

Civilizational Formations and Political Dynamics. The Stein Rokkan Lectur 1985

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Introduction

Stein Rokkan's monumental oeuvre focused on the explanation of the different patterns of political dynamics that developed in different European countries in modern times (Rokkan 1975). Throughout his analysis he was fully aware of the importance of both cultural-religious and political-ecological settings or frameworks for the understanding of the historical and contemporary development of the different patterns of political formations and dynamics, while at the same time he also stressed the autonomy and distinctiveness of the political sphere.

The recognition of such autonomy has indeed become predominant in many recent studies in political sociology (Skocpol 1982, Bright & Harding 1984). The recognition of this autonomy developed in many ways against those suppositions common to both 'liberal' as well as Marxist camps, which tended to reduce the political sphere and activities to the status of epiphenomena of various social forces, using its power and control in service of these forces.

Many of these studies laid a much greater emphasis on, and redefined analysis of, the various mechanisms of control, including also to some degree ideological or symbolic control, and on the expansive tendencies of the state, and on the state as an autonomous ideological construction. They have also applied it to the analysis of new types of social and political problems such as the formation of economic and social policies, the structure of social movements or classes, modes of conflict resolutions and the like, or implicitly — and sometimes explicitly — moving in a more general way into the analysis of the dynamic interaction between state and society, or state and other social groups.

At the same time, however, they have largely neglected the cultural dimensions and, to a certain extent, the political-ecological ones, as well as the interaction between the two, which were so strongly emphasized by Stein Rokkan.

Because of this they have, instead of asking about the specific characteristics of European state formation and political dynamics, taken them more or less for granted and have even transposed them into other parts of the world, thus neglecting also the quest for the understanding of the specificity of European

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political formations, in terms of the distinctive characteristics of European civilization.

In this lecture, I would like to bring back these questions and to put them in the framework of comparative studies of civilization. I shall do it by presenting a series of comparative studies, starting with a comparison between medieval India and Europe — a comparison which will focus on the relations between political-ecological settings and cultural premises and then proceeding to the analysis of one of the most distinct aspects of European political development, namely that of the Great Revolutions which have ushered in the era of modernity.

The starting point of our analysis — which will be elaborated in the case studies and then brought together in the conclusions — is that it is not possible to understand fully many central aspects of political process — whether in the modern societies on which we have focused here, or in historical ones which we have analyzed elsewhere — by taking the definition or nature of the state, of political institutions, for granted. Nor is it possible merely by defining the state or political institutions in terms of political power and of the political and administrative activities of the different, seemingly universal, political and administrative agents or by examining their relative strength vis-à-vis other groups, especially classes or various interest groups within a society.

In addition to these variables or aspects of the political process — the importance of which nobody would, of course, deny — it is of central importance to analyse the very definition and evaluations in the broader context of the civilizations in which they develop, of the political realm in general, and of the state in particular, as they develop and necessarily also change through the historical experience of the respective civilizations.

Of special importance in this context is the way in which such experience shapes such premises and their institutional derivatives, through the activities of the major elites and coalitions thereof, through the selection by these elites of different themes from within the basic repertoire of the premises and models, especially the basic premises about authority, justice and the place of the political arena in the overall conception of man and cosmos, which are prevalent in the respective civilizations.

The impact of such premises and their institutional derivatives on the institutional process is effected through the activities of the major elites in general and of the political ones in particular, by the various mechanisms of social interaction in general, control and counter-control or challenges to control, that develop in a society or sectors thereof. Such mechanisms are not limited to the exercise of power in the specific 'narrow' political sense. They are — as indeed the more sophisticated Marxists have stressed — much more pervasive. They are not, however, representatives only of class relations or of 'modes of production'. Rather, they are activated by the major coalitions of elites in a society, carrying different cultural visions and representing different types of interests (Eisenstadt

1985a). At the same time, the very implementation or institutionalization of such premises, together with the construction of social division of labor, generate counter-tendencies and movements and processes of change.

Political Ecology and Civilizational Premises — Decentralized Systems — Europe and India

We shall start with a comparative analysis of the processes of center formation and political movements in medieval India and Europe. This analysis will enable us to evaluate the relative importance of, on the one hand, political-ecological variables, and on the other, of cultural or civilizational ones.

India and Europe, from a broad comparative perspective, shared first of all some very important characteristics which cannot be found in relatively pristine form in any other of the great civilizations in the history of mankind. The most important of these characteristics were the existence of relatively common civilizational frameworks, rooted in cultural-religious orientations which became transposed into the basic premises of different civilizations, as against a multiplicity of continuously changing political centers and subcenters, as well as economic structure.

Indeed, many of the concrete structural or organizational aspects of these two spheres — political and economic — and especially the former, may seemingly evince, in these two civilizations, some very strong similarities or parallels in the structural form, such as form of political domination, kingship, patrimonial arrangements and semi-feudal arrangements and the like.

Yet the overall political dynamics, the structure and construction of the centers and of their activities, the nature of the movements of protest, their articulation into political conflicts and the modes of their incorporation into the center were, as is quite well known, different in these civilizations.

