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Modernization in Times of Globalization I

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Multipolarity means thinking plural: Modernities

Jan Nederveen Pieterse

Abstract

Modernities are a theme of our times. Recognizing that modernities are multiple and diverse and transcending ideal-type modernity and its Eurocentric legacy, acknowledges the multipolar realities of twenty-first century globalization and the ‘rise of the rest’. Real-existing modernities are mixed social formations in that they straddle past and present and import and translate styles and customs from other cultures. In addition, modernities are layered—some components are shared among all modern societies and make up transnational modernity while other components differ according to historical and cultural circumstances. The third section reflects on East Asia as an alternative modernity and sketches its main features. Leaving modernity as utopia behind, for a grounded modernity opens the possibility of coming to terms with the dilemmas that real modernities face.

Multipolarity means thinking in the plural. The Cold War era was bipolar and involved comparisons between capitalism and communism across many dimensions. The period of unipolarity that followed the end of the Cold War was one of relatively unrestrained American superpower, in capitalism and finance and, in later stages, geopolitical expansion. This was the era of neoliberalism, the Washington Consensus, recurrent financial crises in emerging economies and, during the G.W. Bush administration, three new wars. In the process, the US overplayed its hand and became overextended.

In the twenty-first century we enter an era of multipolarity, which is shaped by two markers: the weakening of American hegemony and the rise of emerging societies. Thus, as one set of reference points unravels, or at least loses its model appeal—American hegemony and Anglo-American capitalism—other points of reference slowly, gradually emerge in East Asia, China, Singapore, the Arabian Gulf and Latin America (Nederveen Pieterse 2008). In international business, the talk is of ‘decoupling’. In development studies, the conversation is about ‘Asian drivers’. Investors and asset managers talk about the BRIC (Brazil Russia India China) and other emerging economies, several of which have been upgraded to investment grade. In international affairs, the talk is of ‘the rise of the rest’ (Zakaria 2008) and the transition from the G7 to the G20 as a
leading forum in the world economy while the president of the World Bank observes that ‘a multi-polar economy, less reliant on the US consumer, will be a more stable economy’.¹

In this setting it makes sense to think of modernities in the plural because emerging societies are no longer in the waiting room of history; they have emerged as actors on the main stage. A case in point is the role of sovereign wealth funds from the global South as financial players especially since 2007 (Nederveen Pieterse 2009a). It makes sense because the heading ‘developing countries’ is no longer adequate. Countries such as Brazil, Mexico and Indonesia are no longer just developing countries; they are both developing countries in international rankings and emerging economies in international economic and financial indexes.

What is at stake in this argument? Is it merely a technical adjustment of vocabulary, a terminological courtesy in a changing geo-economic landscape? The stakes are larger and concern a shift from a Eurocentric, top-down view of history towards a multilinear perspective on historical change. Marx summed up the unilinear view: ‘the more developed society shows the less developed the image of its future’. Multilinear evolution has been accepted since the 1940s, yet Eurocentrism and west-centrism die hard, especially when hierarchies coincide with geopolitical fault lines and the citadel of modernity is guarded by a variety of gatekeepers. A ‘singular modernity’ has often been thematized; not surprisingly, from Heidegger to Jameson (2002), it is an exercise in westcentrism. From world-system theory to ‘global sociology’ (Cohen and Kennedy 2007), modernity has been theorized as a Eurocentric bulwark. What variation the conventional paradigm of modernity acknowledges is typically variation in time—early and latecomers to modernity; early, high modernity; pre-modernity, modernity, postmodernity. When variation in geographical space is acknowledged it is mostly along center-periphery lines, in which metropolitan centers are more modern than peripheries, so northwest Europe is ‘more modern’ than Catholic, Mediterranean Europe. According to this ‘geography of modernity’ Turkey lies on the outskirts of Europe and modernity and so do the Middle East and the world of Islam (cf. Taylor 1999, Therborn 1995).

