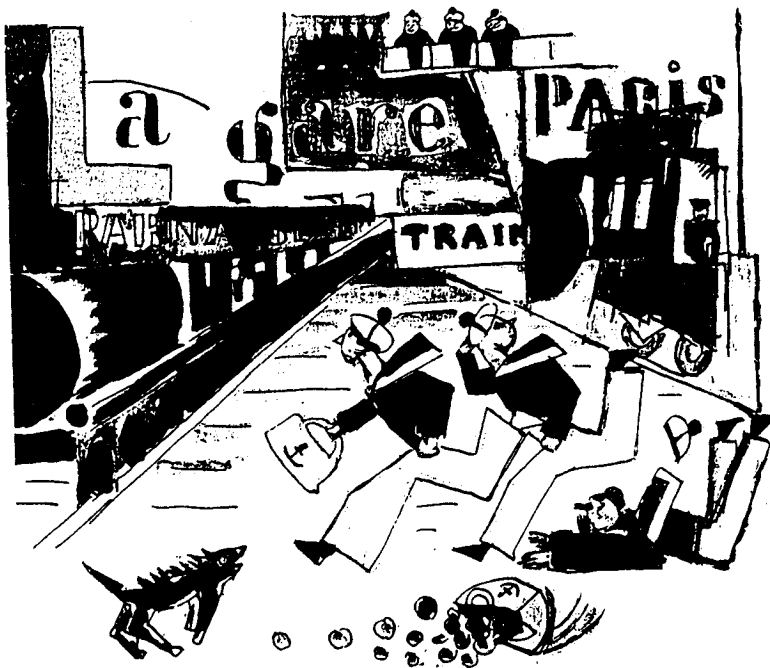


Modernity, Modernism and Children's Literature



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Ulf Boëthius (red)

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Zohar Shavit

Modernization Theories and their Application to the Study of the Child's Culture¹

Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed.

We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.

Philipo Tomaso Marinetti²

Any discussion of modernization is tricky. On the one hand, the overwhelming number of inquiries into modernization somehow suggest that addressing the issue is quite redundant. On the other hand, however, existing theories fail to provide us with a paradigm that promises to be useful in assessing the vital relationship between modernization and the culture of the child. Nonetheless, ever since the child's culture came to be perceived as a distinct social phenomenon, the notion of modernization has proved to be so central to its development that it simply cannot be ignored.

This is because modernization has played, and continues to play, a major role in constituting the child's culture. From the outset the notion of modernization has been a major factor in organizing the child's culture, due to its involvement in issues of social order, family structure, and the educational system. Indeed, the very writing and production of books for children were often concerned with various aspects of modernization. Various artistic schools of thought ("isms"), active since the turn of the century, began to leave their mark on the child's culture, children's films, theater, books and illustrations.

Briefly, then, where the child's culture was concerned, modernization was to be found everywhere. Be it the process of autonomizing of the child's culture, the role played by texts for children as agents of modern-

ization, the various artistic schools of thought of the first and the second waves of modernism, or values of modernization determining the plot of the story or its characterization of protagonists – one simply could not do without modernization.

But what is modernization actually all about?

Is it not much ado about nothing? Well, at times this indeed seems to be the case; modernization becomes a way of referring to everything, and finally fails to mean anything. Modernization is concerned with large-scale processes in various social systems and seems to relate to every single phenomenon that can be ascribed to the last century. Modernization is understood as a major and perhaps the most prominent process of change in Western and other societies by almost all schools of sociology since the fifties. This understanding came to be taken for granted, there was hardly a sociologist who dared to ignore nor question it. The notions of modernization, modernity, anti-modernization and post-modernization spread unselfconsciously throughout almost all academic narratives. In fact, the notion of modernization became so popular that it became trivialized. Often referring to different and even contradicting developments, the notion of modernization became an empty gesture, although it still maintained a dual function as both a scientific theory and a social ideal. Modernization theories simultaneously offered a scientific theoretical model as well as a model for imitation. It was party to the scientific narrative as well as to a social-political one. The inherent weaknesses of this duality almost go without saying.

