

# **The Historical Dynamics Of Modernizm: A Critical Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

In recent decades, the modernism and modern socio-political analysis has been subjected to criticism in many respects. The ideas of the global, post-modern and post-industrial societies attempted to legitimize themselves over the criticism of the modern approach towards the economic, social, political and philosophical parameters of modern version. Due to the fact that the institutions, models, matrixes pertaining with the modern realm faded away one after the other, challenging and confrontation with modernizm was popularized. Nevertheless, many critical series of analysis remained as deficient, abortive and defective studies because many researchers had not adequate information and awareness about the dynamics of the modernizm which was shaping the main character of modernizm. Yet modernizm just as the other movements of thought was directly relevant, related and bound to the time and space which produce them. In the light of this understanding, we attempted to elaborate the main historical dymanics and the socio-political ground which the modernizm had been created. We hope that this study demonstrates the intrinsic and essential trajectory which the

modernism followed within the dark labyrinth of history in order to meet the expectations of alternative models of societies as an harbinger.

**Keywords:** Modernism, modernisation, modern fallacy, social change, individualism, Eurocentrism, colonialism, rationalism

The notion modern primarily has been used the first time in history in 5th century handwritings of St Augustine as referring the new law, order and approaches by implying the distinction between the paganism and Christianity. In historical approach, we encounter the understanding of interruption, challenge and tension as the striking parameter of its characteristic feature. Even Giddens focuses on the tension creating dimension of modernism and argues that the modernism creates tension in building a modern individual by depending upon the idea of competition, self-realisation, and emancipation (Giddens 1997: 284-286). In other word, modern is a kind of transitinory period from the old to the new.

In a broader perspective, if it is required to have an etimological analysis, it is seen that the roots of notion modern originates from the the mode or moda which means “new” and “an entity which is “new” and “novelty” as Latin suffix (Giddens 1993: 22). As a derivative, the word modern means the supremacy or hegemony of new one. If we regard the century when the word modern frequently used, it refers the dominance of new values of divinal Christian faith inspite of the previous values of paganist and politheist Greek culture. The other derivative version of modern is modernism implies a kind of political stream which stipulates to widespread the supremacy of new one into the different segments and all spheres of the life and transforms this approach into an ideology and the type of life (King 1995: 27-31).

Modernity as another appearence of modernism includes the meaning of a new socio-political milieu which emerges as a result of the penetration of the modernism into the daily social life (Hall 1992: 43-46). Lastly, modernisation is a social phenomenon which refers the transititon process from the traditional entity/sphere into the modern entity/sphere (Göle 2009: 55). As we will explain in following stages of our presentation, there might be different types and forms of modernizm and could be categorized within subject-matter of plural modernities. Nevertheless, it is widely understood from the word modernism, the process of westernization. Therefore, we will attempt to analyze the modernism in different perspective by following trajectories of western history as well as the East-West relations in respect of dialogical interaction and confrontations.

Actually, the East and West relations constitute the basis for the modernization process. These relations are consist of very complicated and sophiticated parameters and contain the scopes of sociology, psychology, history, philosophy, culture and politics. The most

important constituent which prepares the modernisation is a historical experience with its unique and specific character. From Antiquity, as it is widely known Antique Greek is accepted as the cultural historical ancestor of the today's modern European culture and identity, to the Information Society which we are living now, all historical turning points, changes, waves, and transformations witnessed in European Continent creates the specific culture and identity of Europe (İnaç 2010: 143-145). Nevertheless, the aforementioned historical experiences which Europe lived made the European people so arrogant and one with superiority complex that they could assert that every society and community desired to be civilized is supposed to suffer the same historical trajectory which Europeans had experienced within the past history by depending upon the reason which we will try to elaborate. Moreover, as Alevli argues, the societies should pass from the collusion of the Enlightenment in a pejorative meaning for the sake of arriving the so-called "civilization" (Alathı 2009: 327). West defines the events, happenings and going-ons which just only are lived in Europe such as Renaissance, Reformation, rationalism, enlightenment, humanism, modernism as the cultural revolutionary ladders and, thanks to these developments, perceives themselves privileged from the other societies and distinguishes the world as "the west and the rest". As it is known, it is a simple, one-dimensional and reductive categorization.