So take the discussion about the relations between the west and Islam and the Middle East. In Samuel Huntington’s phrase it is a clash of civilizations (1996). This upholds the model of Europe and the US and considers how Middle Eastern societies deviate from this standard. Then, with Bernard Lewis,

we ask the question *What went wrong?* The demonization of Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran follows close behind. Enlightenment fundamentalism produces a ‘hard modernity’ that synchs with a hard geopolitics. Khaldoun Samman’s book, *The clash of modernities* (2010), suggests a contrasting view. Rather than to an encounter between modernity and ‘failed modernity’ it refers to a contest between different, rival modernities with shortcomings on both sides. This matches accounts of Middle Eastern and Muslim societies as alternative modernities (e.g. Kamali 2006), of ‘rock and resistance’ in the Middle East and North Africa (LeVine 2008) and sites of modern Islam such as Turkey (Göle 2000).

According to Eisenstadt, ‘modernity is an open-ended horizon in which there are spaces for multiple interpretations’ (2000), a perspective shared by others (Deutsch 1991, Kaya 2003, 2004). This implies a change from a unilinear path of evolution following a single logic, towards multiple paths and, so to speak, a spaghetti approach to historical change.

In this paper I argue, first, that modernities are mixed and composite; if we consider not the ideal type of modernity in the abstract, but real-existing modernities, they all include premodern strands. In the second section I argue that modernities are layered—some components are shared among all modern societies and make up transnational modernity while other components differ according to historical and cultural circumstances. The third section reflects on East Asia as an alternative modernity and sketches its main features. This treatment follows previous discussions of modernities (Nederveen Pieterse 1998, 2000, 2009b).

**Modernities are mixed**

Does ‘modernities’ make sense? Let me tease out several meanings, without being exhaustive. In one of the early formulations, by Eisenstadt (2000), multiple modernities refer to differences between Europe and the US. This is an argument for which there is ample justification, confirmed in sociology. A different consideration is that while *modern sociology* generally treats modernity as a single configuration (e.g. Giddens 1990), the *sociology of modernity* finds that actual, real-existing modernity in, say, Italy, Scandinavia and Japan is remarkably different (Bauman 1992). Thus, one level or perspective concerns modernity as an ideal type, a paradigm, as in Weber’s rationalization and Talc-
ott Parsons’ pattern variables, and another concerns real-existing modernities, and here the plural comes in.

Each real-existing modernity is composite and mixed and includes premodern strands and features, many of which are typically overlooked and glossed over when we adopt the ‘modern gaze’ or ideal-type perspective on modernity. Examples of particularistic or premodern elements in modernity are in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Particularistic or premodern elements in modernity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status (estates); guilds—crafts, trade unions, professional associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beruf, craft regulation, apprenticeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarchy, status system, old boy networks, clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary associations, rackets, syndicates, clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic associations; crime networks, Mafias, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several of these strands live on and have been incorporated into ‘modern institutions’.\(^2\) If we focus, then, not on ideal-type modernity as an end state or condition, but on ‘becoming modern’ or modernization as a process, it typically comes about through adjustments of and accommodations with premodern institutions. These have generated transitional in-between social formations that have often constituted important formative periods. Eric Hobsbawm (1954) spoke of the ‘feudal capitalism’ of Spain and Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (when economic surplus was invested in cathedral building), in contrast to the Low Countries where different relations between aristocracy, merchants and the church prevailed and surplus was reinvested in enterprise. The weak status of aristocracy in the Low Countries, particularly on the seaboard, gave rise to in-between categories such as ‘noble merchants’. The ‘imperialism of free trade’ is a transitional formation that functioned in the nineteenth-century British Empire (Gallagher and Robinson 1982). Manchester School liberalism displays some of these features, as an interspersion of imperial rule and merchant interests: ‘Britannia rules the waves’. ‘Conservative modernization’ characterized the policies of many ruling strata in nineteenth-century France (Bonaparte), Germany (Bismarck), Russia (Count Witte), Ottoman Empire (Tanzimat reforms) and Japan (Meiji Restoration).\(^3\)

\(^2\) See e.g. Lash and Urry 1994, Kotkin 1992.

