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Abstract

This article elucidates some connections and divergences between SN Eisenstadt's work on multiple modernities and critical reflections on 'African modernity' presented by Africanist scholars. It argues that there is more crossover between these discussions than is commonly thought when both are seen as parallel responses to the shortcomings of post-war modernisation theory. Eisenstadt's work can inform debates in African Studies concerning the effective power of tradition in postcolonial African societies, and on African interpretations of the 'cultural programme' of modernity. The article also discusses some weaknesses within Eisenstadt's theorising which arise from an extension of the multiple modernities framework to African societies, namely an underappreciation of the various modalities of colonial-imperialism and racialisation, as well as the institutional constraints placed on postcolonial societal elites. It claims that these can be offset via a dialogue with the work of scholars within African Studies. Moreover, it is argued that the paradigm of multiple modernities can more satisfactorily shed light on African trajectories of modernity via the retrieval of tenets of Eisenstadt's 'heterodox' modernisation theory and work on post-traditionality, outlined in the 1960s and 1970s, which include specific reflections on African societies.

Keywords: Eisenstadt; Multiple modernities; Africa; colonialism; decolonisation; postcolonialism

Schmuel Noah Eisenstadt is increasingly recognised as one of the greats of twentieth and early twenty first century sociology (Ben-Rafael and Sternberg, 2005; Susen and Turner, 2011; Preyer and Sussman, 2015). He is perhaps best known today for his comparative study of civilisations and ensuing paradigm of multiple modernities, one of the most systematic and ambitious attempts to formulate a historical sociology of modernity from a non-Eurocentric perspective. The present article constitutes a specific contribution to scholarship on and within the multiple modernities paradigm in the sense that it brings it into dialogue with debates in African Studies about the value of the concept of modernity as it pertains to African societies and cultural orientations. Such extensions to African cases, as to the global south in general, are few and far between, and as Delanty and Mota (2015) have intimated with reference to Brazil, highlight the need to modify the framework so that it is inclusive of a greater range of historical trajectories beyond those of the Eurasian Axial Age civilisations.

Such a move reveals some limitations and undeveloped areas in the multiple modernities approach, namely: 1) a lack of discussion of the various modalities and configurations of

colonial-imperialism and their legacies; 2) the associated logics and practices of racialisation and their effect on socio-cultural tradition and collective identity in African contexts, what might be framed in Eisenstadtian vocabulary as the colonisation of the cultural programme of the colonised; and 3) the severely constrained capacity of postcolonial nation-states to institutionalise distinct interpretations of modernity following the formal dismantling of colonial rule. These limitations and omissions converge with some more general social-theoretical critiques of multiple modernities. These include criticisms of its culturalist approach and its relative neglect of the global organisational constraints that institutionalisations of plural forms of modernity are inevitably entangled in (Dirlik, 2003; Therborn, 2003; Harrington, 2016:364-365), as well as Eisenstadt's focus on the relatively continuous and stable traditions of Eurasian Axial Age civilisations and the subsequent lack of attention to world-regions outside of this traditional framework of Axiality (Wagner, 2014:295-296, 2015; Delanty and Mota, 2015).

It is suggested that these might be offset via a more sustained dialogue with theorisations of and reflections on modernity from Africanist scholars. However, also elucidated in the article is how some of these themes are present in Eisenstadt's earlier heterodox formulations of modernisation theory, and that they are explicitly adumbrated when he addressed modernisation in African contexts. Extending the multiple modernities framework towards African cases, it is suggested, necessitates the retrieval of aspects of Eisenstadt's work prior to the development of 'multiple modernities' which he appeared to marginalise in the turn towards the Eurasian civilisations of the Axial Age. With this taken into account, there is a good deal of complementarity between the work of Eisenstadt and select influential representatives of Africanist scholarship.

The following discussion is divided into two broad sections. In the first section, I will outline how Africanist critical engagements with the concept of modernity, as well as Eisenstadt's career-culminating promulgation of multiple modernities, can be seen as parallel responses to the problems of post-war modernisation theory. Here, I particularly focus on Eisenstadt's earlier 'heterodox' modernisation theory and his explicit engagements with African societal development, emphasising points of continuity between the work of this period and his later work on multiple modernities. In the second section, I look at the convergences and divergences between both Eisenstadt's work and

select works of Africanist scholarship in relation to a several themes of shared concern. Principally, these relate to the question of the role, status and effective history of socio-cultural tradition in the interpretation and institutionalisation of distinct modernities, as well as to the problem of the political agency and societal autonomy of colonial and postcolonial African societal elites and their capacity to institutionalise autonomous interpretations of the cultural programme of modernity. In each of these sections, Eisenstadt's reflections on modernity and modernisation will be brought into dialogue with scholars working within African Studies, in history, anthropology and philosophy. Of course, 'African Studies' is heterogeneous and therefore my contribution here is to elucidate connections between Eisenstadt's theory and certain critical debates with African studies advanced by primary representatives who have confronted the problem of modernity in direct and critical, rather than denunciatory, terms.

