Reinventing Modernity
Reflexive Modernization vs Liquid Modernity vs Multiple Modernities

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Abstract

Modernity has not collapsed under the weight of postmodern criticisms. On the contrary, it has rebounded with greater vigour as witnessed by the emergence of new terms such as reflexive modernization, liquid modernity and multiple modernities. These terms suggest that modernity can no longer be conceptualized in the singular. Yet the pluralization of modernity does not necessarily imply that there is a new consensus about the meaning of modernity. The appearance of these terms can be regarded as specific attempts to transcend postmodern critiques. Comparison of these new terms provides an understanding of their usage in the context of the decline of postmodernism and the direction of contests over the meaning of modernity.

Key words
■ diversity ■ liquidity ■ modernity ■ postmodernism ■ reflexivity

The emergence of postmodernism in the 1980s challenged modernity as the reigning paradigm of world development. According to the postmodern view, the world merely constituted a play of differences and society could be reduced to a text. Postmodernism could not go beyond its criticisms of modernity, rendering itself vulnerable to accusations of relativism and nihilism. Since the mid-1990s, dissatisfaction with postmodernism has prompted a return to modernist themes (Alexander, 1995: 86). Several new approaches to the changing nature of modernity have been proposed. They include 'reflexive modernization', 'liquid modernity' and 'multiple modernities'. These new approaches do not necessarily suggest a convergence of views in regard to the redefinition of modernity. Each connotes a particular response to postmodernism and represents a different vision of what modernity entails. The aim of this article is to compare these three approaches to modernity in terms of: (1) their responses to postmodernism; (2) their central arguments; and (3) their implications for the renewal of modernity.

Responses to Postmodernism

The new approaches to modernity constitute theoretical positions that dispute the emergence of a new era marking the end of modernity. At the same time, they address the continuity of modernity as requiring new concepts that can meet the challenges of postmodernism. Of these new approaches, reflexive modernization stands out as a first-line defence against postmodernism in its insistence on the role of rational agency in a world characterized by the runaway effects of modernity. Reflexive modernization is associated with the works of Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991) and Ulrich Beck (1992; Beck et al., 1994). Central to this discourse of modernity is the notion that individual actors are capable of self-monitoring activities, which contribute to the way social situations are perceived, assessed and changed. Reflexivity is not only a concept dealing with rationality and the decision-making process. It is embedded within an action-oriented approach to social change that sharpens the awareness of social responsibility and culpability. According to Cohen and Kennedy (2000: 86), the 'widening exercise of reflexivity is partly linked to the development of mass education and the wide dissemination not just of scientific knowledge but of the principle of doubt on which scientific method is built'. In other words, reflexive modernization is not only premised on the modernization of structures but also on knowledge-based faculties that provide the means for overcoming the dire consequences of modern growth. It represents another level of modernity that is self-confrontational (Beck et al., 1994: 5), critically appraising institutional and individual behaviour without the ludic sensibility of postmodernism.

Unlike the anti-foundational perspective of postmodernism, reflexive modernization is decisively programmatic in the sense of utilizing individual freedom to address the risks incurred in the modern context. This entails transforming the disillusionment with modernity by systematically reviewing and possibly redrawing the boundaries erected in modernity. In a recent statement, Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003) conceptualized reflexive modernization as a 'second modernity' to question and analyse the construction of boundaries within and between societies. This constitutes a programmatic effort to identify the nature of boundary construction and the power to change boundaries.