\(^3\) On premodern features of modern times see Mayer 1981; cf. Nederveen Pieterse 1989. Con-
Here the general principle is to implement reforms and adopt new technologies and institutions to maintain the core power structure. The various forms of ‘colonial modernization’ in the western colonies and dependencies—building infrastructure, plantations, machinery, administrative reforms, and later the ethical policy—also indicate the formation of mixed social formations. ‘Colonial modernization’ is a transitional social formation in itself (cf. Scriver and Prakash 2007). Examples of mixed social formations are in Table 2.

Table 2 Mixed social formations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noble merchants</th>
<th>Low Countries, 1300 onward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Feudal capitalism’</td>
<td>Spain and Italy, 16/17th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial free trade</td>
<td>British Empire, 19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Conservative modernization’</td>
<td>France, Germany, Russia, Japan, 19th century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Colonial modernization’</td>
<td>Colonies, 20th century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of these hybrid combinations of premodern and modern elements live on in institutions of lasting significance. The House of Lords in Westminster and the Upper Chamber in many European parliaments indicate the enduring role of landlords and aristocracies and agricultural interests, often to this day. (Arguably, the EU Common Agricultural Policy or the system of agricultural subsidies, which is the EU’s largest expenditure post, owes its longevity to these interests, which are partly of a late-feudal nature and have often been represented in Christian Democratic parties.) European welfare states owe some of their origins to their post-feudal character. Feudalism implied a system of entitlements and duties (noblesse oblige) which infused nineteenth-century working class movements and were rearticulated in industrialism. Corporat-ism, too, owes some features to older forms of state-market cooperation when the major guild house stood next to the town hall, as in many old towns such as Bologna and Freiburg. Some of these features live on also in postmodern times, in forms of localism and identity politics rooted in older communal traditions, and neo-tribal loyalties to sports teams alongside new loyalties to brand names and logos.

One can make a case, too, for different modernities coexisting and interacting within a society or state formation. Cases in point are the American South
and Southwest and the Italian South or Mezzogiorno. A common interpretation of the American Civil War is that it was a conflict between two modes of production: industrial, mechanized production in the northeast and manual labor based on slavery in the plantation economy of the South, and mechanized labor won the day over manual labor as a more efficient production system. Both availed themselves of contemporary technologies and economic opportunities, including free trade in the South and protection in the north, so this can be viewed as a contest between rival modernities. Besides, they are modernities whose differences have persisted over time, despite convergence in some respects (notably modernization in the South especially since the 1930s and public works programs such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the interstate highway system). In the 1970s the South’s institutional framework of low wages, low taxes, low services and no unions—the institutional framework of plantation capitalism, reworked during Reconstruction and Jim Crow—proved to be attractive and competitive for industries facing a profit squeeze after the end of the postwar boom. This sparked the great shift from the Frost Belt to the Sun Belt, which is still ongoing, with vast ramifications for American society and politics.4

Robert Putnam (1993) and others argue that modern institutions such as decentralized government and local administration function differently in Italy’s north and south. Even though Putnam recycles stereotypes about the Mezzogiorno, the differences are meaningful and the notion of multiple modernities coexisting in a single state formation may apply here too and have analytical purchase. Both formations are modern because they avail themselves of contemporary technologies and institutions and are different because they deploy them according to diverse historical and cultural legacies. The institutions are similar but they function differently because they are embedded in different cultural, historical and geographical settings. The theme of multiple, in fact competing modernities within a country has been adopted also in analyses of prewar Japan where it refers to a contest between ‘rural modernity’ and ‘urban modernity’ (Tamanoi 1998, Minichiello 1998).

A different take on modernity’s mixed lineages is Tiryakian’s argument on the Christian, Gnostic and Chthonic ‘metacultures’ of modernity (Tiryakian 1996). This takes us still further back in time and brackets modernity by placing it within a wider, layered civilizational frame. Another twist to this line of thinking is the theme of neo-medievalism: the rise of crossborder sovereignty

4 I have discussed this as Dixie capitalism, as the actual template of neoliberalism, and as ‘the revenge of the Confederacy’ in Nederveen Pieterse 2004, 2008.
and supranational phenomena such as cyberspace in some respects parallels medieval times and their fractured and overlapping sovereignties (Kobrin 1998, Winn 2004). Medieval modernity is yet another option. AlSayyad and Roy (2006) find that gated enclaves, regulated squatter settlements and camps are ‘fiefdoms of regulation or zones of “no-law”’ that parallel the medieval city in Europe and the Arab world.