Modernization theories understood social transformation as the result of internal factors, suggested a sound linkage between advanced industrialization and the development of other social institutions (educational, political, cultural) and saw liberal Western societies as models for imitation. While they focused on Western society, they never hesitated to discuss the “Third World” and the “new nations” as well.

The various schools of thought grouped under the title “Modernization theories” in the fifties and the sixties focused on the analysis of large-scale social processes and compared between processes of modernization in various societies. Although to some extent they shared the same point of departure, they also differed from each other in the ways they emphasized different aspects or objectives of research.

Eisenstadt’s school (mainly Eisenstadt, 1971) presented a commitment to the values of progress and to the conditions enabling the creation of a

steady practice of modernization; Bendix (1966–1967) introduced the need for a comparative discussion of modernization, whereas Lehmann (1982) and Stirling (1974) discussed the modernization of specific societies – Japanese society (Lehman, 1982) and a village in Turkey (Stirling, 1974), respectively. Both Bauman (1987, 1989) and Beck (1996) discuss the specific changes concerned with processes of modernization. Bauman is interested mainly in the intervention of the state, whereas Beck stresses the element of risk-taking.

It is by no means incidental that theories of modernization which began to develop after the second World War, began to decline in the 1970s. Towards the end of the seventies the discussion of modernization reached a dead end. It was indeed high time for the devil's advocate to enter the field – and so he did. From then on, most discussions of modernization were intent on undermining its foundations (for instance, Wehler, 1976 and Wagner, 1992). In the late-seventies it became clear that modernization theories failed to offer a model for imitation; and more importantly, for our purposes – they failed to offer an adequate explanation for the complicated socio-historical processes which involved, inter alia, anti-modernization tendencies and other complicated processes of change.

What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations, asks Alice. In the same spirit we may ask, what is the use of a theory without explanatory and analytical power, a theory which can be applied to almost everything and hence cannot really account for anything. Indeed, to a large extent theories of modernization of the 1950s and the 1970s became either gestures or facades that masked ideological dogma. Consequently, their very validity was severely undermined.

Toward the eighties, however, just when modernization theories seemed to have lost all their relevance, they were revised and revived. There was good reason for this revival, which in fact answered the needs of the field of sociology itself. Too many social phenomena were connected to processes of modernization and required a solid theory which would center upon modernization and account for it. The new frame of reference, called Modernization II, or Neo-modernization Analysis (Tiryakian, 1995, 254), took upon itself to serve as an alternative to traditional modernization theory, and amend its faults. Its proponents saw themselves as a school of anti-modernization, especially the post-Modernists (for instance Crook et. al., 1992), and indeed they differed from the “old”,

traditional theories in their attempt to base sociological theories on much sounder historical ground and a much more complicated understanding of the forces involved in the process of modernization. Nevertheless, they did not dispose of the basic notions of modernization, and in fact had much in common with traditional schools.

Personally, I don't think this is very surprising. I contend that there is no way to eliminate the notion of modernization from any investigation of socio-historical processes that took place over the last two centuries. The notion of modernization is indispensable for the discussion of the child's culture, and for the analysis of various other matters which otherwise cannot be properly analyzed. While it may well be necessary to make numerous modifications before the notion of modernization becomes workable, we must be careful not to throw the baby out with the bath-water.

The notion of modernization is especially important in the context of the systemic and structural aspects of the child's culture:

1. Systemic – the process of autonomization of the child's culture
2. Structural – the process in which notions of modernization become instrumental in the creation of verbal and non-verbal texts.

Now, I would like to refer to four out of the dozens of theoretical notions, which I regard as the most significant for the discussion of children's culture. I would like to present them first and then offer several revisions which will make them more workable:

- the notion of cultural planning
- the notion of change
- the notion of cultural interference
- the notion of a cluster of attributes

Each of these refers to a different aspect of modernization.