The differences were, to some degree, very closely related to the broader cultural conceptions and premises in general and of the political realm in particular, and to the structure of the major elites predominant in these civilizations with all the variations within each of them.

Even here we face a rather paradoxical situation which, at the same time, is of great value from the point of view of our comparative analysis.

Both Europe and India developed within the framework of so-called Axial Age Civilizations (Eisenstadt 1982). The term Axial Age Civilizations was used by Karl Jaspers to connote those civilizations — namely Ancient Israel, later on Christianity in its great variety, Ancient Greece, partially Iran with the development of Zoroastrianism, China in the early Imperial period, Hinduism and Buddhism and, much later, beyond the Axial Age proper, Islam — in which there developed conceptions of a basic tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders.

These conceptions were developed and articulated by a relatively new social element — new type of elites in general and of carriers of models of cultural order, of intellectuals in particular — be they the Jewish prophets and Priests, the Greek Philosophers, the Chinese Literati, the Hindu Brahmins, the Buddhist Sangha or the Islamic Ulema. In the orientation of the activities of these groups the conceptions became combined with the stress on the necessity of active construction of the world according to some transcendental vision or command. Accordingly the successful institutionalization of such conceptions of the internal contours of societies as well as of their interrelations — processes which changed the dynamics of history and have ushered in the possibility of world history or histories.

In close relations to this conception there developed also in these civilizations a far-reaching restructuring of the relation between the political and the higher, transcendental order. The political order — as the central locus or framework of the mundane order — has been usually conceived as lower than the transcendental one and accordingly had to be restructured according to the precepts of the latter and above all according to the perception of the proper mode of overcoming the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, of 'salvation'. And it was the rulers who were usually held to be responsible for assuming such structuring of the political order.

At the same time the nature of the rulers became greatly transformed. The King-God — the embodiment of the cosmic and earthly order alike — disappeared, and a secular ruler, in principle accountable to some higher order, appeared. Thus there emerged the conception of the accountability of the rulers and of the community to a higher authority — God, Divine Law and the like — and accordingly there appeared the possibility of calling a ruler to judgement. The first most dramatic appearance of this conception appeared in Ancient Israel, in the priestly and above all prophetic pronouncements. A different conception of such accountability — an accountability to the community and its laws — appeared on the northern shores of the Eastern Mediterranean — in Ancient Greece. But in different veins this conception appeared in all these civilizations (Eisenstadt 1981).

Europe

And yet there developed also some crucial difference between Europe and India, with respect to one crucial aspect of these orientations, of the ways of reconstructing the world in general, and of the political sphere in particular.

In Europe, unlike in India or in Buddhism, the resolution of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, or, to use Weber's expression, the road to salvation, was not conceived as being attainable through a total negation of the mundane world, but also through activities in the political, military, cultural and even economic sphere — through the restructuring of these

spheres (Heer 1968, Troeltsch 1931).

Thus there developed in Europe a great multiplicity and complexity of different ways of resolving this tension, either through worldly (political and economic) or 'other-worldly' activities — a complexity derived to no small degree from the multiplicity of traditions out of which the European own cultural tradition crystallized — the Judeo-Christian, the Greek, the Roman and the various tribal ones.

Second there developed here — again in distinction from India — the conception of a high degree of relatively autonomous access of different groups and strata to these orders — to some degree countered by, and in constant tension with, the strong emphasis on the mediation of such access by such bodies as the Church or political powers.

Third, again in contrast to India, was the definition of the individual as an autonomous and responsible entity with respect to access to these orders.

Last, in European civilization, a high level of activism and commitment of broader groups and strata to these orders was prevalent, while in India the commitment and activism were much more directed to the transmundane order.

Out of the conjunction of these cultural orientations with the specific political and ecological conditions and structure of elites that developed in Europe, it is possible to understand the institutional implications of the center-periphery relations that developed in Europe.

First of all, of crucial importance here is the type of structural pluralism that developed in Europe. This pluralism differed from mere decentralization as well as from the type of structural differentiation that develops in ecologically compact, above all imperial, systems.

This type of pluralism differed greatly from the one that developed, for instance, in the Byzantine Empire, which shared many aspects of its cultural traditional models with Western Europe. Within the Byzantine Empire this pluralism was manifest in a relatively high degree of structural differentiation within a rather unified socio-political framework in which different social functions were apportioned to different groups of social categories. The structural pluralism that developed in Europe was characterized, above all, by a strong combination between low, but continuously increasing, levels of structural differentiation on the one hand and continuously changing boundaries of different collectivities, units and frameworks on the other (Anderson 1974, Bloch 1961).

The combination of these symbolic models and structural conditions generated several basic institutional characteristics of 'traditional' and Western European civilizations (Hintze 1975, Thrupp 1967, Lindsay 1957) which distinguish it from other civilizations and epitomize its distinctiveness.