Incorporating the peasantry into industry, services and urbanism is modernity’s key challenge and when this fails, one of the outcomes may be medieval modernity—modernity accommodating or shielding itself from a large peasant hinterland. With a stretch of metaphor, the shrinking middle class in the contemporary United States has been termed a situation of ‘postindustrial peasants’ (Leicht and Fitzgerald 2006).

Different types of mixture arise when elements from other cultures are adopted. Thus in Japan, parents, peers, teachers and the media work together to inform the young about Santa Claus and his visits. The Japanese Santa wears the familiar red and white attributed to the nineteenth-century American illustrator Thomas Nast (Plath 2007: 312). However, in Japanese advertisements Santa is often drawn as an attractive young woman. The androgyny of Santa may reflect the growing influence of the mother in Japanese society (Plath 313). The popular Christmas seems to offer people the means for making sense of life in a modern environment. This is one instance of the ‘globalization of Christmas’ (cf. Miller 1993). Other forms of mixture arise, of course, from contemporary migration flows and multiculturalism. ‘Global multiculture’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2007) is one of the expressions of transnational modernity. In sum, real-existing modernities are mixed social formations in that they straddle past and present and import and translate styles and customs from other cultures.

Modernities are layered

Criteria for alternative modernities include that social formations are enduring and sustainable over time and show sufficient cohesion—historical, geographical and cultural. Modernities, of course, imply overlap: per definition all modernities share core modern features; so multiple modernities don’t preclude partial convergence. Thus in the West, over time, we don’t see a complete

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5 On these dilemmas see Nederveen Pieterse and Rehbein 2009.
convergence of Europe and the US, and not with Japan either. There is partial convergence—in technology, industrialism, post-industrialism, information technology, banking, transnational corporations, interfirm cooperation, international treaties and conventions, security cooperation, etc.; but there is no complete convergence and no great likelihood of this occurring either. Look closely and in areas of cooperation such as finance, banks perform different roles and accounting standards function differently. In the course of the twentieth century many differences have remained fairly stable, even as each society or region has also undergone major changes. There are enduring differences, too, within Europe, between Northwest, Nordic, South, Central and Eastern Europe. In spite of EU integration, many differences will linger on for quite some time. We can distinguish, then, differences that are temporal and fade over time and differences that are deeply embedded and structural.

A related discussion is that of ‘capitalism against capitalism’ or the contest between different capitalisms that was initiated by Michel Albert (1993). Originally this, too, unfolded as a comparison and contrast between European and American capitalism, or Rhineland and Anglo-American capitalism, stakeholder and shareholder capitalism, along with another reference point: Japanese capitalism and the ‘Japanese challenge’. This debate has given rise to the varieties of capitalism thesis and a large literature in global political economy. It refers to the empirical and widely observed institutional diversity between economic and political systems. The argument of variation between national capitalisms is not necessarily significant, but regional differences do count. An alternative view, the transnational capitalist class argument assumes a transnational alignment of class interests and an eventual institutional convergence of capitalisms. Yet, clearly, these perspectives can be combined. We can think of capitalism as layered, with convergence at one level (credit ratings, international financial institutions, interfirm cooperation) and divergence at other levels (institutional frameworks, legal standards, different patterns of state, market, society relations).

Fernand Braudel explained world trade as a three layered structure in which ‘capitalism’ is at the top whose members gain the largest profits in their fields, then in the middle the ‘market economy’ made up of regular participants of buying and selling activities, and lastly the ‘non-market economy’ where people participate in bartering or are self-sufficient (Arrighi et al. 2003: 263). These layers exist both within and between social formations.