The notion of cultural planning concerns the need for, and the legitimization of, processes of modernization. Planning is the process in which the elite utilizes the child's culture as a means for distributing values of modernization, for instance, when texts for children function as agents of modernization, whereas the notion of change refers to the dynamics of the processes and seeks to analyze its nature. The notion of cultural interference offers possible accounts of the origins of the process of modernization, while the notion of a cluster of attributes suggests a paradigm for the analysis of the textual manifestations of modernization.

Let me now elaborate briefly on the general nature of modernization theories.

Despite the differences between various modernization theories and between these and post-modern(ization) theories, none of these has managed to detach itself from evolutionist ideas, nor from the tendency to universalize historical processes. These theories assume that the processes at stake are predictable and inevitable, and their main weaknesses hence consist in their inadequate representation of historical processes. Specific studies of particular cases cast into question the universal model of modernization. The sociological model has proved to be problematic in describing Western Europe and “underdeveloped” societies of the so-called Third World. Several prominent theories over the last decade prefer to deal more with modernity and less with modernization (for instance, Beck, 1996). However, in certain, albeit twisted ways, they recall aspects of Eisenstadt’s early views on the structural nature of social change and his adherence to the traditional division between state, society and culture.

The notable methodological and theoretical weaknesses of the most prominent theories of modernization can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Postulating universal processes of modernization.
2. Describing change as a one-way, unequivocal and definite process.
3. Neglecting the different time spans involved in processes of modernization (such as, for instance, the long and the short).
4. Perceiving tradition and modernity as dichotomous, that is, as mutually exclusive, opposite poles.
5. Drawing a clear-cut line between “before” and “after” modernization.
6. Overlooking non-parallel processes.
Although all systems are known to undergo a multitude of non-simultaneous changes, the existence of non-parallel processes goes unacknowledged.
7. Failing to distinguish between far remote regions and those within the “modern era”.

Bendix’s introduction of a comparative frame of reference marks an important improvement of the paradigm, which nonetheless was still severely limited; briefly, its main limitations consist in the following:

1. Adhering to the classical sociological distinction between “external” and “internal” causes of change.
2. Neglecting how contacts between various systems are constituted.
3. Assuming that some social processes are “complete” and therefore “successful”, whereas others are “incomplete” and thus inferior.
4. Assuming that a particular system can simply absorb the components of other systems, and that their absorption induces specific changes in a predestined, unavoidable direction.

I believe that Bendix’s introduction of a comparative methodology is vital. However, in order to make his and other theories workable, it would be most profitable to reconceptualize the history of culture in semiotic terms which already acknowledge the sociological aspects of cultural history. Merely pointing out the need to focus on specific case studies will not do here. A prerequisite for a workable theory is a flexible system of concepts which can be applied to a variety of different cases in which modernity is considered to have played a critical role.

A possible direction has been suggested by Norbert Elias in his work on *The Civilizing Process* ({1978, 1982} 1994 [*Prozess der Zivilisation*, 1939]). Elias views the main deficiency of theories of modernization in the fixed, static nature of their notions, which inevitably leads to a perception of social events as a series of isolated incidents rather than a network of dynamic procedures and processes. Elias suggests two sorts of solutions: he proposes new theoretical questions and seeks to introduce new fields of research. His inquiries into the relations between the individual and the community by way of introducing new fields of study such as table manners, hygiene, and court literature, have made it possible to discuss the effectiveness of change and its (modes of distribution) management.

As rightly argued by the second wave of modernization, Modernization II, the following modifications were considered essential for attaining a workable theory of modernization:

1. Introducing Micro-Macro relationships.
2. Hierarchizing the elements involved in modernization processes.
3. Distinguishing between intentions and instruments.
4. Understanding that modernization involves more than a single given process, and that different and even contradicting courses of development must be taken into consideration.

5. Recognizing that processes take place at different points in time and may well exert different influences.
6. Perceiving the direction of development as cyclical, not as a linear progression.

To sum up:

If we strive to analyze specific social change within the overall framework of modernization, and if we seek to account for the relations between major structural changes and concrete historical manifestations, then we must provide a theoretical framework which will facilitate the study of a complex system of sub-systems. Only a frame of reference that accommodates complexity will enable us to analyze the dynamic, yet specific and concrete relations between a polysystem and its sub-systems. This will also enable us to perceive minor changes in the system's texture, without which we cannot attain an adequately comprehensive inquiry.

