Westernisation, Rationalisation, Amalgamation: Party Politics in Intercivilisational Encounters

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Abstract *During the last two decades, the perceived rise of Asian powers has led to a gradual shift in the academic view of the development of humanity from one of Westernisation to one of globalisation. Concurrently, students of civilisations re-started afresh their ongoing debate how and to what extent different cultures in the world influence each other. Many political scientists believe that there is either already an end to inter-civilisational conflicts and the victory of the West is complete, or that there are intrinsic, insuperable differences between world cultures; scholars of historical sociology, on the other hand, advocate a less radical, but perhaps more compelling model: one of inter-civilisational encounters, where civilisations in the course of history managed to adopt an idea coming from outside their cultural sphere, adapt it and assimilate it into their own ideology. From a historical-sociological perspective, drawing on the Weberian strand of the current debate, the presented paper focuses on the transformation of political partisanship in ancient, medieval, early modern and modern civilisations. It proposes that general characteristics of party systems may be found in pre-democratic periods from which they developed into modern democratic politics. Moreover, it wants to assess the impact that non-Western societies have had in the 20th century on the global image of a political party. In conclusion, it argues for a notion of amalgamation of ideas in today's political partisanship in place of a one-sided theory of Westernisation.*

Introduction

Political parties have always been at the centre of interest of Western social scientists. From the very birth of the modern political science at the start of the 20th century (e.g., Ostrogorski 1964[1902]; Michels 1962[1911]; Weber 1968[1922]), parties have figured prominently among the works on politics and today, "the scholarly literature that examines political parties is enormous" (Strom – Muller 1999: 5). Parties' early advocates saw in them an important vehicle of liberal democracy (e.g., Schattschneider 1942; Key 1942) and soon, they emerged as a specialised and very prolific sub-field of political science. The classic books by Duverger (1954), Neumann (1956), La Palombara and Weiner (1955), Lipset and Rokkan (1967) or Sartori (1976) established the study of parties and party systems as one of the major and most progressive research themes, where previous theories are constantly challenged and older concepts revaluated.

What may, however, be considered a comprehensive approach towards the research field, with its tens of thousands of articles, books and monographs published, may also be severely lacking in terms of geographical and spatial coverage. Since modern political science is a discipline predominantly concerned with European and American liberal democracies of the recent centuries, also the scope of party literature has always been limited to the Occcident of the 19th, 20th and 21st century. Up until the 1980s and the 'third wave of democratization' (Huntington 1992), research into political systems in most of the world had been the domain of students of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. The democratization literature and the party literature were two coexisting, but largely separate branches of political science and methodological approaches towards these two respective fields of study diverged; political parties in non-democratic regimes were seen as completely different 'animals' from parties in liberal democracies (e.g., Arendt 1951; Friedrich and Brzezinski 1956; Neumann 1957)

Also this methodological separation between the Western democratic and the non-Western non-democratic world contributed to the always widening divide between students of the modern Occidental civilisation and those studying other cultures. The diverging approaches of social scientists towards the West and towards 'the rest' led in many cases to the formulation of concepts and entire theories that cannot travel well across the different parts of the Occident, let alone across different world cultures. The situation in political party studies is indeed just a reflection of the more general Occidentocentric nature of modern social sciences.

On the following pages, I want to propose a way how to bridge the divide between the Western and the non-Western world and show that if the research into political parties in the future manages to span more than two continents and more than three centuries, its conceptual and theoretical framework should end up greatly enriched by knowledge gained from new geographical areas and time periods. My argument is structured as follows: first, I consider the potential that inter-

cultural comparisons might have for the study of party politics in the West and discuss in detail the current wave of 'civilisation analysis', a new multi-disciplinary paragidm that has once again recently captured the attention of social scientists (e.g., Eisenstadt 2002; Arnason 2003). Second, I focus on the temporal dimension and propose a socio-historical approach towards the study of emergence of party systems in Western societies. Third, I turn to the geographical dimension and point out three specific mutations of political parties outside of their European crib. In conclusion, I stress the importance of a truly global comparative research by emphasising the strong links between the current Western model of political parties and the challenges it is facing from Asia and Africa.

Westernisation: The Occidentocentric Trap

At the very beginning of this mostly theoretical section, I add a caveat: nowhere in this paper should be my words construed so as to contribute to the trend of criticising the West for its culturally imperialist tendencies. I am not a proponent of non-Western values and sciences, since I have been raised and educated in the West. I see the Western culture as nowadays dominating and from all world cultures the most pervading.