Divergent Responses to Modernisation Theory

In some recent reflections on 'presentism' in writing on Africa, Achille Mbembe argues that African societies continue to be placed in some time behind more 'developed' societies, or are simply identified with the absence of modernity (Mbembe, 2017). Presentist treatments of Africa societal development have a long lineage, nowhere more typically expressed than in Hegel's claim that sub-Saharan Africa, *in toto*, languished 'in the conditions of mere nature … on the threshold of the World's History' (Hegel, 2001 [1837]:109-117). It is well-documented that this kind of interpretation formed an imaginary component of modern European self-consciousness, as well as part of the justification for colonial-imperial domination itself (Arendt, 1967:192; Mudimbe, 1988; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:86; Reid, 2011). There remains, long after formal decolonisation, a pervasive tendency to set apart so-called 'African phenomena' and assign to them an aeonian, stagnant condition of backwardness and tradition (Thomas, 2011:727).

Meanwhile, there has long existed a body of nuanced and critical engagements with core themes of theoretical sociology in African Studies, concerning the relationships between modernity and tradition, about large-scale societal transformation and the role of interpretive and practical agency therein, as well as the limitations of 'Eurocentric' categories within the social sciences. These have tended to develop from the substantive

investigations of scholars of history and anthropology, and they have appeared in a more normative idiom in postcolonial African philosophers. Many of these reflections have been dedicated to deconstructing the 'invention of Africa' (Mudimbe, 1988) that functioned as an imaginary component of the European colonial-imperial domination of African societies in the 19th century.

More still developed as specific responses to the discourse of modernisation in the decades following the Second World War. Although the discourses of modernisation were heterogeneous, they were underpinned by a general set of theoretical premises and an underlying assumption: all societies could essentially be placed on a historical continuum from traditional to modern, the latter being represented by those north-Atlantic 'Western' nation-state societies – spearheaded by the USA – that had realised a number of core universal evolutionary processes. Such societies, conceived in the framework of the liberal-democratic, industrialised nation-state, evinced a high degree of functional differentiation, achievement-related roles, and universal value-generalisation (Therborn, 2000; Knöbl, 2002; Joas and Knöbl, 2009:308-338).

It is no coincidence that the high-period of modernisation discourse was coterminous with the emergence of the decolonisation movements of the global South. Implicated in US international power in the era of Cold War antagonism, it had a considerable practical orientation and its insights were deemed to be capable of steering developmental processes in non-Western societies (Gilman, 2004). These decolonising societies represented, for social scientists concerned with modernisation, ideal laboratories for testing the premises of their developmentalist schemas; the emergence of fledgling states was 'a new domain of intellectual conquest' in an era marked by 'a heightened sense of possibility' (Cooper, 2005:37). As such, one can observe throughout the 1950s and 1960s efforts among social scientists to delineate the nature of the 'traditional' societies of Africa and their 'receptivity to change' (in specific reference to Burundi and Rwanda, see for example Albert, 1960; Maquet, 1961).

It is well documented that these theories of modernisation faced significant challenges by the 1970s (Wagner, 2008:7). Alongside theoretical treatises on dependency and the neo-colonial exploitation of the periphery by the core economic powers (Rodney, 1972; Wallerstein, 2004), there developed the philosophical deconstruction of the

universalising 'metanarratives' implicit in the linearity of modernisation (Lyotard, 1984 [1979]). This in turn influenced the development of postcolonial criticism, which demonstrated how colonial discourses were constitutive of key paradigms in the social-scientific and humanities disciplines (Said, 1978; Mudimbe, 1988; Hall, 1992). Anthropologists, increasingly reflecting on the entanglements of their own discipline in the development and function of empire, identified and problematised the symbolic violence of stage-theoretical models of historical development whereby large parts of the world were said to exist in an earlier time than the purportedly superior, advanced industrial societies (Fabian, 1983; Kahn, 2001). The optimistic sense of possibility that pervaded post-war discourses of modernisation was also weakened by events, among them the 1968 student protests, the fallout from the invasion of Vietnam and the unmasking of US neo-imperial ambitions, and the economic crises of the early 1970s (Joas and Knöbl, 2009:312-313).

The interdisciplinary field of African Studies, as Lynn Thomas details, formed within this context, emerging in part as a critical response to the 'racist, teleological, and condescending presumptions embedded in such conceptions of the modern' (Thomas, 2011:727). For example, the influential work of the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff on the Tswana of Southern Africa took as its point of departure the failure of predictions that 'modernising social forces and material forms would have the universal effect of eroding local cultural differences'; whilst unequal global flows of technology and trade had connected the world as never before, this had given rise, in terms that anticipate Eisenstadt's formulation, to 'many modernities' rather than a singular institutional arrangement and cultural orientation (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:xi). For the historian Frederick Cooper, the presentation of modernisation as the unfolding of an irresistible law of history left no space for human agency or for the types of interpretive conflicts and struggles for resources characteristic of the decolonial period (Cooper, 2005:117). For philosophers like Innocent Onyewuenyi, in terms that prefigure more contemporary decolonial theoretical and Afrocentric modes of argumentation, the descriptive veneer of modernisation theory belied a technocratic, neo-colonial orientation that wrenched Africans 'from our philosophy, from the nature of beings as we understand them ... from our view of the world' (Onyewuenyi, 1991:45).