Just as capitalisms plural is contentious in international political economy, so is modernities in sociology. Yet, the differences in economic and fiscal systems,
business environments and corporate governance are ordinary and glaring and in economics the criticisms of ‘capitalisms’ plural by and large concern the conceptualization and theorization, rather than the analytics and empirical differentiation, which are broadly accepted. The major alternative view, transnational capitalism and a transnational capitalist class, has relatively few adherents. While the diversity in capitalisms is widely recognized and accepted, this isn’t the case with respect to modernity, even though it logically follows considering that capitalism (‘modern capitalism’) is one of the institutional dimensions of modernity. Sociology in this regard is more conventional and wedded to the classic paradigms of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In Connell’s analysis of ‘why classical theory is classical’ (1997) the construction of the classical tradition reflects the erasure of imperialism and western power.

We can think of modernities as layered, with strata of shared features—technologies and institutions; strata of partially shared attributes; layers of temporary differences that will likely recede over time; and layers of deep seated differences embedded in the ‘grammar’ of culture. Societies the world over share modern conventions such as the universal standard time, codes and rules that organize air, sea and land traffic and international and satellite communication and a host of international treaties and conventions. They share basic technologies from the combustion engine to industrial standards and information technology. Commonalities don’t preclude differences. English is a lingua franca across many societies, yet it is articulated differently according to local vernaculars, so it is ‘globish’ rather than English (Nerrière 2004). English is shared but partially so; there are differences between British, American, Indian, Caribbean and Ghanaian English, etc. Besides different diction and vocabulary, and sometimes meaning, each has generated distinctive literatures.

Looking East

As Mahathir-bin-Mohamad of Malaysia points out, if countries can be westernized, they can be easternized as well (Mahathir and Ishihara 1995). In the past, the rule was to industrialize you must westernize; now to industrialize you must easternize (Luna and Klein 2006; cf. Kaplinksi 1994). For developing
countries, looking east, not west, for development examples has been the standard practice for quite some time. East Asia and the development experience of the Tiger economies has been the model to look up to for some time for African countries, Latin America, the Middle East, the World Bank (the ‘East Asian miracle’) and UN development agencies. For smaller countries, such as the emirates of the Arabian Gulf, Singapore has taken on model functions. Malaysia and its New Economic Policy has been an example for multiethnic societies such as South Africa and Brazil. Hence the times that development means modernization means westernization means Americanization are long gone. Europe, the US and Japan have not ceased to be models in certain respects, but there are now additional models which are in many ways more relevant and appropriate for developing countries. So there is now a plurality of models.

Advanced countries and transnational corporations also look to Asia and hold up Asian examples in labor practices, management techniques and welfare policies. British conservatives used to look to Hong Kong and Singapore as ‘lean welfare states’. We could term this kind of positive evaluation of Asian practices, ‘Asianism’.

The idea of an ‘East Asian model’ is contested and subject to criticism (White 1988). There is ample differentiation in East Asia. Political systems, economic institutions and gender relations diverge across the region. Thus, in Taiwan small and medium size enterprises have received government support and have played a much larger role than elsewhere. Nevertheless, several components are widely shared and may be viewed as building blocks of an East Asian modernity. Some apply to Northeast Asia, not to Southeast Asia. Together they make up an alternative modernity, which serves as a guidepost to many developing countries.

**Developmental states**

Chalmers Johnson’s concept of the developmental state originally applied to Japan. The general lesson is that there has been no successful socioeconomic development in history without a committed and capable state. We can broadly term this state capitalism with several variants such as bureaucratically coordinated capitalism (Japan).

**Corporatism**

Close state-corporate relations characterize all early developers, also in Europe. Invariably the military industries served as a major nexus and
impetus to industrialization (with government contracts involved in iron, steel, railways, machinery, energy, weapons and navy). However, this isn’t the typical pattern among the late-latecomers to industrialization. Japan went this route from the late-nineteenth century on, but most newly industrialized countries did not, presumably because light industries were the typical starting point and the Cold War arms race and the overwhelming American military presence made it unnecessary as well as impracticable.