The uniqueness of the imperial-feudal system, especially as it developed in Europe, has been in the existence of multiple centers, both different kinds of centers — political, religious and others — as well as of different regional ones (Eisenstadt 1977, 1978), but the mere existence of relative multiplicity and of

pecially political centers is not unique to Europe. It can also be found in India. What distinguishes the European experience is not just the multiplicity of centers but their structure, and the relations between them in general and between the religious and political ones in particular (Anderson 1974, Bloch 1961, Brunner 1968, Praver & Eisenstadt 1968, Hallam 1975). The most important of these characteristics is the fact that they did not live — as in India and to a smaller degree in Islam — in just a sort of adaptive symbiosis, with the religious legitimizing the political and the political providing the religious with protection and resources, and battling with each other over the relative terms of such adaptation.

Beyond this the relations between the religious and political centers in Europe were characterized by the fact that first each of these types of centers claimed some autonomy and standing role with respect to the 'central' functions of the other, i.e., the religious in the political and social, and vice-versa. Second, they were characterized by the fact that each of these centers could support its claim of autonomous access to both the material as well as power and prestige bases of resources. Third was the fact that there developed various 'graded' — primary, secondary — centers, with some degree of autonomy which also claimed some such autonomous access to the higher center which attempted in its turn to superimpose the higher on the lower ones (Hintze 1975, Cam 1954). Or, in greater detail, the most important aspects of medieval and early modern European society were (a) a multiplicity of centers (b) a high degree of permeation of the peripheries by the centers and of the impingement of the peripheries on the centers; (c) a relatively small degree of overlapping of the boundaries of class, ethnic, religious and political entities and their continuous restructuring; (d) a comparatively high degree of autonomy of groups and strata and of their access to the centers of society; (e) a high degree of overlapping among different status units combined with a high level of countrywide status ('class') consciousness and political activity; (f) multiplicity of cultural and 'functional' (economic, or professional) elites; a high degree of cross-cutting between them and a close relationship between them and broader, more ascriptive strata; (g) relative autonomy of the legal system with regard to other interpretive systems — above all the political and the religious ones; and (h) the high degree of autonomy of cities as autonomous centers of social and structural creativity and identity-formation (Rokkan 1975, Tilly 1975).

This special type of centers and sub-centers is unique to Europe and is explainable at least partially by the prevalence of a multiplicity of autonomous elites oriented not only to religious activities, but also to social and political-economic ones — in its turn closely related to the basic premises of European civilization outlined above.

In close relation to these institutional features of medieval European civilization, there also developed in Europe special patterns of change in several of those related to impingement on the periphery, on the center in particular. These

patterns were characterized by: (a) a high degree of predisposition of secondary elites, relatively close to the center, to be the major carriers of religious heterodoxies and political innovations; (b) a relatively close relationship between these secondary elites within broader social strata and hence also to movements of rebellion; (c) a concomitant predisposition to develop on the part of those elites and groups — and often also to combine — activities oriented to center-formation with those of institution-building in the economic, cultural and educational spheres.

Out of these qualities of European civilization, there developed two major characteristics which persisted to the present. First, there was the continuous confrontation between the construction of centers and the process of institution-building. Institution-building in most spheres was seen as very relevant to the construction of centers and judged according to its contribution to the basic premises of these centers, while at the same time centers were also judged according to their capacity to promote such just and meaningful institutions. Second, there was the continuous competition between different groups or strata and elites about their access to the construction of these centers.

India

The situation in Indian civilization was entirely different. Its basic premises, as well as the structure of elites, have indeed greatly differed from those of European civilizations — despite many structural and organizational parallels or even similarities. It is these differences that have greatly influenced the pattern of political process within them and made them different from those we have identified in Europe.

Two starting points are of special importance for understanding the Indian civilization. One was the combination of political decentralization or multi-centrism and of continuously changing political boundaries and economic structures together with a relatively, although never fully, unified civilizational framework. From this point of view, it resembled indeed in many ways the (Western) European one. The second point, however, was that this civilization was characterized by very distinct types of cultural orientation and structure of elites.

Hinduism (Biardeau 1972, Brown 1961, Dumont 1966, 1970), most fully articulated in the Brahminic ideology and symbolism, was based on the recognition of tension between the transcendental and the mundane order — a tension that derives from the perception that the mundane order is polluted in cosmic terms. This pollution can be overcome through ascriptive ritual activities that identify social with cosmic purity or pollution and through adherence to the arrangement of social ritual activity in a hierarchical order that reflects an individual's standing in the cosmic order.

Accordingly, Hinduism emphasizes the differential ritual standing of wide

ascriptive social units called castes and of the occupations or tasks tied to these units. Mundane activities were arranged in a ritual hierarchy based on their other-worldly significance vis-à-vis the elimination of the pollution of the mundane order, and ensured the transmission of such differential ritual standing through the basic, primordial, kinship units. In all these ways, it had a much more direct relation to worldly activities than Buddhism (Cohn 1971, Dumont 1970b, Heesterman 1964, Mandelbaum 1970, Singer & Cohn 1968).

At the same time, however, the very stress on the pollution of the world also gave rise to attempts to reach beyond it, to renounce it, and the institution of the renouncer (*Sannyasa*) has been a complementary pole of the Brahminic tradition, at least since the post-classical period (Heesterman 1985).

