



## A Critical Review of “Ottoman Modernization”

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### Abstract

The concept of modernization frequently appears in today’s sociological analyses. This conceptualization, which is employed to describe the non-Western world in particular, is essentially provided within a theoretical framework and takes on meaning within it. The term “modernization,” however, is frequently abstracted from the latter and substituted with the concepts of modernity. Such uses make it difficult to understand the “modernization theory” developed in Western academic circles to explain the non-Western world and criticize it.

The Ottoman Empire dealt with the problem of “encountering the West” within its unique circumstances and produced specific solutions for this problem. Moreover, the emergence of modernization theory can only be traced back to the 1950s. Therefore, speaking of an “Ottoman modernization” appears anachronistic when considered chronologically and in light of the Ottoman Empire’s unique historical experience. Using the methods of document analysis and literature review, this paper seeks to determine whether the Ottoman experience had a place within the paradigm of modernization or not.

### Keywords

*Modernity, Modernization Theory, Ottoman Modernization, West, Progress*

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## Introduction

Assessing history and social structures of the past with today's perspectives and ideas is a frequent mistake made even by the most experienced specialists. A researcher studying historical events or societies should understand that his/her current circumstances are not absolute and that assessing the past from a present-day perspective results in incorrect conclusions. Such an awareness, above all, entails examining the impact of current circumstances on human life and distancing oneself from the past. Almost all facets of human life, including the social, economic, cultural, religious, or psychological aspects, are subject to this kind of assessment. With such awareness, one can conduct a more distanced analysis of the social circumstances of past communities, the institutions that were built in response to these circumstances, and their modes of operation within the relevant time-space. Analyses lacking this perspective are bound to be either anachronistic or deficient/flawed.

Pointing to this procedural error, Halil İncalcık notes that historians, in an attempt to bring a different perspective from their era to their research, frequently resort to abstract concepts derived from sociology which results in a construed perspective of historical events? This situation illustrates the absence of the approach (İncalcık, 2011) advocated by German historian Leopold von Ranke, dubbed the father of modern historiography. Ranke argues that a historian should concentrate on the critical analysis of history's mark, namely the document, and return to the period of history under study in order to see and understand the events as if living through them. Ranke's scientific approach avoids twisting historical events to fit a contemporary context and assigning them new meanings. By preventing anachronistic interpretations of history, he establishes a benchmark for the validity of contemporary social analyses based on historical data.

Oğuz Adanır reminds us that over the last four or five decades, social and human sciences in some countries have been dominated by certain ideologies, most notably in modern societies, and the "scientific approaches" developed as alternatives have been similarly dominated by counter ideologies. According to Adanır, authentic thoughts that could be considered objective have not been produced during this period or prior to it, and those that have been produced have been hidden, pushed to the back burner, and suppressed. Particularly in Europe, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people with free thoughts received the necessary attention, and respect only after the 1960s

and 1970s, and the level of attention remained insufficient even in 2000. The atmosphere of intellectual, mental, and ideological debate and competition in the early days of modernity ceased (Adanır, 2013), and at the end of two centuries, the modern system, having established its adequacy, ended all debates and assumed a dogmatic character by asserting that it is the sole historical and social reality.

From this point onwards, the academic and intellectual worlds have been dominated by the perspective founded on a particular historical milestone and the historical experience of a particular society. This approach, which is centered on Western history and society, presents the latter as models for all societies and attempts to define and describe non-Western societies based on this model. The approach has persisted due to political processes associated with the non-scientific dynamics discussed previously, despite criticism at various levels and its labeling over the years as a “West-centric perspective.”