Reflexive modernization can be regarded as a wary response to postmodernism's claims of transcendence in the context of social changes in Europe that focuses on neo-liberal reforms. Modernity emerging from these reforms must stress a new foundation based on a pursuit of economic and political integration in Western Europe, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and the development of a new optimism for European unity. Under these circumstances, reflexive modernization as a theory of modernity in the 1990s reflects to a certain extent the political agenda of that period. As such, it is a theory that is pragmatically oriented to questions of reconstruction rather than deconstruction as in postmodernism. Yet, the issue of risk and uncertainty that lies at the heart of reflexive modernization is very much a postmodern concern dealing with non-rational events. This would make it seem as if reflexive modernization is a distant

cousin of postmodernism. However, this is not the case because the risks implied in reconstruction are not simply experienced as a linguistic game but as a reflexive process involving individual and collective decisions. It means that confronting uncertainty need not be fatally accepted but can be pragmatically managed as part of self-monitoring activities. Thus, the theory as applied to social change in Europe and elsewhere attempts to bring to realization a sustainable economic and political environment under the aegis of modernity.

In contrast to reflexive modernization that is programmatically reconstructive, liquid modernity is critically concerned with the ephemeral condition of contemporary society. It is a theory of social change that attempts to uncover the consequences of advanced social differentiation and alienation. This view of modernity represents the recent work of Zygmunt Bauman (2000) whose earlier writings on postmodernity (1992, 1993) had earned him the epithet 'prophet of postmodernity' (Smith, 2000). However, Bauman no longer addresses social problems within a postmodern perspective, preferring to redefine postmodernity as 'modernity in its liquid phase' and 'the era of disembedding without re-embedding' (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 89).

In liquid modernity, Bauman (2000: 14) views the world as inexorably transient, producing a sense of impermanence that he describes as 'the new lightness and fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power'. This approach to modernity accomplishes two goals: (1) overcoming the limitations of postmodernism; and (2) putting back on track the modern problem of institutional stability. By substituting liquid modernity for postmodernity, Bauman is in effect declaring that the modern era is not yet over and we are not limited to a condition of *différance*, i.e. an infinite regress of perceptual differences. There is the possibility of the postmodern which gives us pause for thought but the present world is still empirically modern and needs to be addressed as such. With the concept of liquid modernity, there is no risk of slipping into a postmodern parody of contemporary problems. Instead, liquid modernity constitutes a direct critique of contemporary welfare society. As Abrahamson puts it in his review of Bauman's work:

> the road liquid modernity is going down currently leads to unbearable human suffering and injustice . . . where political and economic instability pushes apparently increasing numbers of people to escape their place and seek, but not find, decent lives elsewhere. (2004: 177)

However, the idea of modernity being liquid can be regarded as continuous with the postmodern stress on the flexibility and mutability of all relationships. In other words, the modern problem of institutional stability has been reinterpreted within certain terms inherent to the postmodern perspective. This approach to transcending postmodernism without abandoning some of its ideas can also be seen in the concept of social fluids (Turner, 2003). For Turner, modernist concepts of linearity and order are being 'displaced by concepts of social fluids and social melting' (2003: 9). This new sense of liquefaction and desultoriness suggests that fixed categories have become otiose, unable to reflect rapidly

changing circumstances and social or cultural upheavals. It is precisely due to this inability to appreciate the 'global world of social fluids' that the human body is seen to be threatened and overwhelmed by new technologies and diseases resulting from uncontrollable flows of populations and cultures (2003: 8). Social fluidity has created new frontiers of experience and knowledge, exposing humanity to uncharted territories of identity formation and management. Like the endless movements of contemporary society, the human body has come to represent a site of identity contests. The fluidity of identity brings with it a new sense of freedom as well as challenges to preconceived notions of institutional stability. Liquid situations provide ample opportunities for innovation, thus undermining all efforts to establish firm bases in collective projects.