Given this strong articulation of the tension between the cosmic and the mundane orders, a distinctive center did develop within the Hindu civilization, the ideological core of which was the Brahminic ideology and symbolism. But because of its other-worldly emphasis, its wide ecological spread and its strong embedment in ascriptive primordial units, this center was not organized as a homogenous, unified setting. It rather consisted of a series of networks and organizational-ritual sub-centers — pilgrimages, temples, sects, schools — spreading throughout the sub-continent, and often cutting across political boundaries (Cohn 1971, Singer 1958, Singer & Cohn 1968).

At the same time, however, the major center of Hinduism was not political. Louis Dumont, in his famous *Homo Hierarchicus* (Dumont 1966) and other works, and later on Jan Heesterman (Heesterman 1985), have pointed out the different conceptions of the political realm in India, as compared with Europe. They both stressed that in the former the political realm was not seen as one of the major arenas of 'salvation', of the bridging of the tension between the transcendental and the mundane orders. Rather, it constitutes — according to Dumont's exposition — a secondary sphere in relation to the realm of the sacred, as represented by the Brahmin, or, as in Jan Heesterman's explanation, one of the major manifestations of the degeneration of the given word of 'arta' — against the absolute state of the Dharma. Anyhow, in both interpretations, the political realm did not command any special commitment or constitute an arena of high ideological value, while at the same time it constituted a central and necessary organ of the society.

Thus, although there arose in India states of different scope, from semi-imperial centers to small patrimonial ones, not a single one developed with which the entire Indian cultural traditions was identified. Classical Indian religion has, of course, a lot to say on the problem of policy, on the behavior of princes and on the duties and rights of subjects. But, to a much higher degree than in many other historical civilizations, politics was viewed more in secular terms which emphasized its distance from the ideological center of the civilization, its tradition and identity (Heesterman 1971).

At the same time, this relative independence of the cultural traditions, centers

and symbols of identity from the political center was paralleled by the relative autonomy of the major social groups in general and of elites in particular — the complex of castes and villages and the networks of cultural communication (Beteille 1965, Ishwaran 1970, Mandelbaum 1970).

These castes and caste networks were not, however, simple primordial or territorial units of the kind known in many primitive societies. They were, in fact, much more elaborate ideological constructions which raised primordial givens or attributes to a higher level of symbolization, thus giving rise to a wide definition of communities, markets and networks (Rowe 1973).

It was within these groupings and networks that the major types of institutional entrepreneurs and elites emerged, political and economic entrepreneurs and articulators of models of cultural order and of ascriptive solidarity, whose entrepreneurial activities were structured by the two fundamental aspects of Indian social life. On the one hand, these activities were rooted in and defined by the combination of ascriptive primordial and ritual characteristics and, on the other hand, such definitions laid a very strong emphasis on the proper performance of mundane activities.

In most of these groups some combination of ownership of resources and of control over their use and conversion developed. In the macro-societal setting, such a conversion was mostly effected through the interrelations between the different caste groups and the networks (Morrison 1970, Neale 1969, Rudolph, Rudolph & Singh 1975).

Accordingly, a very peculiar characteristic of markets developed in India. Relatively wide institutional markets emerged, which were embedded in the broader ascriptive units, mainly in the local and regional caste networks. These were relatively broad constructions which were continuously being reconstructed anew. These markets, the widest of which were the religious ones, centered around temple-centers and fairs and, to some degree, were cross-cutting, i.e., the religious ones (temple festivals and fairs) were controlled, in a relatively flexible and yet not unstructured way, by the association between the major elites — Brahmins, the kings and the different caste networks (Conlon 1970).

The most important characteristics of these elites have been a relatively high degree of their embedment in broader ascriptive caste or regional group; the concomitant relatively low level of specialization and autonomy of such elites from broader ascriptive groups; but at the same time their autonomy from the political sphere and the tendency to create rather diverse coalitions in which the representation of such ascriptive communities was of rather great importance.

It was this type of elites who articulated the basic premises of Indian civilization in general and the conception of the political arena and of authority in particular, and who also activated the major types of political process which differed so greatly from those we have analyzed in Europe.

In close relation to these themes regarding the political culture, there have developed in Indian political experience, even if necessarily haltingly, some very

distinct patterns of incorporation into the various centers through partial access to many of the demands of different groups in a rather pragmatic way, but not a continuous confrontation between the two or a continuous process of reconstruction of the political centers through movements of protest.

The basic arena of the different movements of protest was the religious one, and they were oriented to the redefinition of the religious collectivities and symbols. They could be strongly connected with the extension of the borders of political communities or with the establishment of new ones, but rarely with the reconstruction of the premises of such centers.

Indeed, throughout its long history, India has witnessed the continuous rise of new organizational settings, of many rebellious movements, the redefinition of the boundaries of political units, changes in technology and in levels of social differentiation, some restructuring of the economic sphere and changes in social and economic policies, all directed by these coalitions and set within the basic premises of this civilization. But these changes, with the partially failed attempt of Ashoka, did not usually succeed in restructuring the basic premises of the political ideal center-periphery relations.