This critical stance towards modernisation among scholars of Africa made them similarly sceptical of the emergence of the 'modernity fad' (Cooper, 2005) in the 1980s and 90s. It seems also to have provoked some suspicions towards the idea of 'multiple modernities', as developed by Eisenstadt, a perception undoubtedly coloured by Eisenstadt's association with the earlier discourse of modernisation and its major figures. Cooper, for instance, refers to Eisenstadt as a 'veteran modernisation theorist', who may have rejected the notion of convergence on a singular West-defined model but nevertheless retains in his theory of multiple modernities 'the notion of connected socio-cultural traits moving from tradition to modernities' (Cooper, 2005:127). This image of Eisenstadt, as an arch modernisation theorist wedded to its basic overall tenets despite alluding to the more 'culturalist' and pluralist framework of multiple modernities, has also characterised his reception in a nascent postcolonial sociology. Gurminder Bhambra (2007, 2014), for instance, argues that Eisenstadt's acknowledgement of forms of cultural difference proceeds without impacting on the assumption of the European origins of modernity itself, and thus smuggles in a form of Eurocentrism whilst claiming to disavow it. Furthermore, it is argued that the multiple modernities framework obfuscates the constitutive role of colonial-imperial domination, violence and appropriation in the formation of European modernity, referring instead to the more neutral descriptors of Western 'diffusion' or 'expansion'.

Whilst some of these criticisms certainly correspond to omissions and shortcomings within the multiple modernities paradigm, they are too hastily based on a mischaracterisation of Eisenstadt's contributions to modernisation discourses. From at least the mid-1960s, parallel to the scholars of African studies, Eisenstadt was himself engaging in the 'far-reaching reformulation of the vision of modernisation (Eisenstadt, 1987:6) that culminated in the early-2000s in a cultural and historical sociology of modernities in the plural. Eisenstadt always occupied a 'heterodox' position in modernisation theory, highly attuned to the instability and multidirectional tendencies of modernisation processes (Alexander, 1992:86; Spohn, 2011). He admits that this position emerged partly from his biographical experience as a Jew born in Poland, who moved to Israel in the turbulent 1930s and came of age in the new state ridden with problems of integration and conflict (Eisenstadt, 1998:38-39). He was also keenly aware of how appeals to sweeping theoretical categories could run roughshod over important

regional specificities. As early as 1949, he noted that, 'there is no theoretical distinction between sociology and social anthropology' (Eisenstadt, 1949:121) problematising the purported division of labour between sociologists of 'modern' societies and anthropologists of 'traditional' societies (Touraine, 1989:5).

As becomes quickly apparent in considering his earlier, less-cited contributions to sociological theory, Eisenstadt was a sharp critical commentator on modernisation discourse and its intricacies. He was aware of its shortcomings and blind-spots, as well as the challenges posed by emerging theoretical programmes such as world-systems and dependency theories (Eisenstadt, 1973:98-112, 1974). Subsequently, much contemporary critique of the paradigm of multiple modernities that charges it with more subtle formulations of the same underlying assumptions of modernisation theory are in fact anticipated in his heterodox modernisation theory of the 1960s, and especially in his turn towards the theme of 'post-traditionality' in the 1970s, prior to his increasing focus on Axial Age civilisations in the 1980s (Eisenstadt, 1980, 1982). In the 'Axial turn' toward the Ancient Eurasian civilizations of Israel, Greece, Christian Europe, Zoroastrian Iran, early Imperial China and in the Hindu and Buddhist civilizations, and Islam broadly occurrent in the 1980s, it is arguably the case that Eisenstadt neglects these earlier critical elements that come from closer attention to the analysis of African societies and of the global south in general (Boy and Torpey, 2013:248; Delanty and Mota, 2015).

For the earlier Eisenstadt, Sub-Saharan African societies in the aftermath of decolonisation stood as primary counter-cases to those developmentalist discourses that smoothed over the unevenness of modernisation, its potential for breakdowns, and its multiplicity of institutional expressions (Eisenstadt, 1964, 1965; Tiryakian, 2011:245). The establishment of new states and political structures in African societies, he argued, had to be conceived 'as an attempt at modernity, at the establishment of a new modern order, of new modern societies, which were to take their proper place among other modern societies' (Eisenstadt, 1965:455). What is more, this heterodox formulation of modernisation was explicitly and critically counter-posed with the 'Europocentrism' (Eisenstadt, 1974:238) or 'Western-centricity' (Eisenstadt, 1965:458) of the more mainstream tenets of modernisation theory, presaging the more contemporarily familiar term 'Eurocentrism' stemming from the work of macro-sociological, Marxist-influenced theorists like Samir Amin (Amin, 1988).