Like liquid modernity, the term 'multiple modernities' began making its appearance at about the time postmodernism went into recession. Many works have utilized this term to suggest or advocate a new condition of worldwide modernity that cannot be accounted for by postmodern theorists (Taylor, 1999; Eisenstadt, 2000; Sachsenmaier et al., 2002; Kaya, 2004). Postmodernism assailed modernity's foundations but did not engage with the question concerning the global spread of modernity and its mutation into multiple modernities. It could not imagine the possibility of other modernities because it was single-mindedly propounding the end of modernity. For many postmodernists, the critique of modernity was not necessarily equivalent to a discussion of the fate of modernity in the Third World and non-Western countries (Lee, 1994a). To discourse on postmodernism implied a preoccupation with problems of Western ontology rather than the meaning of modernity in the non-Western/Third World. Hence, postmodernism circumvented the issue of non-Western/Third World development and found little or no resonance in Third World debates on the consequences of modernity (Lee, 1994b).

For this reason, the concept of multiple modernities cannot be construed as a direct response to the decline of postmodernism. Rather, it can be regarded as an outcome of globalization issues focusing on the spread of modernity and not its demise. These issues take into consideration 'the dialectics of modernity in its globalization' which 'allows for recognition of both the unities and the divisions of a contemporary modernity' (Dirlik, 2003: 289). In other words, multiple modernities can be taken to represent a reworking of modernity by challenging the assumptions of modernity as equivalent to the West (Kaya, 2004: 50). There is a convergence here between multiple modernities and postmodernism because both attempt to undermine modernity's foundation by questioning its hegemony. Yet multiple modernities is basically a concept of cultural diversity or multiplicity that disputes a universal approach to modernity biased by Western experience, unlike postmodernism which poses critical questions for overcoming modernity altogether. Hence, the implications of multiple modernities are not explicitly critical of modernity as a metanarrative but as a vehicle of Western domination.

This comparison of the relationship between postmodernism and the new approaches to modernity suggests that postmodernism did not kill off modernity

but gave it a new lease of life. Each of the new approaches poses the possibility of modernity transcending postmodern scepticism. Whether it is in the theme of reconstruction in reflexive modernization, alienation in liquid modernity, or cultural multiplicity in multiple modernities, modernity is still envisaged as maintaining a structural presence that defies the parodies of postmodernism. To understand the nature of this presence, we will next examine the central arguments of these approaches and their criticisms.

Central Arguments and Criticisms

The central arguments of these new approaches revolve around basic concepts such as reflexivity for reflexive modernization, fluidity for liquid modernity and diversity for multiple modernities. Reflexivity is tied to the theme of reconstruction in reflexive modernization as its concern with experience, knowledge and change impacts directly on decisions and policies to bring about improved social conditions. Fluidity is related to the theme of alienation in liquid modernity in the sense that the lack of institutional stability provides the condition leading to less enduring relationships and new forms of loneliness. Diversity is undoubtedly a concept that embraces the theme of cultural multiplicity since it is not possible to discuss difference without referring to variations in cultural patterns. My aim here is to discuss these concepts as they relate to the central arguments. These arguments also include a discussion of tradition, if by tradition is meant the established structure of actions predating the onset of modernity. Tradition is often contrasted with modernity since it constitutes the basis from which social transformation becomes possible.

Reflexive modernization attempts to say something about the Western experience with world-mastery. It emphasizes the role of reflexivity as a way of dealing with Western disaffection with modernity. Indeed, reflexivity suggests the continuing effort to remodel modernity as the unfinished task of the Western enlightenment. In this process, reflexivity stands out as an engine of further self-discovery that fuels the argument for radical reform. This is attested by Beck's recent statement that reflexive modernization concerns radical social change through the modernization of modernity's own foundations (Beck et al., 2003). In this argument, reflexivity is called upon to define new boundaries, which for Beck and his associates constitutes a theory of second modernity focusing on the pluralization of boundaries (and identities). Second modernity concerns the conscious marking or redrawing of boundaries and its consequences, unlike the first modernity where social differentiation occurred with little or no reflexivity.