In his concept of functional dynamics, or Polysystem Theory, Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) proposes a broad and flexible theoretical framework that indeed promises to accommodate a more complex network of social and cultural relationships. Polysystem Theory assumes that the functions ascribed to all systemic elements are subject to change, i.e. they can be modified, transformed, or entirely discarded, according to the particular needs of a given system at a specific point in time. This theoretical framework enables us to consider how specific systemic elements function alongside other systemic elements within the same system, as well as within other systems in the broader framework of intra- and inter-systemic relationships. Polysystem Theory hence enables us to recognize the existence of the universals within the modernization process, even as it acknowledges the need for the concrete, detailed analyses of minor patterns.

As I conceive the notions of change and planning as primary in this discussion, I would like to present them both in a semiotic framework:

A. The notion of change

All sociological discussions of modernization, dealing either with partial modernization, gradual modernization, or with the transition from modernization to anti-modernization, assume that the process of change is the main business of modernization.

However, explicitly or implicitly, they all base their understanding of the nature of change on a finalist-evolutionist postulate. They all assume

that change is an irreversible process which advances uninterruptedly in one clear-cut direction. Accordingly, change is reflected by the replacement of a "traditional" scheme, or an older one, by another, more "modern", newer one. The transition from the "old" into the "new" is described in terms of a huge leap from a given phase to a higher one, as part of a process which has come to an end and necessarily results in a "better" social system. Furthermore, this change from "traditional" to "modern" is perceived as a total one. It is considered to pertain to all components of the system and leaves nothing untouched. Any deviation from the totality of the process is regarded as an anomaly, abnormality, or irregularity which will lead to the "failure" of the process.

Eisenstadt regards the very heart of the modernization process as the (revolutionary) climax of previous lengthy processes which make it feasible. According to Eisenstadt, modernization processes become objects of study only if the process had been successfully completed.

His analysis of change concerns a static condition of the polar end of the process. This is true for other theories of modernization as well. They all assume the existence of two poles: the beginning and the end. Even theories which seek to dissociate themselves from the dichotomy of tradition versus modernity still cling to these two poles, where "change" itself is taken for granted, as a background supposition which need not be described or explained.

Let us take Bauman, for example. Bauman suggests replacing the notion of development with the notion of change, initiated by the elite (Bauman, 1987, 1989). Although he doesn't presume that change occurs along a linear and sequential progression, Bauman still presents an idealistic view of change in which he describes a process resulting in the total separation of nature (=a field) from culture (=a garden), provided that change develops "properly" (Bauman, 1989, 13).

In an attempt to get rid of the ideological implications annexed to the notion of modernization over the last fifty years, various studies have entirely given up any attempt to discuss processes of change in a wider and more general context. They prefer instead to concentrate on specific and limited case studies (see, for instance, Stirling, 1974), and undertake to describe only the components involved in the process. Their main contribution lay in the light they shed on the components themselves and in the attention they drew to the texture of the process. Their analyses of micro-processes is undoubtedly significant. However, we should ask our-

selves whether we must really do away with any hope of accounting for the macro-process of modernization and its universals and whether such partial analysis of the components is at all acceptable.

I believe the answer is no – we need not give up on this. There is no need to rely on a limited theoretical framework which implicitly assumes that patterns of change are chaotic and therefore cannot be explained by a structured model. Most important, to my mind, is the theoretical possibility of analyzing the co-existence of old and new elements. This is following Eisenstadt, who claimed that every new pattern of modernity is based, to a large extent, on elements of an old one, indicating the ambiguous nature of the scheme. I would like to relate the ambiguous nature of the modernization process to the other notions which play a major role in most newer theories of modernization, namely the notion of planning.

B. Cultural Planning

Most scholars agree that planning is a decisive factor in processes of modernization, because modernization always involves the realization of a program set by an elite stratum of culture planners. With the notion of planning, the concept of change becomes both intelligible and manageable. Bauman (1987), following Elias ([1939, 1978, 1982] 1994), coined the phrase “civilizing process” which has become instrumental in describing processes in which the “savage” culture, a “natural” non-human entity, becomes a “garden culture”. The entire process of modernization is one in which the “garden culture” is created according to a preset program set out by members of an elite.