He argues that the principal factor in the downfall of modernisation theory from the late 1960s onwards was the fact that the assumption that societies in all corners of the world would become more and more similar in orientation and in institutional arrangements to the industrial societies of the West as it expanded. Instead, in terms strikingly continuous with the opening lines of his programmatic essay on multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000), he argued that it was rather the case that the 'very profound changes' that the expansion has given rise to have 'taken a great variety of forms, which may seem to be entirely different from what has happened in Europe, or from what Europe thought it was bringing to the world through this expansion' (Eisenstadt, 1978:167). The 'Western-centric' view of unilinear development and convergence assumed that the economic sphere was the primary motor of historical change and that socio-cultural factors are of secondary or epiphenomenal status in processes of modernisation (Eisenstadt, 1965:456, 1978:169), an assumption that generated an overwhelming concern with the conditions of possibility of economic growth at the expense of its social and political consequences.

The orthodox view of modernisation also implied that the continuity of the modernisation process would be stable following the initial 'take-off' and this in turn was undermined by an abundance of empirical instances of the emergence of pathologies resultant from 'implanting' political institutions in the first stages of independence, and political and economic crises following formal decolonisation (Eisenstadt, 1965:457). Against easy appeals to the 'reversion' or 'reversal' of modernisation processes into ethno-tribal antagonism or traditionalism, Eisenstadt instead concerned himself with *breakdowns* and *crises* of modernisation that tended towards the generation of novel institutional arragements. Breakdowns and crises, he argued, 'did not necessarily lead up to the total *collapse* of these new regimes or to their *return* to some traditional social and political form' but they rather tended 'to coalesce together into some new forms of viable ongoing social and political systems' (1965:459 emphasis added). Argentina, Burma and Indonesia, in addition to examples from Sub-Saharan Africa such as what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, are all cited as examples of such crises and breakdowns (Eisenstadt, 1964, 1965, 1973:34). Furthermore, he rejected the idea that 'the different institutional spheres – be they economic, political or in the field of social organization – are closely interrelated, so that they tend necessarily to go together and to coalesce in relatively similar patterns' (Eisenstadt, 1965:457). That modernisation processes in

these spheres following sharply different trajectories gives rise to a wide variety of instantiations of modern society: 'such new polities and societies certainly differ in many ways from the "older" (Western) modern ones nor do they necessarily develop in the direction of these "older" societies, and yet they by no means remain any longer simply traditional societies' (1965:459). Again, there is a clear echo of these early formulations in Eisenstadt's acute sensitivity to the precarity of modern institutions, the tensions and antinomies of the cultural and political programmes of modernity, and to the fragility of democratic regimes (Eisenstadt, 1996, 1999, 1999a, 2000:24-25; 2005a).

A familiar shortcoming of the 'multiple modernities' paradigm is that it affords too much emphasis to endogeneity whilst neglecting the global setting, where world regions and even nation states are essentially conceived as 'cultural containers that are coherent and bounded and reproduce themselves over time' and form their own distinct modernities separate from those of others (Wagner, 2009:254; see also Dirlik, 2003). It is interesting, then, that in his writing on modernisation in African societies, Eisenstadt attributes a great significance to the international setting for crystallisations of modern configurations. Modernisation processes, he held, cannot simply be reduced to endogenous forces and conditions. He refers to the international situation of the 1960s, referring to the 'growing drawing together of almost all regimes of the world into one common international setting' under the growing shadow of the Cold War; here, due attention was given to how 'the competition between the great powers for influence in the major areas of the world on the one hand, and the ideological legitimation for any "independent" regimes on the other hand' (1965:459) was inevitably shaping the institutional arrangement of newly independent nation-state societies.

His attentivity to the international setting of modernisation also encompasses the constraints imposed on programmes of modernisation by specific experiences of colonial-imperialism. The most characteristic feature of modernisation in colonial and ex-colonial societies was that it was 'unbalanced, especially in the relations of the processes of change and transition between the "central" and the local level' (1965:460). The extent of change was controlled and limited by colonial powers, not by some deficiency or lack within the inherited socio-cultural make-up of the modernising peoples themselves. This differed, he adds, depending on the form of colonial rule, whether direct or indirect. In indirect colonies rule colonies, in ways that evoke the more contemporary

reflections of Africanist scholars like Mahmood Mamdani (1996) or Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò (2010), he argued that 'the "modern" European colonial regimes stifled the possible development of forces inherent in the traditional setting which might have facilitated an autonomous transition to some modernity, which might or might not have been similar to the "Western" nation-state or revolutionary class-society' (Eisenstadt, 1974:247).