The concern with how reflexivity can be used socially and politically has prompted critics to construe reflexive modernization as a naïve quest to resolve the apparent chaos of the so-called first modernity. Alexander (1996: 133), for example, dismissed the theory as a return to simplistic modernization arguments that failed to consider the cultural component of social action. A more poignant criticism comes from Shields (n.d.) who argued that the theory is parochially

positioned as an internal critique of modernity rather than a comprehensive one that includes non-Western or non-First World viewpoints. In particular, Shields considered reflexive modernization as lacking clarity on the historicity and cultural specificity of boundaries. These are not only criticisms of naïveté but also of cultural insensitivity. Reflexive modernization seems to represent a type of quick fix that is immune to its own cultural assumptions.

For Argyrou (2003), this immunity raises critical questions about the possibility of a hidden agenda that further differentiates the First World from non-First World peoples (known collectively as the Other). The centripetal forces that are pulling the Other towards modernity's core have come to be seen as threatening the imagination of modernity's own uniqueness. In these circumstances, how can modernity maintain a sphere of difference while the quest for sameness in modernization goes unchecked? The key to the strategy of difference lies in the concept of reflexivity that makes modernity in the West unlike that emerging elsewhere. In one stroke, reflexivity freezes the traditional in time and banishes other modernities to alien territory. As a result, modernity reifies itself as a thoroughly reflexive project 'superior to everyone else, to all traditional conditions and all other, "lesser" modernities in the world' (Argyrou, 2003: 39).

The challenge to reflexive modernization as a programme of reconstruction lies in its ability to handle the question of tradition in the West and elsewhere. Does reconstruction through reflexivity imply the exclusion of tradition or its reorganization as a new order of action? To answer this question, we can return to Giddens's (1991: 2) choice to treat modernity as a 'post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge'. What this suggests is that not every aspect of a traditional system can be thoroughly exorcised by modern knowledge and practices because there is a place within modernity for the continuation of traditional symbols and meanings. A post-traditional order is, therefore, a special arrangement of the modern and the traditional resting on a utilitarian consensus between them, but it can also result in dissonance. One reason for this dissonance is reflexivity, as Giddens puts it:

> Today, we see a definite tendency to seek to re-establish vanished traditions or even construct new ones . . . [W]hether tradition can effectively be recreated in conditions of high modernity is seriously open to doubt. Tradition loses its rationale the more thoroughly reflexivity, coupled to expert systems, penetrates to the core of everyday life. The establishment of 'new traditions' is plainly a contradiction in terms. Yet . . . a return to sources of moral fixity in day-to-day life, in contrast to the 'always revisable' outlook of modern progressivism, is a phenomenon of some importance. Rather than constituting a regression towards a 'Romantic refusal' of modernity, it may mark an incipient move beyond a world dominated by internally referential systems. (1991: 206–7)

Thus, reflexivity is not only an instrument of doubt that jeopardizes traditional foundations, but it also agitates modern individuals to seek pre-modern sources of moral understanding. In other words, reflexive modernization attempts to overcome tradition by its self-monitoring activities that can set in motion a trend

of continuous revision to differentiate the modern from the traditional. It can lead to an internally referential system of knowledge and power that is diametrically opposed to the moral governance of everyday life in traditional terms (Giddens, 1991: 145). Yet, reaction to the 'evaporation of morality' forms the condition for the perceived necessity of tradition to re-anchor the self in a rapidly changing world. Therefore, contrary to Argyrou's argument, reflexive modernization cannot really distance itself completely from tradition because of its ambivalence towards tradition. The power of doubt in reflexivity frees internal criticism from its own dogmatic tendencies, such that the critique of modernity's foundation is not necessarily a unilateral return to tradition but a reconsideration of the meaningfulness of tradition in modernity's own unfolding. Hence, the post-traditional order provides reflexive modernization with the occasion for re-calibrating the meaning of tradition without insisting on an absolute separation of modernity from tradition. Whether this rapprochement with tradition can be extended to the modernizing experiences of the non-Western world has not been tested and remains an open question that reflexive modernists will have to tackle in the future.