As Wagner (1994) points out, the planning of modernization processes by the elite has in fact characterized Western society ever since the 18th century. The failure of the existing elite to supply the needs of the community results in the creation of a new elite stratum whose source of authority and power lies in its ability to initiate a new agenda for the broader community. In other words, when the previous elite failed to introduce a program of modernity, it was replaced by an alternative elite offering a different program of modernization.

Planning is characterized by the following oppositions:

1. Liberty versus Discipline

The ability to plan is not unlimited and the results of planning are to

some extent always unpredictable. This is the case not only because the forces involved are ambiguous (Wagner, 1994), but because planning moves between two oppositions, namely liberty and discipline. While liberty is one of the goals of modernization, the institutions which strive to introduce modernization often do so by enforcing discipline.

2. Controlled versus Uncontrolled Developments

Modernization processes are never the result of chaotic or random occurrences. The process of modernization always involves a high degree of cultural planning and management of cultural conditions. However, it is rather naive to assume that planning can be accomplished in a straightforward manner, without deviating from an original plan of action. As a matter of fact, deviations and reversals (i.e. anti-modernization oppositions) are always, in one way or another, part and parcel of the modernization process, and are key factors, for example, as far as the nature of the process and its duration are concerned. There is usually a disparity between long term processes and the original program.

The meanings ascribed by culture planners to the various social elements invariably deviate from their original plan, so that ultimately the latter is never fully accomplished. It would be most interesting to investigate what part of the overall program is typically accomplished.

3. Consciousness versus "Reality"

The process of modernization does not necessarily take place in "real life". A change in social consciousness, as has been already noted by Eisenstadt (1966), can play an equally major role in modernization processes.

4. "Tradition" versus "Modernity"

The dichotomy between the concepts of "tradition" and "modernity" involved in the process of modernization is often based on dialectic relations. An element identified as part of the tradition often functions as an agent and catalyst of modernity.

5. Linear versus Cyclical Sequences

Consequently, the entire process of change should be analyzed in terms of oppositional and dichotomical relations and NOT in terms of linear progression. Moreover, the direction of the process is not unequivocal.

Modernization does not necessarily lead to a “modern state” and concepts of modernity are often applicable to pre-modern states.

6. Forced and Independent Process(es)

Once the process of change begins, it acquires a certain degree of autonomy, so that it cannot be stopped nor regulated. Processes of change are maintained through a dynamics of their own, which is in turn determined by their own network of internal and external relationships.

7. Long and Short-term Changes

The process of modernization can only be adequately dealt with within a historical context. The strong sociological thrust of modernization theories may well have been to their disadvantage, for the historical dimensions of modernization has often been neglected.

Is modernization a process with an end? Or is it a never-ending process? This issue has yet to be addressed, let alone resolved. However, it is crucial to be able to distinguish between the long and the short-term aspects of modernization in order to assess the different ways they impact on the process.

8. Parallel versus Conflicting Roads

The roads taken by processes of modernization are not necessarily parallel. Some precede others, paving the way for those which come later.

9. Gradual versus Immediate Change

When elements of change enter a system, this never implies a total replacement of old paradigms by newer ones. The new is never imprinted on the old as patterns are indented on dough, giving it new shape from the start. The new does not totally abolish the elements of the old, but is rather based on existing components which may be newly constructed. Sometimes the by-products of previous processes, which Beck (1996) calls *Halbmodernisierung*, result in a full process of modernization.

10. Two (or More) Competing Models

Each case of modernization is unique due to the encounter between the old and new and the forces and elements involved in the processes. It is more than likely that more than one model of modernization will be introduced into the system in the process.

11. Absorption versus Rejection

New patterns and elements are not simply absorbed into the system. The absorbing system often tries to resist changes which do not meet its needs or interests. Even when a change is considered by culture planners to be an entirely favorable one, it does not involve an immediate transformation of all the systemic components (Zemon-Davis 1975) and it is never practiced without some measure of opposition which in itself contributes to the character of the process.