However, at the same time, I realise the need for the Western researcher to take a step back and try to objectivise the West as only one of several 'life paradigms' that have existed on Earth since the birth of the human civilisation. That is, also, as I understand it, the main argument of civilisation analysis, an interdisciplinary field of social sciences focusing on phenomena with a greater "coefficient of expansion and internationalization… than those lodged in society or the nation-state" (Durkheim – Mauss 1971, 812). Civilisation analysis not only operates with the plural of the term 'civilisation' and thus implicitly makes the objectivity-allowing step back, but it has also introduced the notion of 'multiple modernities' into the mainstream social-scientific arena. Moreover, as Arnason (2003) argues, scholars of this new discipline stop short of the anti-Western propagandistic tendencies of the postcolonial studies and instead weigh and assess world cultures and civilisations without a predetermined, prepared agenda.

For my purpose, a comparison of civilisational complexes, as will be explained later, should be stripped of any normative connotations: Levi-Strauss's (1997) favouritism of the Greco-Indian world is something to be avoided, as is also the Hegelian idea of a progressively dynamic Occident versus a stagnating and backward Orient. Quite the contrary, the principal message of the following passages is that even though the social constructs of the West has invaded and pervaded realms of other civilisations, they have also been noticeably influenced by them. There is no bad or good Westernization, neither there is a uniquelly progressive 'geist' of the Occident. If we use the term coined by Benjamin Nelson, there are only encounters of different cultural paradigms, different civilisations, different 'structures of consciosness' (Nelson 1981); and since the West has in the past three of four centuries dominated through its technological advantages, the Western encounters were more frequent, thicker and deeper than other encounters in history.

When Lucian Pye in 1958 published his article on the differences between Western and non-Western political processes, he also proposed that future research should be centred around two general theories of political systems: one relating to the West, the other to the 'rest' (Pye 1958, 468). Arguably, in political science, this is the normal situation today. Political scientists, and the students of political parties in particular, get used to grouping nation-states into sets with similar cultural and institutional background. Instead of developing hypotheses and theories capable of travelling between continents, they tend to focus in their majority on the most similar cases and use the corresponding comparative research method. Such an approach is not wrong per se as it allows for a better control of variables. However, its potential is exhausted when trying to account for changes in the electorate and in the party politics that are caused by newly occuring variables such as inter-civilisational migration, rise of fundamentalist movements, or movements in supra-national institutional frameworks. Or, and this is very recent phenomena as well, when previously non-Western countries start to democratise and follow anew the Western liberal model. The moment of transition from a non-democratic into a democratic regime and the subsequent political turmoils have in the last two decades challenged the classic theories about political parties and they keep being challenged, after the latest wave of democratisation swept also old dictatorships inside the traditional areas of the "backward" Orient.

In the next two sections, I propose two ways how to improve our general knowledge about the nature of partisanship that should help in a better understanding and explaining the modern phenomena that are connected to the globalisation of the world: the first is a path into the European history, the latter a journey to other civilisations. Behind this proposal is a set of implicit assumptions that mirrors the paradigm of the civilisation studies as represented by Nelson (1981), Huff (1985), Eisenstadt (2002) or Arnason (2003): first, I assume the 'longue durée' nature of the observed phenomena, particularly of the notion of partiness both in the European as well as in the non-Western context. In Europe, the continuity of its (sub-)civilisations for the last three millenia cannot be disregarded and a similar organic inter-state and

inter-national continuing transition should be observable also on other continents. Second, the civilisational paradigm has also introduced the concept of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000), which emphasizes the possibility of diverging adaptations to global modernisation in different parts of the world. Civilisational legacies play in these diverging adaptions a major role and I adopt this concept as well. The third and last assumption is, however, my point of departure from the emerging civilisational analysis paradigm (see Arnason 2010): I do not follow the 'strong programme' of cultural sociology (Alexander 2008) and do not emphasise the role of culture in shaping the politico-economical sphere. In my view, the trichotomy culture-politics-economy is an egg-chicken controversy, which should be discussed elsewhere, but not in this paper. Here, I merely put forward a proposition that the interplay of this trichotomy can sometimes lead not only to conflictual spaces between civilisations, but also to deviations and subsequent conflicts inside civilisational complexes. This is what future research should explore.

Rationalisation: The Development of a Single Construct

The classic trichotomy can be found also in the groundwork of Stein Rokkan's seminal research on the development of nations and the origins of West European political parties (Lipset – Rokkan 1967; Eisenstadt – Rokkan 1973; Urwin – Rokkan 1983; Flora 1999). Rokkan's work has since the 1970s served as the starting point for many a later student of party politics in Europe and elsewhere and its concepts form today the core of the 'sociological' school of party studies.[1] Culture, politics and economy are in Rokkan's framework of equal value and only their diverging geographical positioning matters: the question, whether a city is a cultural, political, or economical capital is a matter of degree.

What Rokkan primarily brought into the party studies is the notion of longevity. In order to explain certain phenomena in the party politics of Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, he abandoned the detailed research of institutions and focused on long-term sociological changes in the electorate. His party typology was based on four major modernising shifts in society that had in Europe taken place since 1500s (reformation, urbanisation, nationalisation, industrialisation) and the subsequent emergence of four 'cleavages' in the West European electorate.