Unlike the criticism that reflexive modernization resembles a type of parochialism that sets it off from other forms of modern development, liquid modernity connotes an alternative condition of development that does not differentiate between modernities. It suggests a scenario of rapid levelling in culture and economy, originating in the West and spreading throughout the whole world. Through the concept of fluidity, Bauman (2000: 6) tells us that we are now witnessing the dissolution of 'bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions'. All are subject to the processes of homogenization stemming from the unimpeded flow of global capital. As developments in science, technology and rationality, bolstered by global capital, exert pressures on all societies and cultures in the world to modernize, reflexivity may be no more than a pin-prick on a juggernaut that sets out to dissolve all boundaries and differences. In short, liquid modernity is contributing to a new global mass society (Lee, 2005).

In liquid modernity, borders and boundaries are superfluous in a world characterized by unrestrained changes that promote the ethic of consumerism. To Bauman (1998: 85), consumerism connotes the quest to satisfy increasing needs and so the consumer 'is a person on the move and bound to remain so'. Everyone in this liquid world is by definition a nomad of novelty because fluidity creates new needs that are not constrained by space and time. To be fluid is to be nimble, being able to blend in with the others and reduce signs of difference. Consciousness in a liquid situation expands to absorb the mish-mash of objects produced and offered in a widening modern environment. Unlike reflexive consciousness that is a judgmental consciousness, liquid consciousness becomes more beholden to the senses than to individual reason. Such consciousness cannot but turn modernity into a vast playground of sensual sameness. Reflexivity then becomes an insignificant or inconsequential aspect of a largely de-sublimated environment.

Unlike reflexive modernization, liquid modernity is less likely to generate ambivalence towards tradition because it implies a condition of dissolution and absorption that subordinates tradition to modernity. In liquid modernity, '[a]ny dense and tight network of social bonds . . . is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way' (Bauman, 2000: 14). Bauman himself did not explicitly bring tradition into his discussion of liquid modernity, probably because he considered the social bonds in tradition to be vulnerable to modernity's melting powers. Indeed, Bauman's suggestion that liquid modernity is nothing more than a process of 'disembedding without re-embedding' (Bauman and Tester, 2001: 89) is a commentary on the fading of traditions. What is wrenched from tradition cannot be securely reestablished as another foundation under conditions of liquid modernity. In other words, tradition does not necessarily disappear when liquefied but is likely to be realigned or recomposed as a new experience that is commensurate with the desires and expectations of the present context. New arrangements come into place, not as a result of reflexivity, but as the taking over of one form of experience by another ad infinitum. Liquid modernity is, therefore, a generator of novel experiences surpassing all traditions. Cultural mixtures and collages of traditions become accepted as the 'real thing' in a borderless world that places no limits on the production of *ersatz* images. This is most vividly brought out in global tourism where hundreds of thousands of itinerant consumers travel the world to seek new sights and experiences without the need to know or understand traditions. Hence, dead traditions are revived or new traditions invented as a form of entertainment for global tourists. MacCannell (1976) called this phenomenon 'staged authenticity' to highlight the loss of the original meaning of tradition as customary practice untainted by global changes. Global tourism promoted by liquid modernity is likely to devalue tradition as a basis of cultural continuity. Instead, tradition is placed on a consumer's pedestal. It can still generate a sense of cultural identity but not necessarily the solidarity defining the future of a particular cultural group.

There is a sense of an eternal present built into liquid modernity. The world is changing at a rapid pace, fuelled by capitalist expansionism, technological innovations and rabid consumerism. It would appear that such change makes it necessary for people to live feverishly for the moment, going along with the latest fashion and being seen as highly responsive to the new and the popular. Bauman is, in effect, describing a kind of alienation in liquid modernity where the breakdown of social bonds does not necessarily lead to personal disintegration but to heightened flexibility that blocks out critical consciousness. In other words, fluidity creates more gullibility and egocentrism. Given this condition of modernity, it is surprising that Bauman does not offer a theory of resistance to a world that is so fluidly commoditized, a dystopia of delight where no one feels the need to be sceptical.