12. Passive and Active Participants

Members of the absorbing society are never passive absorbents. They are both users and interpreters of the modernization process which they adapt to their cultural code.

So far we have been concerned with what might be the appropriate theoretical paradigm for analyzing macro-processes of modernization. But what about the analysis of micro-processes? Is it really essential to develop a theoretical framework for analysis at the micro-level?

On this point I would like to share my doubts with you, for I argue that it is not.

Many studies see fit to analyze micro-processes by means of a cluster of attributes. They perceive in it a convenient tool for studying the texture of change, a way of effectively dealing with what might be called the system's "flesh and blood", that is, its concrete components. This cluster of attributes comprises a variety of elements, which repeatedly participate in the process of modernization. For instance, attributes such as literacy, professional specialization, the nuclear family, secularization, mobilization, automatization, and levels of organization.

It seems to me that some of these attributes, especially the last three, are indeed extremely important for the analysis of both the systemic as well as the textual aspects of modernization. However, it must be remembered that a description of a specific cluster of attributes entails examining both elements and their functions, and that neither of these can be taken for granted. The modernization process raises two optional, new sets of relations between elements and functions: in the one the functions of given elements will change, and in the other, newly introduced elements will proceed to carry out old functions. The specific composition of the cluster of attributes is what lies at the heart of the research, rather

than a catalogue or inventory. Detecting the new attributes is in fact the point of departure for any serious inquiry. Each case of modernization examined will yield a different organization of the set of attributes involved. Different elements can carry the same functions and vice versa: the same function can be carried out by different elements. It is the task of every research project to explore the specific puzzle originating from each of the case-studies involved.

This task is feasible only if the theoretical model facilitates investigating how one frame of social order, social notions and *Weltanschauung* is always in the process of being replaced by another; how cultural elements change their contingent positions in this process, how they adopt new forms and then manifest new modes of conduct in the newly-created system; how specific elements, old and new, take part in the creation of a new social order which eventually yields a new sense of identity. These seem to me the most significant issues in trying to understand the modernization process in the context of the child's culture. Fruitful research of the child's culture clearly cannot do without the notion of modernization.

Nor can we hope to go about things constructively without first developing a flexible theoretical framework which will enable us to describe the various manifestations of modernization, how the course of history is transformed, the practices of cultural agents and the responses on behalf of the communities involved. Only a theoretical framework that can account for all the above will be able to deal fruitfully with processes of modernization, whose importance cannot be underestimated.

One of the best known modernist Hebrew poets, Uri Zvi Greenberg, wrote in his manifesto *Against Ninety Nine* (1928): "If another Messiah is born, we hope not in the primitive Galilee will he come over but he be born in the province of Galilee where cars and hygienic houses, motor boats in the lake of Galilee and electricity all over".

Modernization and all the nouns and adjectives deriving from it, it must be concluded, are key notions in any discussion of the child's culture. Coming down to earth from messianic visions, we must make sure that we are at all times in possession of the right key for the right lock. If we don't, we may well be flooded out by the multitude of studies of modernization. It is up to us to provide ourselves with the appropriate means to cross them.

Notes

- 1) This paper is the outcome of a cooperative research project conducted by the Universities of Frankfurt and Tel Aviv on Children's Literature in the Process of Modernization, supported by the DFG. As the project will take between four or five years to complete, the following findings are presented as preliminary.
- 2) The Foundation of Futurism [Manifesto of Futurism, 1909], translated from the French by Eugen Weber, reprinted by permission of Dodd, Mead and Company from Eugen Weber (1960) *Paths to the Present*. New York: Dobb, Mead & Co.

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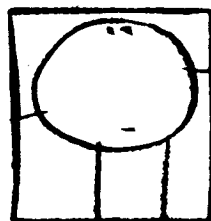
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Centrum för barnkulturforskning
Stockholms universitet
106 91 Stockholm
Telefon 08-16 36 87
Internet: www.barnkultur.su.se