The Civilizational Framework of Modern Revolutions

The comparison between medieval Europe and India does indeed illustrate the basic points of our analysis — namely that the analyses of the civilizational dimensions of societies, of the ways in which different cultural visions shape, through the activities of different elites, the premises of societies, are crucial for the understanding of the construction of political formations and dynamics in general, and of centers and center-periphery relations in particular. We shall bring now the lines of our argument to bear on the analysis of a very central problem in the understanding of comparative political dynamics — namely that of the ‘causes’ of revolutions which were connected with the breakthroughs to modernity — i.e., the Great Rebellion in England (possibly even the earlier Revolt of the Netherlands), the American and French Revolutions, and later on the Russian, Chinese and possibly Turkish and Vietnamese revolutions. (This analysis follows Eisenstadt, 1978 and 1985b.)

These revolutions were characterized by several distinct ideological and structural-organizational features.

On the ideological level, they were characterized by the intensification, transformation and combination of several themes, most of which could separately be found in many societies and civilizations — especially in the Axial Age ones — namely highly articulated ideology of social protest, especially of a utopian, emancipatory vein, ideologies based on symbols of equality, progress and freedom presumably leading to the creation of a better social order, and comprising elements of violence, novelty and totality. They were also characterized by a very strong universalistic missionary zeal.

Similarly, on the organizational level, they were characterized by the bringing together, in more than a simple ad-hoc way, of several components of social movements and political struggle — namely rebellions and movements of protest, central counter-elite, political struggle and religious (or intellectual) heterodoxies — most of which (with the partial exception of the last) can be found in most human societies.

How can these revolutions be explained? Seemingly, this question refers — and has been often dealt with in the literature — to the problems of the ‘causes’ of revolutions. Here, in broad terms, two often combined or overlapping types of explanations have been predominant in the literature — one dealing with different types of structural and the other with specific historical circumstances.

Among such structural conditions, inter-elite struggles in combination with other forces, such as class struggle and the dislocation, social mobilization and political articulation of broader, newly emerging social groups, and the weakening of the center — often under the impact of international forces — were often singled out.

Yet a closer look at the historical evidence points out that most of these conditions could be also found in many, if not all, human societies, especially in more differentiated ones.

However, only in a very few of them did they come together to bring about the overthrow of the existing political regime and changes in its basic premises and constitutional arrangements and the bases of its legitimation and its symbols; the displacement of the incumbent political elite or ruling class by another one, and the concomitant development of far-reaching changes in all major institutional spheres of society — above all in economic and class relations; and an assumption of a radical break with the past, of discontinuity with it, attempting to create or generate a new type of man which was characteristic of the ideology and to some degree also the outcomes of modern revolutions. In this context it is interesting to note that many of the conditions which were often singled out as causes of revolutions — such as political decay of regimes, inter and intra-elite struggles, class conflicts and rebellions — have also been identified in the respective literature as the causes of decline or of important internal transformation in the great empires (Eisenstadt 1963, 1969, 1978).

Here of course it may be claimed that the fact that these revolutions occurred only in the framework of special historical conditions is of crucial importance, and that it is such historical conditions which can be seen as necessary, if not sufficient, causes of such revolutions. The most important among such conditions, singled out in the literature, have been those of relatively early stages of transition to modern settings in which there occurs the coincidence of three major aspects of the breakthrough from a ‘traditional’ or closed pattern of legitimation of political authority — also possibly as regards the definition of symbols of collective identity — to an open one; second, the transition to an open system of stratification, to ‘class’ system, rooted in or connected with

a trend to market economy in general and industrial economy in particular; and third, and closely connected with the former, the creation of and/or incorporation of the respective societal units into a series of continuously changing international political, economic and cultural international systems.

Yet, while there is no doubt that it is only in such historical conditions that these revolutions occurred, there remains the crucial problem for comparative analysis — namely that such revolutions occurred neither in all societies within which the different types of conflict analyzed above could be identified, nor in all societies in this situation of transition to modernity (as for instance in Japan or in India).

It was only in some very special types of societies, and above all in some specific civilizational settings, that these different movements, conflicts and movements of protest came together and coalesced in the revolutionary patterns, or in the situations of transition to modernity analyzed above.

A closer look at the historical evidence indicates that the first revolutions (the European and American ones) occurred in what may be designated as imperial feudal societies, while the latter revolutions have occurred in imperial ones. They have not occurred in what may be called patrimonial societies — whether centralized or decentralized — such as India, Islamic countries (with the partial exception of the Ottoman Empire), or in centralized feudal-patrimonial ones like Japan.

It is not easy to identify the conditions which account for the major differences in the patterns of change between those centers and patrimonial societies in terms of variables often stressed in the more recent sociological literature on the State, such as the type of social division of labor and degree of economic development, of structural differentiation or of class or center-elite relations or struggle. Rather, they can be understood through the combination of such conditions with those which we have designated as civilizational dimensions or premises.

Imperial and imperial-feudal societies were characterized also by the predominance within them of several specific cultural orientations and the concomitant development of certain types of civilizational premises.

They all developed within the framework of Axial Age Civilizations but — as already indicated above in our comparison of India and Europe — they were characterized by a very strong emphasis on the reconstruction of the mundane world in general and the political one in particular as at least one way of salvation.