Although such a world seems to have arrived, it does not remain unchallenged as a singular global condition. Resistance to a universal view of modernity takes as its starting point the idea that modernity is an inclusive, mutating project leading to multiple modernities. This implies that modernity cannot be sheltered

from its own potential to become unlike itself. In other words, the experience of modernity in different societies undermines its plausibility as a unidimensional project. By taking on modernity as a project of social transformation, each society comes to question the linear path of development assumed by the agents of modernization.

By pluralizing the word, modernity, the distinction between First, Second and Third Worlds was erased to suggest that former colonies have now overcome the divide between modernity and tradition that once stigmatized their condition. Multiple modernities can be regarded as an incisive critique against the assumption that modernity is an exclusively Western project. If colonialism had through its institutions of domination contributed to the hubris of modernity, advocates of multiple modernities can now claim to disprivilege colonialism's self-aggrandizement of its civilizing mission by offering alternative interpretations of social change. For instance, Kaya has argued:

> the assumptions of modernity as equivalent to the West must be problematized so as to show the tenability of the concept of multiple modernities. For this to be shown, it must be argued that the modernization of non-western societies cannot be viewed merely as westernization or Europeanization. Existing social theory, a product of Western experience, cannot be valid for analysing non-western experiences of modernity. We would insist that the openness of modernity to interpretation provides an important opportunity for anyone who aims at arguing for multiple modernities. (2004: 50)

This statement reflects dissatisfaction with a universal approach to modernity biased by Western experience, which is influenced by the vast colonial projects of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By inventing multiple modernities, it is possible to ask how modernity affected colonial subjects to produce new attitudes that reshaped the meaning of modernity. It implies that 'former colonial "subjects" of Euro/American projects of modernity are empowered in a post-colonial world to assert their own projects of modernity' (Dirlik, 2003: 286).

The realization that modernity is not *a* project but one encompassing many possibilities of development places tradition in a unique situation of facilitating social change by readjusting cultural practices. In a sense, such change does not destroy traditions but redefines them through innovative actions to produce a modern context not shorn of traditions. Thus, multiple modernities guarantee the continuity of tradition but not necessarily in its original form. The concept of diversity emphasizes the localization of modernity in which diverse traditions do not disappear completely, but are transformed or absorbed into new forms of thought and action. In effect, it is this diversity that determines the multiple trajectories of the modernity project.

However, it can be argued that multiple modernities are actually modernities at risk because the transformation of traditions can promote as well as challenge the legitimacy of existing institutions. Whereas colonialism tends to introduce modernity from the elite level down and thus presents a semblance of elitist transition, multiple modernities are likely to encounter a highly complex situation

of multi-level interaction between the new and the old. This type of situation increases the possibility of resistance because it cannot be assumed that agents of modernization are able to determine precisely the appropriate level for fusing the new and the old. Furthermore, elites may not even play a vital role in such fusion since the postcolonial context does not call for the collaboration between a colonizing power and local leaders. In multiple modernities, it is the historical background that provides a perspective to the risks entailed in social transformation, and thus emphasizes the particularistic aspect of the emergence of modernity.

The particularism of multiple modernities suggests an expanding arena of value conflicts. Each of the emerging modernities represents a specific mixture of the modern and the traditional that may be in sharp contrast to others. For instance, the Confucian factor in East Asian modernization may be at odds with the individualism of Western modernity. Confucianism represents a type of cultural conservatism that seems to have worked in tandem with the rapid economic growth of several East Asian societies. However, it does not fare well as source of individualistic values because the moral fabric it advances places little or no importance on the satisfaction of individualistic desires (Lee, 1997). Conflict of values arising from multiple modernities means that it is futile to speak of a common core of values inherent to any effort to modernize. If modernity is generally interpreted as a systematic drive to seek world-mastery, then multiple modernities represent the myriad cultural routes to attaining control of various aspects of the life-world. Each cultural route may attempt to assert its influence over the others. Hence, the conflict of values in multiple modernities reflects the struggle of identities in redefining the meaning of modernity.