Nevertheless, Eisenstadt avoided the tendency to overemphasise the causal determination of Western economic and political power and maintained that there remained a strong element of interpretive agency and choice in programmes of modernisation, despite vast power differentials and external constraints. As with Africanists like Frederick Cooper and the Comaroffs, the linear conceptions of development and modernisation were criticised for their ahistoricism, their foreclosure of 'the possibility of choice' and their 'assumption that both the road to the envisaged end-stage and this end-stage itself are inevitably given in the concrete historical situations in which these potentially modernising societies find themselves' (Eisenstadt, 1974:243) Against these foreclosures, Eisenstadt argues for a 'general claim of some possibility of "openness" of alternatives, in that there is a role for leadership of different elites in making strategic decisions which are crucial for the process of modernisation' (Eisenstadt, 1974:243).

This was evident especially among the first generation of elite figures to govern African independent nations. In the decolonising African societies of the 1960s, he identified in the programmes of this new generation of independence leaders 'the search for those elements of the specific historical heritage which may best contribute to the crystallisation of new, more flexible, specifically African symbols of modernity' (1965:465); the attempt to fuse the horizons of socio-cultural tradition with what Eisenstadt would later term a modern cultural and political programme. We are evidently a long way here from 'orthodox' modernisation theory, from the assumption that 'traditional' forms of association and symbolisation would inevitably make way for the Western model of the modern institutional arrangement.

Culture, Tradition and Interpretive Agency: Multiple Modernities and African societies

In several important senses, as intimated, the above prefigures central pillars of the multiple modernities paradigm. This paradigm was introduced in programmatic terms as allowing for an understanding of the contemporary world as:

> A story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programmes. These ongoing reconstructions of multiple institutional and ideological patterns are carried forward by specific social actors in close connection with social, political, and intellectual activists, and also by social movements pursuing different programmes of modernity, holding very different views on what makes societies modern. Through the engagement of these actors with broader sectors of their respective societies, unique expressions of modernity are realized.

Modernity does not refer to an inevitable unfolding of a universal historical law and does not afford a unique superiority to the West, or to Europe, as the bearer of the law. European modernity rather constitutes a specific articulation of a more encompassing 'civilisation' of modernity (Eisenstadt, 2001). Crucial to this civilisation of modernity is a twofold distinction between, on the one hand, a 'cultural programme' premised on the belief in the possibility that the gap between the transcendental and mundane orders could be bridged by the exercise of conscious human agency and, on the other hand, a 'political programme' that stressed the capacity of human beings to realise this possibility in political projects and absorb peripheral protest symbols into the core of modern institutional arrangements (Eisenstadt, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006:149). Modernity is thus comprised of a particular orientation to time and accompanying conception of human agency, and a modern 'social imaginary' (Castoriadis, 1987), a complex of symbols, forms and figures that invest with meaning a condition, using terminology derived from Claude Lefort, defined by the 'loss of markers of certainty' (Delanty and Eisenstadt, 2004:395). The future is posited as a space for projecting possibilities interpreted within the present, possibilities that are realisable through conscious and reflexive action. The plurality of modernity and its multiple institutional arrangements is therefore attributable to the interpretive and creative action of individual agents and collectives, particularly elites (Joas and Knöbl, 2009:319-320).

Though not explicitly foregrounded by Eisenstadt himself, the notion of multiple modernities is marked by a specific mode of cultural hermeneutics (Silber, 2011).

Modernities are given form via a process of continual interpretation within specific socio-cultural and experiential horizons. Central to the multiple modernities paradigm therefore is the generative role that Eisenstadt afforded to culture and tradition (Eisenstadt, 1969:453, 1973; Joas and Knöbl, 2009:316). As outlined above, from a very early stage, Eisenstadt explicitly argued against the counter-posing of a dynamic and open modernity on the one hand and a static, undifferentiated tradition on the other. He was staunchly critical of the weak conception of 'traditionality' prevalent in some versions of modernisation theory whereupon it was simply defined as something to be overcome, as 'what had to be broken down in order to assure the continuous development of modern economic, political, and social forces' (Eisenstadt, 1974:229).

Tradition, he argued, constitutes instead 'the reservoir of the most central social and cultural experiences prevalent in a society, as the most enduring element in the collective social and cultural construction of reality' (Eisenstadt, 1972:3). Tradition is not simply a stagnant cultural container but is an open-ended and expansive horizon with which differentiated and dynamic creative interpretations of the modern cultural and political programmes are fused, interpretations which inform a plurality of modern institutional arrangements. It is this conception of tradition that makes the Eisenstadtian oeuvre much more complementary to the Africanist treatments of modernity than has hitherto been acknowledged. It is a rejection of the tendency to anthropomorphise modernity and ascribe it with an agential quality, to cast it in the role of a behemoth that flattens the obstacle of tradition that it encounters in its path. The characterisation of modernity as that which melts the solids of *gemeinschaft* bonds and the symbols and significations of historic heritage makes little room for how centuries of African precolonial historical experience – and the continual development of the reservoir of symbols and narrative that constitute 'tradition' – possess an effective history that continues to shape the present (Schoenbrun, 2006; Reid, 2011; Thomas, 2011:733).