The Rokkanian typology is today widely used in many works on party politics; unfortunately, in a very reductionist manner, where the aspect of longevity evaporates from the theory. What civilisational analysis and sociology in general, however, tells us is not to lose from sight the historical roots of modern phenomena. Partiness and factionalism had existed in human society long before large-scale legal and economic democratisation enfranchised masses and brought about institutionalised party politics. Via the Weberian process of 'rationalisation', by which I understand[2] the synchronous instrumentalisation of all three parts of the classic trichotomy, old differences between social groups were translated into modern politics. And even though the recent 'de-freezing' of West European electorates and larger voters' volatility between parties may suggest a fundamental shift in the thinking and the behaviour of the European voter, the macro-level civilisational variables may still explain some of the recent changes.

The obvious examples can be found on the borders of large cultural complexes; in the European case, in eastern Scandinavia, East Central Europe and the Balkans. Herbert Kitschelt (1999) in an influential article proposed a typology of (post-)communist regimes based on their former historical legacies. Even though he voiced his opposition to 'shallow' long-term cultural explanations for the different levels of success in democratisation of the former communist countries, his own correlation shows that what mostly mattered were indeed different civilisational origins of individual countries. The religious borders and shared imperial, pre-nation-state historical experience were the dividing lines along which the former Soviet bloc now disintegrated.

Indeed, what the post-communist period mostly shows is that unless artificially homogenised by exceptionally strong, disabling institutions, long-standing differences between large ethnic, religious, labour or other demographic groups will re-emerge even after decades and generations of their suppression. When the less centralistic, less homogenising and most importantly more democratic institutions were adopted after 1989, the electorate in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Balkans as well as in Central Asia re-aligned in majority back along pre-communist lines.

I do not think that institutions do not matter; they are, nevertheless, embedded in specific conditions which may change their meaning across time and space. A presidential regime in one country may aggregatively resemble more a former monarchy in that country than a presidential regime in another country. A cultural framework developed over centuries may be very resilient towards ideas important from other cultures, be it the Western civilisation or any other.

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[1] For a discussion on the differences between the 'sociological' and the 'instutitionalist' school of party studies, see e.g., Janos 2003.

[2] Once again I am here at odds with Jeffrey Alexander (1983).

The resilience of civilisational patterns allows also to question the established belief in the global Westernisation, a topic to which I return in the next section.

In his 2004 Leonard Schapiro Lecture, Adam Przeworski (2004) advocated the theory of new institutionalism for its treatment of institutions as endogenous phenomena. The evidence of the last two decades indeed backs up this proposition: we are familiar with the modern history of Eastern Europe and the different outcomes of post-communist transitions. As regards political partisanship, one cannot but conclude that terms like social democracy, nationalism or liberal conservatism have different meaning in different cultures. The very meaning of partisanship varies, as does the notion of right-wing versus left-wing politics. If there is a lesson for students of party politics to take from the current European economic crisis, it is that even across Western countries, economic policies do not follow the right-left spectrum, but rather correlate in a very significant way with cultural background. Instrumental centuries-long democratisation and 'rationalisation' of electoral institutions produced different outcomes in Southern as opposed to Northern Europe.

Amalgamation: The Two-Directional Relationship

Even more pronounced a difference than between Southern and Northern Europe is, quite predictably, the one between the West and the rest of the world, into which the idea of representative democracy was imported and has since had ample time to develop in a completely new setting. I turn now from the European long-duree model of partisanship to considerations about non-Western visions of modernity and their reflections in non-Western political parties.

Shmuel Eisenstadt's concept of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt 2000; 2002) came about and has been nurtured by students of civilisations as a part of the late-20th century cultural turn in sociology. Even though I reject the culture-first approach in civilisational analysis, Eisenstadt's theory can be useful in explaining some of the mutations that originally Western ideas of democracy and representative party politics underwent after they had been tranlated into Asian, African, but also Eastern European and Latin American environment. In his work on modenity, Eisenstadt particularly draws attention to the antimonial relationship that some cultures adopted towards the West when challennged with to them historically alien Western values. These values, mainly instrumental, strictly rational, liberal and individualistic, stood in contraposition to many teleological, spiritual, absolutist and collectivist beliefs of other civilisations.

Eisenstadt's theory is predomininatly based on evidence from the cultural domain and on associations between cultural items. What is arguably lacking in his work is research into the less ideological and more material sphere. Symbols and communication patterns take the limelight at the expense of politics and economy. The causal mechanism how multiple modernities come into being remains under-explored, which is precisely what Kitschelt (1999) holds against culture-based explanations of objectively perceivable political phenomena. To achieve a change in human conditions, both individual and collective, ideas must be mounted on specific institutional vehicles. Even if a certain political belief is expressed via a commonly accepted symbol, it is the organised activity of a social group or (sometimes) of a individual in a political institutional framework that transforms it from visions into real life.