Each identity involved in this struggle is free to invoke traditions as essential to the reworking of modernity. The role of traditions in organizing identity suggests that multiple modernities can be perceived as specific expressions of culture. It implies that the conditions under which modernity is reorganized and represented have symbolic value insofar as they come to encompass cultural meanings vital to identity needs. The incorporation of traditional elements in multiple modernities is, therefore, an exercise in the rearrangement of symbols that comes to project an exclusive identity for a specific modernity. The admixture of symbols may be imprecise in the sense that it is a loose arrangement, which can be manipulated or even politicized for the expression of a particular identity. Multiple modernities are in effect arenas of symbolic differences in which one type of modernity is set off from another in terms of the cultural content organized around the meaning of identity. Thus, the Confucianized modernity of East Asia is said to represent a set of symbolic values rooted in East Asian culture that allegedly reinforce the ethics necessary for the construction of a modern society. Consequently, this type of modernity can be depicted as unique to East Asia because Confucian values lack relevance in other societies. Even within East Asia, the common core of Confucian values found in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore may not be sufficient to represent *a* specific modernity, since each country with its individual historical and cultural development has generated its

own niche in the modernity bandwagon. Certainly, the Chinese are not likely to have developed the same sense of modernity as the Japanese or the Koreans even though all three cultures are deeply influenced by Confucian values.

Multiple modernities exist as cultural entities because they are concerned with the creation of unique identities arising from the intersection of tradition, innovation and the quest for world-mastery. This struggle to establish unique identities suggests that multiple modernities are potentially nationalistic because it is impossible to speak of the emergence of one kind of modernity without referring to its national identity. Thus, the idea of a Chinese modernity or a Japanese modernity bespeaks the notion of nationality as an underlying factor in the construction of modernity that is fundamentally unique to a particular nation. By attempting to divest modernity of Western exclusiveness, the postcolonial voices of multiple modernities are likely to end up promoting different forms of nationalism to address the meaning of new cultural foundations.

The Fate of Modernity

Comparison of these new approaches suggests that modernity is unlikely to return to a singular vision of world-mastery. It means that modernity has lost its classical standing and now represents a spectrum of meanings marked by different cultural agendas. Each of these approaches can be construed as a way of reconceptualizing the foundation of modernity undermined by postmodern scepticism. Reflexive modernization represents an attempt to reconstruct the foundation of the 'first modernity'. Liquid modernity offers a view of modernity with an aqueous rather than a solid foundation. Multiple modernities suggest the unlimited mixing of the modern and the traditional under conditions of vertiginous variability.

These approaches do not converge with regard to the renewal of modernity. Reflexive modernization is a theory of modern reconstruction advocating a programme of reform in forging a sustainable condition of equality and unity. It speaks to defenders of modernity who are not yet convinced that its foundation is a mere illusion. Reflexivity is seen to provide the means by which the social and political environment can be critically appraised in the maintenance of this foundation. However, for theorists like Bauman, this environment is far from ideal in forging a sustainable condition of equality and unity because the foundation on which it rests has been liquefied without any prospect of returning to an original solid state. Liquid modernity is inadvertently the antithesis of reflexive modernization because it is not a theory of modern reconstruction but of rapacious change due to the relentlessness of global capital. The liquidity of the world suggests that everything is readily absorbed, dissolved and adulterated. It lacks the optimism implied in reflexivity because fluid situations cannot easily be controlled and contained. This means that reflexive modernists would have to argue the case for a strong foundation that can withstand the process of liquefaction. They can possibly accomplish this through a reflexivity that initiates and

leads to new institutions to meet the challenges posed by liquefaction. In short, reflexivity implies a process of re-embedding.