In close relation to the cultural orientations and civilizational premises, there developed the major characteristic of center-periphery relations of the imperial and imperial-feudal societies — namely a high level of distinctiveness of the center and its perception as a distinct symbolic and organizational unit. The centers attempted not only to extract resources from the periphery but also to permeate it and to reconstruct it symbolically and to mobilize it structurally.

Many of these societies also developed a potential for the impingement of at least part of the periphery on the center or centers.

In structural terms, the distinctiveness and autonomy of the imperial centers were mainly evident in their symbolic and structural distinction alike from the broader social units of the periphery, and in their ability to develop and maintain their own specific symbols and criteria of recruitment and organization. In most of these societies the socio-political and the cultural order represented in the centers were seen to encompass the periphery beyond its own specific local traditions. At the same time, the premises of the imperial systems — unlike those of patrimonial regimes — assumed that the periphery could indeed have some at least symbolic access to the center, and that such access was to a very large extent contingent on some weakening of its social and cultural closeness and self-efficiency and on their developing within it some active orientation of the social and cultural order to the center. This permeation of the periphery by the center was evident in the development, by the centers, of widespread channels of communication which emphasized their symbolic and structural difference, and in their attempts to penetrate — however slightly — the ascriptive ties of the groups on the periphery. Truly enough, the impingement on the periphery on the center was weaker than the permeation of the periphery by the center. Yet, however weak, this tendency was also reinforced — albeit in varying degrees in different imperial societies — by a potential multiplicity of centers and collectivities, of 'ethnic', religious and political communities — as well as by the wide scope of their respective institutional markets.

The development of such centers was connected in all these civilizations with that of distinct — especially cultural or religious — collectivities, with a very high symbolic component in their construction, as well as with relatively ideological structuring of social hierarchies.

Above all, they were connected with the development of relatively autonomous primary and secondary elites — above all of cultural-intellectual, religious elites which tended to become closely interwoven in a very sensitive relation with the political elite, and which were the carriers of the basic cultural visions and movements, and which have also very often — as we have seen in our analysis of the European civilizations — continuously struggled with each other and with the political elites.

Accordingly, the non-political elites, the various intellectuals or clerics often tended to view themselves — insofar as the political realm was defined as relevant to the process of salvation — as being on par if not superior to the political authorities in the political realm. They tended to be very active participants in the social (and political) spheres; to see themselves as carriers and representatives of the major ideological attributes of these spheres, and they very often viewed the political authorities as potentially accountable to themselves. Parallel to this, however, the political (and other) elites very often viewed themselves also as autonomous articulators of the models of cultural order — poten-

tially superior to the cultural elites.

Moreover, each of these groups of elites were not, in these societies, homogeneous. There developed a multiplicity of secondary elites — cultural, political or educational — each often carrying, as we shall soon see, a different conception of the cultural and social order.

In these new types of elites, above all the political and cultural ones, the intellectuals became the major partners in the formulative ruling coalitions as well as in movements of protest. It is these elites that were the most active elements in the processes of reconstruction of the world, of institutional creativity that developed in these societies.

It was such elites in general and the religious or intellectual ones in particular that constituted the most crucial elements in the development of different heterodoxies and in activating the connection between them, and in different political struggles and movements of protest.

Thus, in the imperial and imperial-feudal regimes, the higher degree of symbolic distinction as regards the center of collectivities and of strata-formation was exercised by a multiplicity of different elites and representatives of the solidarity of different collectivities, which had autonomous bases and potentially autonomous access to the center and to each other — in close relation to the basic premises of these civilizations. It was these elites, with their impingement on the centers and the periphery alike, that shaped various movements of protest and of political activities and struggle within them. Each of these secondary elites, of articulators of the solidarity of different collectivities, of cultural models and traditions, of political entrepreneurs, could become a starting point of some movements of protest or of political struggle with a higher level of organizational and symbolic articulation and with some potential orientations and linkages among themselves and to the center.

Thus our preceding analysis indicates a very close relation between (1) the degree of coalescence of manifestations of protest, institution-building, the levels of articulation and ideologization of the political struggle, and coalescence of changes in the political system with (2) those in other components of the macro-societal order — especially in the degree of distinctiveness of the center, center-periphery relations, the principles of hierarchization and types of cultural orientations and civilizational premises. These are the very characteristics which we have already encountered in the analysis of the various case studies — the early states, different imperial and decentralized systems.

Our analysis shows that the tendency to such articulation and coalescence tends to be greater in those orientations which are characterized by (1) cultural orientation stressing a high level of tension between the transcendental and the mundane order, a strong component of this-worldly orientation towards a resolution of this tension and/or a high level of commitment to it and of not taking it as given, and the closely related civilizational premises in general and conception of the political realm of authority, of center and center-periphery

relations in particular; (2) a high symbolic and institutional distinctiveness of the center from the periphery; and (3) relatively wide autonomous strata orientation and multiplicity of autonomous secondary elites.

These considerations may be now brought together in the analysis of processes of political change and reconstruction leading to revolutions, or to other modes of breakthrough to modernity.