The idea of a 'cultural programme' of modernity is very close to the desire of Frederick Cooper, for example, to understand modernity as an organising term for a cluster of 'claim-making concepts' encompassing the vocabularies of republicanism, justice, freedom, and fraternity that are instantiated in actual socio-political struggles. In Cooper, as in Eisenstadt, there is a welcome rejoinder of a tendency in some post- and de-colonial criticism of modernity – as in the neologism 'coloniality/modernity' – to place the west,

or Europe, at the centre of the world, as an 'abstracted symbol of imperial arrogance rather than a universal good, but still the reference point' (Cooper, 1999:3-4). Common to both Eisenstadt and Cooper is an approach that emphasises the interpretive agency of human beings as a central component in the development of modernity, or modernities (see also Wagner, 2015:7-8). This also aligns with the reflections on 'Afromodernity' in the recent work of the Comaroffs. Multiple modernities, they argue, are to be located in the 'empirical fact' of how the 'many disadvantaged people across the world' articulate 'what they understand by the modern. And, to the degree that they can, to fashion their own versions of it, even as they live with its many constraints and contradictions' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012:11). The historian Lynn Thomas suggests that more adequate conceptualisations of modernities arise from an examination of how African peoples 'have used the term 'modern' to make political claims and envision different futures', particularly when this examination encompasses 'locations that those theorists often deemed outside of the modern' (Thomas, 2011:734-737).

The dialogue with these thinkers nevertheless also necessitates the confrontation with a certain inattentiveness in Eisenstadt's interpretive approach to material phenomena of power and inequality. A certain over-emphasis on the primacy of culture, especially emergent in the turn to Axial Age civilisations, ultimately diverts attention from, in Gregor McLellan's words, 'the overwhelming concentration of power and wealth in the consolidation of Western civilizational advantage' (McLellan, 2000:288). This of course concerns, in the first instance, the continuing institutional constraints posed at the level of the economic world-system, the realities of international relations, as well as the legacy of historical colonial connections (Dirlik, 2003; Bhambra, 2014). As the Comaroff's argue, 'it is not that people in the Global South 'lack modernity'. It is that many of them are deprived of the promise of modernization by the inherent propensity of capital to create edges and undersides in order to feed off them' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012:11). Although Eisenstadt intimates that the insertion of modern societies into a 'global system' (for example, Eisenstadt 2006:152) constitutes a key dimension of the development of multiple modernities, he does not elaborate in detail on how such an insertion introduces very acute relationships of constraint that severely curtail the attempt to institutionalise autonomous interpretations of modernity (Thomas, 2011:733).

This shortcoming could be offset by a consideration of decolonising and postcolonial societies as case-studies for further studies of multiple modernities. The period of decolonisation of African countries between the 1940s and 1960s was characterised by what might be termed an 'axial' situation, a sense of possibility owing to crises in European politics, economies and self-defined moral authority following the Second World War and the flourishing of independence movements around the world. This period – 'when alternative approaches for exiting colonial empire were still in play' (Cooper, 2008:169) – seems to be extremely ripe for the substantive analysis of 'multiple modernities'. The disappointments of many of these possibilities, and the postcolonial crises of many African societies, would seem also to offer ample opportunities for critical reflection on the shortcomings of the paradigm itself. The capacity to institutionalise 'modernities', to 'sustain distinctive social and economic policies', was significantly impeded, particularly in the decade of the 1980s by 'the constraints of world depression, the policies imposed by international financial institutions, external interventions and the consequent increase in domestic political tensions' (Cooper, 2008:169)

There is also a sense in which the earlier recognition of the variability of colonial-imperial organisation and governmentality is neglected in the multiple modernities paradigm. Eisenstadt, in his late-career work on multiple modernities, does retain his earlier conviction that the variability and plurality of modern institutional arrangements and modern imaginary interpretations ought not be attributed to endogenous, largely cultural factors alone. Rather, they are attributable to the worldwide, 'continual expansion of modernity' which always tended towards the creation of both 'very intensive dislocations while at the same time opening up new options and possibilities' (Eisenstadt, 2006:150). Colonial-imperialist domination constituted a fundamental component of the expansion of modernity and this generated:

> continual confrontations between the hegemonic forces within these systems, and different non-hegemonic societies. The consciousness of the colonial experience, of being colonised, constituted continuous components in the constitution of collective consciousness and political activities in most sectors of these [colonised] societies be it during the period of imperial and colonial dominance or in the postcolonial era' (Eisenstadt, 2006:151).

Eisenstadt clearly recognised how the colonial *experience* constitutes a horizontal background which is the basis for distinct postcolonial *interpretations* of modernity, in

similar terms to the theorisation of 'modernity as experience and interpretation' promulgated by Peter Wagner (Wagner, 2008). There is, however, a reticence to distinguish between modalities of colonial-imperial domination and their differentiated historical effects. This, incidentally, is also a problem of some contemporary postcolonial sociology and decolonial theory which, for all of its persuasive power in elucidating the constitutive colonial connections that constitute the 'dark side' of European modernity, similarly lack specificity with regards to different types of colonial regimes and the importance of this variability for the shape of contemporary global order (Bhambra, 2014).