This approach which has been known as "Euro-centrism" aims to sublimate the Europe in every stage of society and supposes the other societies as the followers of the European steps. For instance, traditional society, agricultural society, modern society, industrial society, post-industrial society, information society (Sezal, 2010: 32-47). According to this approach, when Turkey arrive the level of modern society, Europe would be in post-modern model of society, if Turkey would experience the post-modern social environment, The West would be in information society. Here it is so myopic and arrogant behaviour that the history of the other societies could be seen as indistinct and insignificant. This pathological perception of history is called as "weak historianism" with the specific conceptualisation of Göle (Göle 2011: 78-79).

Within the background of this understanding was consist of the othering, alienation and marginalisation of the East and the perception of the East as imaginary, phantasmal and romantic realm. Within the framework of the western perception, the East can be just only shaped in accordance with the standpoint and vision of the West. Under these circumstances. The Orient as the meaning of the East which the western people perceive, was full of people lazy, feeble-minded, clumsy and rude ordinary people (Keyman, Mutman, Yeğenoğlu 1996: 77-79). Nevertheless, God donated these people various kinds of generous benefactions and boons. On the other hand, the mission of civilized European people was to relief and remove this unjustifiable and unequal situation and introduce this wealth and capital into the service of all people. This approach and perception gained reputation with the name of Orientalism (Said 1998: 66). As an outcome or product of this understanding, Portugal, Netherland and Spain as the countries which had the naval powers and the leading actors of modernisation went along with the western direction initiated the colonisation process. This brutal, ruthless and inhuman adventure took place in literature as "westernisation of the west" (Delanty 2004: 420

59-66). In this period, the west couldn't have an opportunity to pass into the East because the Ottoman Empire transformed the Mediterranean into the Muslim-Turk Lake and became into common other and threat for Europe.

As a result of this reality, the western powers concentrated on spreading her culture and identity into the western part of the west. The aforementioned colonisation process developed in line with the secularism and the establishment of nation-state. In this line, the transportation of almost all wealths of the African and American continents into Europe created the capitalism and its primitive version of merchantilism. On the other hand, the national culture and identity of the Europe had been universalised and the content of this has been inherited by the notions of human and minority rights, supremacy of law, democracy, multiculturalism, cultural plurality. These all collections have been termed as "civilisation" (Ağaoğulları 2009: 34). Nevertheless, there is very important point to bear in mind that if there wouldn't be the existence of the Ottoman Empire with very strong and firm character led to the constitution for the modernisation and the notion of civilisation. That is, the Europe would go towards to the East and fragmentatised and emasculated. We can easily summarize this argumentation with below assertion: "the Ottoman Turks as strong and common threat led to the emergence of the extension of modernism and the term civilization by both reinforcing and strengthening the European people among themselves and automatically creating the self identity and directing all attentions and sinergies towards the west as a whole. That is the harbinger for the insight and comprehension of "constitutive otherness" among the European and Turkish identities (İnaç 2010: 177). As it can be comprehended easily this thesis refutes the Eurocentric way of thinking and the theory of cultural evolutionary ladder drastically.

In this context, it is inevitable and essential to mention about the historical turning points and the deviances and interruptions of socio-political conjontures which shaped the notion modernisation within European historical perspective. As we expressed above, the historical grounds and basis of the modern European culture and the essence of the European civilization were attributed to Antique Greek "polis" unit (city state) (Delanty 2004: 45). The original and rightful reason of this common consensus was the democracy experiment of Greek culture. That was the first time in history. People came together in larger squares called as "agora" and voted in direct way known as "plebiscite". Greek people regarded to participate into the political decision-making process as a matter of honour and respect even the meaning of life. As a result of this logic, people took on mission and played role in administrative body of Pleb Council rotatively and provided the contribution into the development of the fact of democracy as a gift of humankind (Ağaoğulları 2009: 89). One another distinctive feature of this period was the paganist and polytheist faith system which led to emerge the multiculturalism and tolerance against the differences.

Nevertheless, Antique Greek culture gave way to Roman Sanctum Imperium which aimed to create a universal Christian civilisation (Christendom). In this period, this Empire attempted to unite the people under the universal papacy, to control the scientific development through Inquisition composed by the selected members of the Church. Thus, the thinking realm and scientific instruction had been monopolized. Some words such as anathema, excommunicate, indulgence have been invented and forged in order to exploit the innocent believers and a privileged clerical class had been created. Scholastic thinking and patristic philosophy constrained the free thinking. Nobody had a chance to think and decide, everything about the life and world was determined by the instructions and ideas of the patria potestas such as St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine.