Thus, the combination of cultural and structural characteristics, which can be found in the imperial and imperial-feudal societies, generates processes of change somewhat similar to those presented in the image and structure of modern revolutions or at least containing the kernels thereof. The basic cultural orientations and basic civilizational premises, prevalent in them, inspired visions of new types of social order, while the organizational and structural characteristics provided the frameworks through which some aspects of these visions could be institutionalized; the two were combined by the activities of the different elites analyzed above.

It was through the interaction between these structural and cultural characteristics that the different conditions, which have been singled out in the literature, have led to modern revolutions.

It was only when the combination of such cultural and structural conditions came together in the appropriate historical situations analyzed above that the processes of change, attendant on breakthrough to modernity, took the form of revolutions.

When such a combination did not come together, the process of breakthrough or transition to modernity — however far-reaching and dramatic — tended to develop in different non-revolutionary patterns.

Thus, to give only a few preliminary indications (a full analysis, which has been presented in some detail elsewhere (Eisenstadt 1978, 1985b) is beyond the scope of this paper):

In Japan, where the 'transcendental' dimension was weak, as was the place of autonomous intellectual or religious heterodoxies, there took place the Meiji restoration, sometimes called, together with the Turkish and other revolutions, a 'revolution from above', but certainly greatly differing from the classical Great Revolutions. In Indian and Buddhist countries, and in a different vein in most Latin American countries where other-worldly premises were either predominant or very strong (as was also the closely related structure — the weaker autonomy — of elites), the pattern of change, far-reaching as it could be in many ways, was also different from that of the classical revolutions.

Thus, the analysis of the causes of the Great Revolutions — the great hallmarks of European modernity — brings out the crucial importance of the series of factors emphasized throughout our analysis, of what we called the 'civilizational' factors. In more general terms, this analysis has showed that, while the propensities to conflict and change are inherent in the very nature of society, yet the orientations and full impact of such conflicts, contradictions and propen-

sities to change vary greatly among different societies according to their specific combination of symbolic and structural-organizational characteristics. The location, characteristics and impact of such movements vary, *inter alia*, according to the way in which major symbolic orientations and cultural premises and models become institutionalized in the construction of centers and in the interaction between different elites and major social groups and strata. At the same time the mode of such institutionalization varies with the internal dynamics of these models and with the ways in which such models are institutionalized in different ecological and institutional settings.

Concluding Remarks

We may now bring together the major lines of our arguments. We have started with the general assertion that it is not possible to understand adequately many central aspects of political process by taking the definition or nature of the state, of political institutions, for granted; by defining the state or political institutions only in terms of political power and of the political and administrative activities of the different, seemingly universal, political and administrative agents; or in terms of the structural differentiation of such activities; or by their relative strength *vis-à-vis* other groups, especially classes or various interest groups within a society.

We have illustrated in our analysis that, in addition to these variables or aspects of the political process, the importance of which nobody would of course deny, it is of central importance to analyze the very definition and evaluations in the broader context of the civilizations in which they develop, of the political realm in general, and of the state in particular, as they crystallize and necessarily also change in the historical experience of various civilizations, and as they are related to the basic premises of such civilizations, especially the basic premises about authority, justice and the place of the political arena in the overall conception of man and cosmos, which are prevalent in the respective civilizations.

The impact of such premises and their institutional derivatives on the political process is effected through the activities of the major elites in general and of the political ones in particular, especially by the institutionalization by them of the various mechanisms of social interaction in general and of control in particular, as well as by the development of challenges to such control that develop in a society, among such elites and broader strata of society or sectors thereof in general, and in the political realm in particular.

Such mechanisms of control — and the opposition to them — are not limited to the exercise of power in the specific ‘narrow’ political sense; they are — as indeed even more sophisticated Marxists have stressed — much more pervasive, activated not only by representatives of class relations or of ‘modes of production’. Rather, they are activated by the major coalitions of elites in a society,

carrying different cultural visions and representing different types of interests.

The most important such elites are the political ones which deal most directly with the regulation of power in society, the articulators of the models of the cultural order, whose activities are oriented to the construction of meaning, and the articulators of the solidarity of the major groups which address themselves to the construction of trust.

The structure of such elites is closely related to the basic cultural orientations prevalent in a society. Or, in other words, different types of elites are on the one hand carriers of different types of orientations or cultural visions. On the other hand, and in connection with the types of cultural orientations and their respective transformation into basic premises of the social and political order, these elites tend to exercise different modes of control over the allocation of basic resources in the society. The different coalitions of elites exercise such control on the major institutional spheres in several closely interconnected ways.

The first such aspect of control is the formulation, articulation and continuous reinterpretation of what may be called the basic semantic map of a society or sector thereof, its basic ideological premises and institutional symbolization and legitimation.

The structuring of the basic semantic maps entails the definition of some of the basic problems of human and social existence, the specification of 'solution' to such problems, and their relation to the definition of the basic premises of social order.