Also valuable from the work of area studies specialists is their keen eye for the specific configurations of the 'colonial situation' (Balandier, 1966) and how these form importance institutional foundations and interpretive horizons of distinct varieties of modernity. In their studies of the Tswana of Southern Africa, Jean and John Comaroff (1991, 1997) emphasise the 'hybridising' dimensions of the colonial situation, how the colonial situation 'provokes struggles – albeit tragically uneven ones – over power and meaning on the frontiers of empire' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:4). The Tswana frequently interpreted European logics and objects in creative terms that escaped the intentions of missionaries, highlighting the indeterminacies of colonial modernity and the openness of cultural programmes (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:17). They also argued that ritual, far from being a pre-modern vestige, constitutes a site and means through which multiple interpretations of modernity are promulgated and instantiated (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993).

Also emphasised is the 'conjunctural' element of the colonial situation, that the colonial situation involves a contingent, albeit highly uneven, encounter between various actors and motivations. Crucial in the development of a Southern African engagements with modernity that they studied were nonconformist Protestant evangelists, who in this instance were 'the most active cultural agents of empire, being driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the "native" world in the name of God and European civilisation' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991:6). The decolonial situation in Rwanda, furthermore, was made distinctive by the presence of an emerging 'Hutu' nationalism and a post-war generation of Catholic missionaries who, oriented by a social Catholicism informed by their own traumatic wartime experiences of occupation and conflict, stoked the coals of

ethnic conflict (Carney, 2012). An important critical point arises here: homogenising conceptions of colonial-imperialism, be they in the form of normative postcolonial-theoretical rhetoric or in the neutralising and euphemistic depictions of 'diffusion' in multiple modernities theorising, neglect the important tensions between the diversity of colonial actors – administrators, explorers, metropolitan officials, missionaries, traders, and so on, as well as divergences in their motivations (Táíwò, 2010:12; Steinmetz, 2014).

There is, however, a great deal of crossover between Eisenstadtian reflections on the effective history of 'cultural programmes' and Africanist debates on the relationship between modernity and tradition. This debate has been a central theme of African philosophy in the postcolonial period, foundational to the normative projects of 'cultural revivalism' from such figures as Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu to the more critical appraisals of African 'ethnophilosophical' modes of thought from the likes of Paulin Hountondji (Wiredu, 1995; Hountondji, 1996; Gyekye, 1997; Ciaffa, 2008). To these essentially normative debates about the role and status of tradition in African postcolonial societal development, Eisenstadt provides a sociological and analytical concreteness. For Eisenstadt-inspired analyses of multiple modernities in decolonising and postcolonial African contexts, it is not that African societies should follow reject corrupted socio-cultural traditions or resurrect them in projects of 'cultural revivalism' but instead that they have or, or attempted to, interpret the cultural programme of modernity in a fusion with the horizons of socio-cultural tradition.

Here, one might turn to the interpretations promulgated by post-independence leaders like Jomo Kenyatta who, in his "order and progress" motto, evinced 'an attempt to selectively control social change and preserve a sense of continuity, order, and authority against the turbulent commotion of colonialism' (Berman, 2006:8). We might also consider the adumbration of a specifically African socialism in the writings of independence leaders such as Julius Nyerere (1968) and Leopold Senghor (1964), whereby the tenets of socialism would be fused with African practices and logics of communalism. It would also provide a window into the kinds of conflicts of interpretation that marked various competing programmes for independence in decolonising countries. In both Burundi and Rwanda, for instance, multiple modernities in competing and conflicting terms were present in one societal setting which, owing to the racialisation of

the social and political institutions under indirect colonial rule, lent themselves to the sharpening of ethnic divisions (Palmer, 2018:ch.5).

This example, incidentally, raises some critical questions of Eisenstadt's rather neutral definition and deployment of tradition. Far from steamrolling 'traditional' African societies, the administration and the form of indirect rule more often *romanticised* its precolonial social evolution, animated by a colonial-anthropological framework that fetishized and *racialised* tradition. What is at stake here, it could be argued, is how the outlining of the 'cultural programmes' of African societies formed part of the logic of colonial-imperial rule itself (Mudimbe, 1988; Ranger, 1992). To use the felicitous phrase of Georges Balandier, the traditions and historical experience of precolonial societies were 'worked out as a function of a foreign presence' (Balandier, 1970:23). A similar challenge is represented in Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò's (2010) study of how modernity was 'pre-empted' in the experience of 19th century indirect colonial rule in West Africa. The original embrace of the cultural programme of modernity that accompanied missionary was forestalled by the formal establishment of colonial rule and the establishment of a specific governmental logic of 'socio-cryonics'. Here, 'African progress was arrested in the name of preserving (the cryonic moment) what *they*, the rulers, decided was *the* African way of being human' (Táíwò, 2010:11).