**Public service banking**

Close relations between government and banks have long been part of industrial policy. Schumpeter refers to public service banking as the dominant trend in Rhineland and central Europe, in contrast to the Anglo-American style of banking. This tradition also pertains in East Asian societies.

**They are post-feudal social formations**

This applies not just to Asia but to most NICs. They share this feature with European modernities. In this regard they all deviate from the American pattern which arises from a break with feudalism; the American pattern stands alone and is a historical anomaly.

**Distributive social reforms and policies**

This has been a major trend in East Asian economies, partly due to the Cold War and American influence. Land reform and progressive education policies have been hallmarks of development in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Land reform and education policies enabled the East Asian societies to integrate the peasantry into modernity and thus to meet the single most important challenge of modernization. Social policies of housing and compulsory savings plans play a major part in the city-state economy of Singapore (Hill and Lian Kwen Fee 1995). This informs the East Asian emphasis on human development and human security (in contrast to human rights). Arguably the human development approach (and the human development index, combining literacy, health care and income) is owed in large measure to the East Asian experience. The downside of Asian lean welfare states is that they rely on family support and most of the burden of support falls on women (White and Goodman 1998).
Other components of East Asian modernity include the following: a postcolonial outlook, i.e. a collective memory of colonial experiences. An approach of strategic integration into the world economy, for instance, avoiding or minimizing foreign debt. Their security systems are defensive rather than offensive and the role of the military is generally limited (which is different in Southeast Asia, in Thailand, Burma and Indonesia). National territorial expansionism barely plays a role (with China as an exception). ⁷

East Asian configurations have been, of course, dynamic over time and in flux. Over time the Korean chaebol system of business conglomerates has led to corruption and crony capitalism, as in the recent Hyundai scandal. The configuration has been authoritarian in politics and labor regimes and has gradually opened to democratization, though not across the board. The Asian crisis led to IMF interventions and pro-market policy changes in South Korea as well as to the ‘IMF homeless’. The influence of international finance led to the expansion of credit cards and consumerism, which, on the upside, decreases the dependence on exports.

These social formations have been increasingly reflexive and engage in self-criticism and self-correction. The labor and democratic movements in South Korea are a case in point. Anti-authoritarianism is a strong current throughout the region. Infrastructure, urban planning, mass transit systems and architecture are under continual review. Ecological constraints are a growing concern. Criticisms of fast-lane turbo capitalism have been rife (Bello 1992). In China this has contributed to abandoning the Shanghai model of fast-track growth and its disastrous uneven development and adoption of the Harmonious Society policy in 2003. Civil society initiatives and people-to-people contacts play a growing role and inspire a ‘new regionalism’. One alternative proposal is for a ‘civic regionalism’, rather than state or market-led regionalism (Sakamoto 2000). Various elements of this configuration have been thematized—in discussions of human development and human security, the World Bank’s ‘East Asian miracle’, Jose Cooper Ramo’s ‘Beijing Consensus’ (Ramo 2004) and reflections in East Asia and China (e.g., Wei-Ming 2000, Shijun 2006, Nonini and Ong 2007, Yan 2008).

Other alternative modernities include Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica, as the four most stable and prosperous Latin American countries. They are too diverse to constitute a cohesive Latin American modernity, but throughout the region Latin American conditions are increasingly experienced no longer

⁷ This is also discussed in Nederveen Pieterse 1998.
as an affliction, a truncated or incomplete modernity, but as an alternative modernism (Ortiz 2000).

Let’s turn to criticisms of modernities plural. One criticism is that by pluralizing modernity we lose the critical edge and ‘rupture’ that comes with modernity and modern thinking, which matters particularly in early, young or nascent modernities. The external reference point (‘modernity’) helps to open up ossified local conditions.

I think this is a weak criticism. Critical thinking is internal to modernity. Each modernity generates its own reflexivity, its social, political and cultural debates and hence its own critical theory. The external reference point is as likely to be as distorting (applying criteria and standards out of context) and idealized (Heidegger without the Holocaust) as it is inspiring. In the era of global mass marketing and communication there is a surfeit of picture-postcard glamour images of distant icons of modernity—Manhattan skyscrapers, the Big Ben and Westminster and the Eiffel Tower as part of the familiar skyline of western modernity. Dipankar Gupta, however, rejects the idea of multiple modernities.