An example of such a translation, one which I am invetigating in my ongoing research, is the re-shaping of the Western concept of political partisanship in Asia and in Africa. In the 20th century, representative democracy and organised partisanship had been introduced into a large number of new countries around the world, but in many, these institutions subsequently mutated.

Among the first major mutations was the model of democratic centralism of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that subsequently, in the interwar years, spread also into Eastern and Western European countries. The Comintern, established in 1919, supported and coordinated communist parties all around the world. In many non-European countries, it was the direct instigator of the communist movement. In Western Europe, where communism had already existed, Moscow via the Comintern took over the control of activities and organisation of communist parties (Thorpe 1998, 68). The model of democratic centralism worked in Europe first only as a unique party-hierarchy model and functioned even in multi-party systems, but when the communists took over Eastern European countries after the Second World War, it was quickly expanded from the party system into the administration of the state. Party and state fused and with it also the now Soviet-like deformation of the originally Western concept of a representative political party.

A second mutation emerged when communism was exported into China. After a decade of initial cooperation between the Chinese communists and the Soviets, the relationship between these two groups deteriorated in the early 1930s. Despite Stalin's efforts to keep the Soviet-Chinese alliance alive at all costs (Carver North 1963, 96), Mao Zedong's leadership severed ties with the Comintern during their Long March and gradually developed their own Asian form of communism. Old Chinese cultural patterns of strict patriarchy and authoritarianism (Solomon 1967), corporatist business tradition (Unger – Chan 1995), and non-Weberian rural political mobilization (Womack 1987, 483) were injected

into the model communist party and formed a unique Asian model. In the 1950s, Chinese communists started to export their model into South East Asia in the same manner as the Soviets had been doing since 1917. The Cambodian (Willmott 1981), Vietnamese and even Japanese communist parties followed directions coming from Beijing and even though the Asian international situation proved to be much more complicated than in the largely placid Soviet Eastern European bloc, the majority of Asian communist dictatorships adopted the Chinese party-state model.[3]

A third major case, and the last I mention here, is the recent rise of Islamist political parties both in the Muslim world as well as in the original Occident. This is an arguable case, but the more it deserves to be explored. In the Middle East, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, but even in the largely Westernised Turkey, the electorate turns today to religious fundamentalism. In Western Europe, the Muslim minority is getting organised with the material and ideological support of such countries as Saudi Arabia, Quatar or United Arab Emirates (Warner – Wenner 2006). This case is evidently very different from the previous two: most importantly, not all Moslim states adopted the framework of representative democracy. Those states that sponsor the political organisation of Moslims in Western Europe and in other democratic states are, paradoxically, all absolutist monarchies where a party system does not exist. Secondly, in their majority, Moslim parties do not support violent revolutionary causes as in the communist paradigm. Moslim minority parties in Western multi-party systems do not have a revolution on their electoral agenda. The only Islamic revolution that has so far taken place happened more than three decades ago, in Iran. This may change in the current unpredictable development of the Arab spring, but that yet remains to be seen. Thirdly, unlike the Soviets and the Chinese, who based their parties on a secular European idea, Islamic parties are a real amalgam of the Occidental and the Oriental culture. While they draw on the traditional civilisational background, in representative democracies, they adopt the political organisaitons of the West. And via this amalgamated mechanism, they also introduce new features and institutions into Western party systems.

In conclusion…

What I have presented in the previous paragraphs is nothing more but a sketch of possible directions research into party politics may take in future. If the field aspires to be truly global and conscious of all the changes that political parties have undergone since their birght in Western-type representative democracies, party studies should enlarge their scope both temporally and spatially. In his 1970s and 1980s work on the methodogy of comparative politics science, Giovanni Sartori (1970; 1984) frequently warned against the trap of conceptual travelling (the application of concepts to new cases) and conceptual stretching (the distortion of concept by its application to new cases). Presumably, a path into the past and a journey to other civilisations might enrich the dictionary of political scientists by many new words, ideas and concepts. The generalising framework that offers civilisational analysis, its basic set of assumptions and terms of a high level of abstraction, should then make these new words and concepts comparable with the older ones.

Western European and, since the 1990s, also Eastern European and Latin American party system haven been widely researched by both qualitative as well as quantitative methods. Large quantities of data have been extrapolated via sociological or electoral surveys. Detailed models of party networks and interactions have been developed. Nevertheless, there is still arguably many a new finding to be made if we step outside of the boundaries of the established paradigm and look elsewhere for inspiration.

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[3] With the possible exception of North Korean communists, who modelled their party after the Soviet model, see e..g., Washburn 1950.

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