Shmuel Noah (S.N.) Eisenstadt
1923-2010

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In the course of his intellectually extraordinary and social adventurous life, Shmuel Noah (S.N.) Eisenstadt was a central actor in the three dramatic phase shifts that marked post-World War II sociological theory. Each was propelled by dramatic, world-historical changes in Western culture and institutions and their relation to the greater world.

During the 1950s, Eisenstadt was a brilliant member of Talcott Parsons' functionalist school. During the climate of postwar expectations for a peaceful and triumphant modernity, he wrote about incorporation and assimilation, in *The Absorption of Immigrants* (1955), and in *From Generation to Generation* (1956) neatly historicized the hope that peer groups allow new generations not only emotional independence from parents but moral creativity vis-à-vis traditions.

In the decades that followed, the postwar consensus splintered and polarized and Parsonian hegemony was challenged. Eisenstadt absorbed these challenges without abandoning his filial loyalties, not only to Parsons but to his personal mentor Edward Shils. In 1976, Eisenstadt wrote (with Curelaru) that "despite many claims to the contrary, especially by opponents, the structural-functional school was neither uniform nor unchanging," and that, "within this school," not only were there "many internal controversies" but also many "openings."

Some of the most intriguing openings were being made by Eisenstadt himself. For example, in his historical and comparative analysis *The Political System of Empires* (1963) differentiation is viewed as creating problems, not adaptation, and voracious new forms of domination. In the essay with which Eisenstadt introduced his edited collection, *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (1968), while placing Weber squarely into the Parsonian camp, he insists that cultural values, rather than providing stability, actually trigger disruptive struggles for personal fulfillment and collective identity.

In the late 20th century, the zesty cocktail of Weberian Realpolitik and Shilsian luminosity carried Eisenstadt into a third phase. He became engaged in a vast imaginative effort to reveal the historical logic of a major evolutionary transformation. This "Axial age" breakthrough was now thoroughly sociologized, its ramifications systematically thought through in a radically cultural way. Eisenstadt's theory of the Axial Age put intellectuals in the driver's seat, decentralizing the material and ideal interests of class and status groups.

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Eisenstadt historicized the project of criticizing the world; the Frankfurt school mistook critical theory as a universal law of reflection. What he discovered was a way to express the vulnerability of the modern project and the tenuousness of its meaningful order. The Western hue of his earlier writings gradually disappeared, transformed by a new sensibility that was more responsive to inner-directed spiritual, moral, and symbolic concerns. One sees a relativization of rationality (1991), a responsiveness to the rebirth of religious consciousness (1983), a new orientation to emerging Asian society (Eisenstadt and Ben-Ari 1990). There was a shift in emphasis from the "challenges" of social change and modernity to the "dilemmas" they pose, from a focus on the central role of "organization" to the energizing force of "ideas," from the role of "entrepreneurs" as key agents to the critical position of "intellectuals," and from "system" to "civilization" as the primary referent of social collectivity.

For this fully matured Eisenstadt, institutionalization is no longer the resolution of conflict through organizational means, but the attempt to make earthly a transcendental ideal. Compared with his classical and modern predecessors, Eisenstadt later conceived of value institutionalization in a fundamentally new way.

While the later Eisenstadt took his profound interest in the meaning of modernity from Weber and Parsons, he no longer shared his mentors' fascination with the uniqueness of modernity in its western form. Expanding his horizons to China, Japan, and India, Eisenstadt insisted on the idea of multiple modernities. He understood that every post-Axial civilization is modern in its own way. They can have capitalism, democracy, bureaucracy, law, and science; their cultures may be filled with tensions and their emotional lives fragmented and split. At the same time, the institutions, meanings, and emotions of the great civilizations will still seem different and distinct.

To understand the twisting pathways that have allowed global understanding and, at the same time, ensured contemporary frission—this is what Eisenstadt's ambitious research program into multiple modernities was about. In close cooperation with area specialists, anthropologists, historians, and humanists, it inspired the immensely productive later years of his life.

As a human being, Shmuel Eisenstadt embodied his own intellectual paradigm. He was a gentleman of cosmopolitan manners, complex imagination, and critical mind. He was an inveterate traveler between Chicago and Budapest, Uppsala and Tokyo, Jerusalem and Konstanz. He was a mastery of irony who never got entangled in pedantic details and who kept an elegant distance from the slaves of methodological virtue. Not only was he at home everywhere, but it often seemed that everywhere was his home.

In the thousands of lectures that he presented in every corner of the world, Shmuel rarely used notes, though sometimes he took a blank paper to the lectern "in order to calm the

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hosts." He could be breathtakingly erudite and full of hauteur. Usually, however, Shmuel was easygoing, folksy, and earthy. He laced his lectures with jokes, whimsical paradoxes, and digressive asides. His gift for synthesizing different, seemingly antagonistic strains in a debate were legendary, and it was his openness and sensitivity to interdisciplinary dialogue that inspired so many to join him in his intellectual endeavors. Yet, as amicable and charming as he was in person, his scholarly judgment was uncompromising and occasionally even merciless, right up to the very end.

For all his globe trotting and cosmopolitanism, Shmuel Eisenstadt remained a prototypically Jewish intellectual who liked surreal jokes and the sarcastic heightening of reality. He was closely associated with the newly founded state of Israel and with the moral heritage of his first teacher, Martin Buber, and he considered the rightward political developments in Israeli society with alarm. He resisted the temptation of attractive offers from the world's most prestigious American and European universities, though he made frequent long-term visits. The Chinese Academy of Science elected him its "Man of the Year," and he received the highest honors to which a sociologist can aspire.

Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt was born in Poland in 1923. He narrowly escaped the terror of German occupation, immigrating first to America, soon after to Israel. After completing his studies with Buber, he quickly rose to professor in sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he lectured until his retirement in 1989. He had lost relatives in the death camp of Nazi Germany, yet Germany became—with Sweden and Switzerland—his favorite host country in Europe. His friendly and sympathetic relationship with German sociologists provided a remarkable example of the new ties between German and Israeli academics, and a personal demonstration of how post-Axial culture continuously inspires the renewal of universalism and hope.

Shmuel Eisenstadt has left us, but these values, which he generously shared and crystallized in multiple modernities, remain.

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