Once we begin to entertain the feasibility of the term ‘multiple modernities’, we will, in due course of time, suspend our critical judgment and forgive many egregious features that exhibit themselves in contemporary societies. So if there is bride burning, then that too would be a specific type of modernity; if there is an eruption of sectarian intolerance, then that too would be yet another version of modernity. (Gupta 2005: 7)

To a certain extent this is true. To each modernity its pathologies; to deny this would be idealism and ahistorical. In Gupta’s view, however, the ‘telos of modernity’ is a ‘deliberative project’ that turns on intersubjectivity (‘accepting the viability and validity of other points of view and other stations of life’, 2005: 4; cf. Gupta 2000). According to Gupta, ‘modernity owes nothing to the past’ and ‘to make the past irrelevant to the present and to the future is the task of modernity’ (2005: 15). In this view, modernity is about the erasure of history for modernity is ‘future seeking’; modernity then is a purification, a cleansing the slate project, a view that is diametrically opposite to treating history and tradition as wellsprings and resources of the present and of modernity. With an ideal-type angle on ‘project modernity’ one can keep modernity neat and clean. The downside is it only exists in the abstract. Gupta’s modernity is a telos, an unrealized, distant ideal, not unlike Habermas’s ‘modernity as an unfinished project’ (yet to fulfill the goals set by the Enlightenment). This is a utopia rather than a sociological perspective. It is modernity without a dark side.
It is a charming yet peculiar notion that the Enlightenment is progressive and therefore so is modernity. True, the Enlightenment gave us science, abolitionism and the emancipation movements. Yet the Enlightenment also gave us ‘race science’ (and a new justification for slavery), nationalism (and radical nationalism), the new imperialism (on behalf of progress and civilization), the first industrial war (the American Civil War), mastery over nature (and risk society). It gave us, following Lyotard (1979), the great presumptions of modernity (and their disillusionments): science (Hiroshima), revolution (the Gulag) and humanism (with the Holocaust as a counterpoint). Conservative modernity is a major current. Modernity without a dark side means modernity without history, as if it is yet to happen.

There are in each society different currents and different angles on modernity. Thus in India, there are modernizers, such as the industrialists Tata and Birla (both are Parsi families); proponents of alternative modernities such as many in the Subaltern Studies group; neo-traditionalists such as the BJP and Shiv Sena; and those who propose alternative traditions, such as Gandhian tradition, Ashis Nandy and Vandana Shiva. The dismantling of the license raj in 1991 is the shift from one type of modernity—Nehru’s Fabian socialism organized around a centralized state and influenced by the Soviet example; to a hybrid that combines a middle class service economy and urban growth modeled on the example of Shanghai with a large peasantry (Khilnani 1997, Kaviraj 2000). India didn’t experience an industrial revolution; yet its cell phone users rose from 3 million in 2000 to 100 million in 2005. India includes over 680,000 villages; a population of 1.1 billion, yet with only 35 million taxpayers (Luce 2007). When in the 2020s India will be the world’s third largest economy, its modernity will be a bricolage of these diverse streams.

In conclusion, modernities are a theme of our times. Recognizing that modernities are multiple and diverse and transcending the ideal-type of modernity acknowledges the multipolar realities of twenty-first century globalization and the ‘rise of the rest’. It recognizes, further, that all modernities are mixed and layered, also in the west. From modernity as utopia it takes us to a grounded modernity. This opens the possibility of coming to terms with the dilemmas that real modernities face.

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8 The journal New Formations (28, 1996) devoted a special issue to Conservative Modernity featuring, among others, articles about radical nationalism, British conservatism and Peronism.
Multipolarity means thinking plural: Modernities

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Dr. Gerhard Preyer lehrt an der Universität Frankfurt a.M. und ist Herausgeber der Zeitschrift „Protosociology“.

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