In this period, people were passive, subject and found no way out to obey the proposals of the Church (Ağaoğulları 2009: 64). For ordinary people, world is ambiguous, obscure, complicated and abstruse entity and so incomprehensible universe and period that is called by Weber as “the period of mystification” (Weber 2011: 97-99). The distinguishable events of the period were the emergence of the feudal society between 8-12th centuries. Feudal society determined and shaped by the feudal contract between sub and upper hierarchical positions which had equal right for two sides to abolish the contract. In that case, we can argue that some democratic tendencies partly prevailed and started to create some democratic traditions (Bloch 2005: 64). Meanwhile, European continent was brutally invaded by barbaric tribes and respectively, was suffered by the pope-emperor wars, the conflict of the religious and worldly authorities, and the disputes of religion and sect. In this period, the people could have some donated and given identities by pope and emperor which could be taken back with arbitrary will.

Afterwards, the translation of Holy Book (Bible) into the national languages, and its sending out different communities by means of printing house and by the influences of these books, the deceitfulness and the exploitation of the Church had been exposed. In Basle Council, the clerical class couldn't be settled on an agreement one papacy who will unite the Christian world under one political auspices. In spite of unification, we witness the fragmentation of the Christendom as national sects such as Anglicanism, Catholicism, Calvinism with their national churches and institutions. The establishment of these national churches became the turning point in both the creation of nation-states with secular and the modern character and both the prevalence of the Reformation movements. As a prolongation of these sequences of events, instead of divine religion based on the revelation, a different religious approach depending upon the humanistic interpretations was preponderated. Moreover, the humanisation of socio-political and religious scopes and the homo-centric thinking initiated to be felt in every field of the life. The ordinary people turned into a logical and prudential individual with the urbanization which means to immigrate people to work with industrial areas around the factories.

Thanks to these movements, the new greater cities have been established around the factories, people could have an opportunity to work with different jobs and identify themselves in accordance with their jobs. That was the obtained and gained identities instead of the Middle Ages donated identities. The shifting of the identification process led to the settlement of democratic tendencies among the different segments of societies. Thus, the individual was placed on the center of socio-political analysis in line with the rationalisation and secularisation processes. Some new understanding and novelties such as the rationalism, individualism, and the cartesian philosophy depended upon the scientific approach oriented with the observation, experiment and concrete reality led to the emergence of the Renaissance implies the revitalization of democracy experiment of Antiquity (Haviland 2002: 31). As a matter of fact, at the end of the 14th century, Italian potbelly bosses precipitated the commerce in coastal Italian cities where free from the pressures of both popes and emperors made the individualism prevail and widespread.

After the conquest of Istanbul (Constantinople), in Italy where many scientists fled and supported by the manufacturers and merchants in order to improve the technological innovations, a kind of scientific class has been emerged and called as “scientia” (Ağaoğulları 2009: 172). The Enlightenment reflected itself into the notions demystification, self-realisation and emancipation (Weber 2011: 74). As the main parameters of the Enlightenment, the demystification refers to the power of humankind to explain totally and change the world for his primary anthropological necessities such as nutrition, sheltering and fertility. In case of self-realisation, it is the demonstration of human capacity by grasping the environmental realities in line with the proficiency and skills of the humankind. Lastly, the notion emancipation points out the disruption of people with their traditional ties and becoming free from the religious and authoritarian pressures.

Thanks to the rationalism, enlightenment, and developing technology, people focused on the industry, manufacture, handicraft and immigrated from rural area to the urbanized and industrialised centers and had an opportunity to create and define their individualistic spheres. In that case, the individualism implies the realm consists of interests, necessities, and demands distinguished and apart from the rest of the society's common values, traditions and tendencies where he or she born in. This individual sphere was so intimate and private that nobody could intervene and violate (İnaç 2010: 163-164). In addition to the essential constituents of the modernisation, as an expressional reflection for the self-confidence and dignity of humankind, the notion “humanism” has been discovered as the shaping, possession, preponderance dominating and monitoring capacity of the nature and environment in accordance with the human benefit (Haviland 2002: 94-96). As a conclusion, this self-confidence arisen from the past historical experience we elaborated in this study led to the appearance of the hegemonic narrative, culture-bound perception, Eurocentric approach towards the world was inherited by modernity which made the societies disciplined and restricted entities. Nowadays communities depicted as the rest of the west

attempt to discover their own traditions and local values and try to combine and harmonize their own culture and history with the western modernity.

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