On the other hand, multiple modernities tend to represent non-Western/ Third World expressions of postcolonial social growth. It means that multiple modernities do not necessarily identify with the reconstructive programme of reflexive modernization or the image of fluidity in liquid modernity, both of which are associated with developments in the West. As a corollary of post-colonialism, multiple modernities seek to deconstruct the colonial assumptions of modernity as universal and hegemonic. For Kaya (2004), it is the openness of modernity to interpretation that can lead to the perspective of multiple moder-nities without excluding the different features of non-Western cultures. Yet this would imply that such an interpretation must consider how multiple moderni-ties relate to the distinction between first and second modernity raised by reflex-ive modernists. Are multiple modernities based on foundations without invoking a reflexive process as in the first modernity, or are they by definition reflexive, as in the second modernity, because of a conscious need to include non-Western features in their foundations? Multiple modernities do not grow on trees, so to speak, and therefore require a definition of their foundations. In that regard, they also have to confront the question of liquidity that threatens all foundations. Are multiple modernities immune to the fluidity of global capital or are they liquid in nature but with non-Western features? In other words, multiple modernities cannot develop in isolation of the considerations of reflexivity and liquidity and must engage with these questions if they are to attain some plausibility.

What, then, is the fate of modernity in the light of these new strands of post-postmodern thinking? First, these new theories of modernity suggest that it is futile to return to another round of postmodern deconstruction. The world is seen as adamantly modern but requires new perspectives for understanding contemporary problems. These perspectives, informed by the concepts of reflex-ivity, liquidity and diversity, place modernity on a multidimensional path that does not lead to a single destiny but to a variety of outcomes yet to be system-atically studied. What seem to be lacking at this stage of theorizing are empiri-cal studies of modernity that utilize the concepts of reflexivity, liquidity and diversity. Each of these concepts can be applied to specific settings where the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional is undergoing rapid trans-formation. The breakdown of this dichotomy in the light of how reflexivity, liquidity and diversity are contributing to new social patterns is likely to provide a better picture of the direction modernity is taking in different societies. The implication here is that we can endeavour to examine whether the three concepts are complementary, i.e. can reflexivity be institutionalized as a means to assess and control liquidity and in the process provide new cultural ways to determine the extent to which diversity can be maintained? In other words, despite the different agendas posed by these three concepts, future empirical studies may possibly demonstrate the varying levels in which these concepts operate as 'checks and balances' in contemporary processes of modern development such as labour migration, consumerism, technology transfer and class/ethnic formations.

Second, modernity is no longer considered an exclusively Western phenomenon but is undeniably global in its current phase. The classical theorists offered explanations of modernity based largely on Western experiences, but in its current phase it is necessary to go beyond these explanations to include both Western and non-Western experiences. If such a view is taken, then it is possible to apply the concepts of reflexivity, liquidity and diversity in a global manner without limiting each to a particular country or area of the world. The reality of a borderless world suggests that future studies of modernity will have to take into consideration the influence of these concepts across countries and areas of the world. For example, we can ask if reflexivity in one society affects reflexivity in another society, and if so, how that alters the relationship between modernity and tradition in both societies.

Third, contests over the meaning of modernity suggest that its unfolding cannot be isolated from the plural condition of the contemporary world. This was the condition celebrated by postmodernists but must now be accepted by theorists seeking to offer new perspectives of modernity. Postmodernists insisted that the era of modernity was past but they failed to realize that the plural condition touted by them was also the source of new forms of modernity. It is this condition that has given rise to competing ideas about the current phase of modernity and can be empirically analysed for a better understanding of how these ideas have come about.

It can be concluded from this comparison that the paradigm of modernity has not only survived the criticisms of postmodernism, but it has also blossomed into multiple paradigms to reflect the plural condition in the world. Conducting empirical research for each of these paradigms would give us a chance to assess their applicability in different parts of the world.

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