The shaping of the concrete semantic or cognitive map of a society or sector thereof is focused around several basic poles, which are inherent in the nature of human existence, the construction of the social order, and the perception and definition of these problems in human societies. The two major poles or axes of the search for such meta-meanings focus, first, on the cosmological axis and definition of the relations between the cosmic and the human and mundane worlds and, second, on the symbolic dimensions of the social order, i.e., of the relations between the division of labor, construction of trust and of meaning and regulation of power.

The construction of semantic groups, of the basic traditions and premises of societies or sectors thereof, entails the specification and definition of the legitimate range of problems related to these two basic axes: the ways in which these problems and the answers to them are formulated; their legitimation in terms of the range of the basic meta-meanings related to these axes; their transformation into the basic premises of the social order specified above; and their institutional implications.

A very central part of the crystallization of the institutionalization of the semantic maps of a society, sectors thereof or of individuals, are the symbolic, ideological definitions of the different spheres of human activities and social actors in general and of the political sphere in particular. It is these definitions that provide such activities with their specific meaning and legitimation in the

respective societies or sectors thereof. Such symbolic definition of economy, of polity and the like, need not of course be identical with their structural differentiation, i.e., not in every society with a relatively differentiated and specialized economic or political sphere; these spheres must also be designated in symbolically distinct autonomous ways.

The construction of such premises constitutes the basic components of the semantic maps of different societies and sectors thereof. It is through this process that many of the incorrigible assumptions of such maps, of the basic premises of social order, as well as their basic institutional implications and the potential conflicts between such different assumptions and premises, are constructed.

The second component — most continuously 'structured' (i.e. organized in relatively enduring patterns on the macro-level but very important also on the micro-level) — is the control of several central aspects of the flow of resources in patterns of social interaction, and last the relations between these two mechanisms of control.

The control of the flow of resources is exercised through control over their access to the major institutional markets (economic, political, cultural, etc.) and positions; over the conversion of the major resources between these markets; over the patterns of investment and distribution of such resources in space and time; and over the regulation of such spatial and temporal organization of these resources and of their meaning.

It is through the implementation of such control that the principles of generalized exchange — to use the term of M. Mauss — as against the various types of more specialized exchange undertaken in various institutional markets in a society, of the basic entitlement prevalent in a society, become institutionalized (see, in greater detail, Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984).

A central connecting link between these two aspects or dimensions of control, i.e., between that of the construction and symbolization of the basic assumption and premises of the social order and the regulation of the flow of resources, is the creation and regulation of different levels and aspects of information.

The most important of such levels is that concerned with structuring of the symbolic dimensions of social life, above all of prestige as the major regulator of the access to collectivities and centers, of the status identity of different groups in society, of reference orientation to the social order and to different groups within it, as well as of the more technical or instrumental aspects of different types of social activities.

Second is the evocation, in formal and informal ritual and communicative situations (Eisenstadt 1985c), of deep meanings of the orientations to the ethos and of the cognitive aspects of symbolic orientations — those very aspects which have been taken up and emphasized by those trends in anthropology which became dissociated from analysis of social structure.

It is the different coalitions of the major elites and the modes of control they

exercise that shape, through varied processes of 'structuration' of the major characteristics and boundaries of the respective social systems which they construct, the political system, the economic one, the system of social stratification and class formation. These are the major collectivities — as well as the overall macro-societal one or ones — however concerned.

A crucial aspect of such control — or of struggle against it — is also the specification of the scope and meaning of the political (different institutional spheres) realm in general, and of the place of the political elites (their respective elites) among the dominant elites in particular. Thus, power and control, as exercised by the political elites, by different agents of the state — politicians, administrators — is not an entirely autonomous activity controlled only by 'class' or other group interests, or by the direct interests of the political elite or the political class. The very formation of the scope of such power is greatly influenced by the overall mechanisms of control — and of struggle against them — influenced as they are by the basic premises predominant in a society or civilization, by the conception of the political realm predominant in such civilization, and by the structure of predominant elites and counter-elites.

Hence the institutionalization of the different basic premises through the various mechanisms of control can never be fully successful; within each set of such premises there always develop tensions and counter-tendencies and orientations of protest.

The very institutionalization of any such visions, premises and their institutional derivatives, through the various social processes and mechanisms of control mentioned above, as well as their maintenance and reproduction in time and space, do entail continuous re-activation of such processes of control, which in its turn activates tensions usually in conjunction with group conflicts, giving rise to movements of protest and of change bearing within themselves some possibility of reconstruction of these very premises. But the very modes of such conflicts and changes are not random; they are also greatly shaped by such premises and the structure of elites.

These 'civilizational' factors outlined above are of crucial importance for many central aspects of the political processes in different states — 'historical', 'traditional' and modern alike. They do not, of course, belittle the importance, for understanding the political process of various structural, economic factors or the organizations of the state itself. Rather they provide crucial components within which the impact of these factors on many crucial political process — in the cases analyzed here of the dynamics of construction of center and of protest movements and their impact on such construction — is being played out.

Needless to say, these factors are not, of course, immutable in the history of any civilization, but with each such civilization there exist some limits within the range of which, according to specific experiences, such process of selection of different themes — by the various social forces and their impact on the political arena — is being played out.

Moreover, such orientations are being 'played' out in different ways also in different political-ecological settings.

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