Colonial administrators in Ruanda-Urundi, for instance, spoke of 'allowing black humanity, in one of its most interesting parts, to evolve according to its own nature after the traditions of its own resources by making efforts to reach its originality and its particular soul' (in Gahama, 2001:41). According to a resident in the Rwandan capital Kigali in 1938, the aim of indirect rule was to act as 'a safeguard of traditions and a brake upon their evolution'; as 'a melting pot in which past and present tendencies [would] coalesce'; and as 'the means whereby a progressive and progressist, yet slow and smooth, assimilation could be achieved' (in Lemarchand, 1970:75-76). Tradition, *contra* Eisenstadt, is not simply a value-neutral repository for distinct interpretations of modernity that can be drawn upon by 'society' *tout court*. In colonial Rwanda, it was in the interest of various entangled institutions of power – the colonial state, the Rwandan court or Nyiginya and the Church – to maintain and safeguard the idea of a 'traditional', monarchical Rwanda. Fatefully, a deep antipathy towards the precolonial and colonial 'monarchical state', and fears about the downfall of the Rwandan republic established in

1962 at the behest of a Tutsi 'invasion' and its 'fifth column' inside Rwanda, is very clearly adumbrated in the hate media of the 1994 genocide (Newbury and Newbury, 2000:848; Mamdani, 2001; Des Forges, 2011; Carney, 2012). More broadly, in cases such as Mobutu's Zaire, cultural revivalism has also served as an ideological foil for authoritarian governments in the postcolonial period (Hountondji, 1996:170)

Such examples are also ripe for the development of scholarship on an unduly neglected contribution of Eisenstadt's late career work on multiple modernities, namely his repeated reflections on mass violence and warnings about the potential for a 'specifically modern barbarism' in modernity (Eisenstadt, 1996, 1999, 2000:25; 2005, 2005a; 2006:155; for a rare consideration of Eisenstadt in these terms see Alexander, 2013:ch.3). He was particularly concerned with the sanctification and ideologization of violence, terror, and war. Reflecting on the final decade of the 20th century, from the vantage point of the 21st, Eisenstadt saw this tension most vividly in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, in the former republics of the Soviet Union, and in such aforementioned African countries as Rwanda and Burundi. Ethnic conflicts and genocide in these countries should not to be thought of as outside of the modern but are themselves the clearest expressions of the 'traumas of modernity', a violent consequence of 'the ongoing dialogue between modern reconstruction and seemingly 'traditional' forces' (Eisenstadt, 2000:25-26).

The power of this claim, however, is limited by certain omissions within the multiple modernities paradigm that derive from a lack of sustained engagement with specifically African modernities. The colonisation of the cultural programme of the colonised upon which autonomous interpretations of modernity are etched, that have been briefly adumbrated above, accounts for the fact that these conflicts are caused by 'seemingly' traditional forces. Furthermore, a significant factor of their occurrence is that 'modern reconstruction' entailed being entangled in relations of global constraint whereby such autonomous interpretations could not be institutionalised, leading to disappointment, resentment and to humiliation. Both of these points might be effectively addressed in the course of a dialogue with African studies, via the extension of the framework to African cases and alongside the retrieval of aspects of Eisenstadt's work in its pre-multiple modernities phase where he engaged African societies most explicitly.

Conclusion

Eisenstadt's signal work on the effective history of socio-cultural tradition in programmes of societal modernity speaks very well to debates in postcolonial African philosophy about the role and status of tradition. At the same time, certain discussions have the potential to speak to a lacunae in the multiple modernities framework – how in the practice of indirect rule in African colonies during the 19th and 20th centuries, tradition was itself mobilised as a function of colonial rule and, in the postcolonial period, often under the aegis of anti-colonialism, has been deployed ideologically in the pursuit of repressive domestic policies. Eisenstadt's framework also converges in important ways with Africanist engagements with the problem of 'agency' and meaning-making as central to interpretations and institutionalisations of modernity, both of which run counter to tendencies to anthropomorphise 'colonial modernity' as a homogenous behemoth that runs roughshod over the lives of those onto which it is imposed.

What emerges from this dialogue, however, is a sense in which the multiple modernities framework is presently lacking in an appreciation of the significance of colonial and postcolonial histories in Africa in which there developed a rich plurality of interpretations of modernity. Furthermore, this points to a further problem related to the problem of the capacity to institute interpretations of modernity. The problems of power, in general, and the disappointments of the postcolonial period, are what Africanist historians and anthropologists enable us to understand effectively. In some ways, these reflections on African modernity that emerge from substantive area studies and from a hermeneutic dialogue with historical modes of philosophising in African knowledge creation are more productive partners in the dialogic task of developing more globally inclusive and spatio-temporally sensitive social-scientific frameworks than purely denunciatory or deconstructive elements of postcolonial and decolonial criticism. Such a dialogue would make a contribution to the development of a genuinely 'global sociology' predicated on the integration of social theory and regional studies and motivated by the desire to 'retrieve, modify and extend basic concepts of Eurocentric social theory in the light of distinctive historical experiences of other world regions' (Arjomand, 2014:3).

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