In the following pages I will present out a few remarks on the relevance of research on Latin America and its patterns of citizenship, as seen within the framework of multiple modernities. The idea of multiple modernities is very simple, yet problematic (for a comprehensive analysis see Eisenstadt 2007). The basic idea is that as most of the world has become or is becoming modern, the old dichotomy between traditional and modern societies is no longer valid or very interesting. Of course, there are still some societies, that can be perhaps described as traditional, such as Saudi Arabia and many traditional sectors in Central Asian societies, but most societies are for better or worse entangled into modernities. Yet, these modernities are not the same but are different, being the product of complex encounters between the variable appropriation of the political and institutional programs of modernity and their continual reinterpretation in the light of various traditions, crises and breakdowns. And the important point for our discussion is that this is not an outcome only of the expansion of European Western modernity into Asia or Africa. It all started – indeed with the European expansion – already in the West but beyond Europe, in the Americas. The first multiple modernities have been the United States and the different societies of South and Central America and the Caribbean that were defined as ‘Latin America’ since the mid-nineteenth century – the societies discussed in this volume (see also Eisenstadt 2002).

The main contention of this perspective is that the relations and encounters between different societies in the contemporary world is not a dialogue or clash of cultures but between different – to indeed no small extent cultural – interpretations of modernity, and that this can be best understood in terms of the continuity of the cultural development and changeability of multiple modernities.

The very notion of multiple modernities goes against some of the strong, explicit and implicit assumptions of the classical sociological

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1 Professor Eisenstadt completed this work on August 2010, shortly before passing away on 2 September 2010.
tradition and above all of the theories of modernization which were pre-
dominant in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century as well as
against some of the major themes dominant in the contemporary dis-
course of globalization.

The ‘classical’ theories of modernization of the fifties of the twentieth
century have indeed identified the core characteristics of modernity, of
modern society such as the decomposition of older ‘closed’ institutional
frameworks and the development of new structural, institutional and cul-
tural features and formations and to use the terminology of Karl Deutsch,
growing potential for social mobilization. The most important structural
dimension of modernity attesting to the decomposition of former rela-
tively narrow formations was seen in the growing tendency to structural
differentiation – manifest among others in growing urbanization; com-
modification of the economy; in the continual development of distinctive
channels of communication and agencies of education. On the institu-
tional level such decomposition gave rise to the development of new
institutional formations, such as the modern state, modern national col-
lectivities, new market – especially capitalist – economies – which were
perceived or defined to some extent at least as autonomous, and which
were indeed regulated by specific, distinct mechanisms – such as rules of
the market; of bureaucratic organization and the like. In some later for-
mulations it was the development of such distinct autonomous spheres,
each regulated by its own logic that was very often defined as the essence
of modern institutional formations. Concomitantly modernity was seen
as bearing a distinct cultural program, closely related to specific modes of
structurization of the major arenas of social life and shaping a distinct
type of personality characteristics (Eisenstadt 1973).

These theories, as well as classical sociological analyses of Marx,
Durkheim and to a large extent even of Weber (see e.g. Kamenka 1983;
Weber 1968a, 1968b, 1978; and Durkheim 1973) – or at least in one reading
of him – have implicitly or explicitly conflated these major dimensions of
modernity as they saw it developing in the West. These approaches
assumed that even if these dimensions are analytically distinct, histori-
ically they do come together, essentially becoming inseparable. A very
strong – even if implicit – assumption of the studies of modernization,
was that the cultural dimensions or aspects of modernization – the basic
cultural premises of Western modernity, the ‘secular’ rational worldview
including a strong individualistic orientation, are inherently and neces-
sarily interwoven with the structural ones. Accordingly, most of the clas-
sics of sociology as well as the studies of modernization of the 1940s and