Interpretations of the nearly two-century period marked by the rise of Europe and the fall of the Ottoman Empire appear to have been heavily influenced by the ideological orientations outlined above. There are very few studies that portray Ottoman history authentically, while representations based on the modernization paradigm have dominated the field. The concepts “Ottoman modernization” and “Turkish modernization” (Berkes, 1999; Davison, 2016; Mardin, 2019), which emerged for the first time in the 1960s as a result of studies undertaken in American universities, were adopted without argument by the vast majority of our historians and social scientists, particularly after the 1970s and 1980s. After achieving a certain level of penetration, the validity of the conceptualization became completely irrelevant, and it began to be regarded as an attributed term. Is it possible, however, to speak of an “Ottoman modernization”?

This article seeks to answer this question in the context of modernity and modernization theory by shedding light on the development courses and semantic domains of the concepts. To this end, I will employ a new conceptualization, the “modernity-centric perspective,” that will function as my fundamental tool of analysis in both the document analysis and literature review.

The article consists of four main sections. The first discusses the modernity-centric perspective in-depth, while the second section discusses the Ottoman Empire’s approach to the problem of “encountering with the West” and developing solutions at a point in history when the West’s rise reached undeniable heights. As with other societies confronted with a similar problem, Ottomans employed a plethora of methods to resist the West’s expansionism. The unique characteristics that enabled them to resist far longer than other societies are discussed, while this section seeks to explain the nature of their selected practices. The third section delves into the conceptual roots of the perspective that interprets the solution proposals and methods

of struggle developed by the Ottomans against the West as "modernization," and attempts to explain the historical and political dynamics that facilitated the emergence of the modernization theory and the global expansion of the modernization paradigm. Within this scope, this section proposes that modernization theory is a political construct and a historical phenomenon distinct from the resistance mechanisms that non-Western societies employ voluntarily and which include their own authentic solutions against Western expansionism. The fourth section concludes that, in the light of the issues raised, "Ottoman modernization" is a retrospective interpretation, that the "modernization" concept had not yet emerged during the Ottoman Empire's existence, and that it never encountered the modernization perspective, as we understand it today, which entails externally prescribed formulae and their passive implementation. In this context, the chapter emphasizes that the Ottomans invented, elaborated, and selectively implemented all solutions to the problem of encountering with the West, and ultimately, it is not possible to speak of an "Ottoman modernization."

#### **"Modernity-Centric" Perspective**

The unscientific approach that Ranke warned against became the dominant perspective in historiography and social sciences, particularly in the post-19<sup>th</sup> century period. Comprehending history in today's context, attempting to adapt the contemporary ethical and cultural codes to the past, and judging societies and history based on these codes have been comprehensively practiced. Criticisms of the West-centric perspective and orientalism in this context are regarded as a product of scientific diversity and lack the strength to alter or stretch the dominant paradigm.

These unscientific approaches employ a historical turning point as a tool rather than endorsing particular geography. So much so that Europe's sustained success, particularly after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is understood as the result of a series of historical events. The West emerged as a significant military, industrial, and political power as a result of a lengthy period of colonialism following geographical discoveries, which ensured the influx of the non-Western world's wealth into the West; the Industrial Revolution as a consequence of the accumulation of capital, and capitalism and imperialism that accompanied all these developments.

These developments ushered in a comprehensive process of social change and transformation for the West, beginning with a mental metamorphosis and eventually encompassing all spheres of life. Western sociologists retrospectively coined the term "modernity" to refer to this historical experience. Western intellectuals and politicians believe that the modernity experience is what truly distinguishes the West from all other societies, and that modernity elevates the West to the status of a role model for others. With modernity, the West rewrote its history, and in doing so, it interpreted its entire history

- including its failures - as a series of circumstances that led to it. In this way, the West demonstrated a proclivity toward sanctifying its history as a whole. This perspective produced a myriad of historical narratives and provided fine examples of the progressive history perspective, which advocates that from the beginning of its history, the West progressed along a linear trajectory toward its target of modernity, namely from bad to good. All good and bad developments that enabled the West to achieve modernity and to dominate all other societies were legitimized by the outcome. Therefore, all societies should desire to follow in the West's footsteps and share in the West's achievements. This path is the "modernization paradigm," the boundaries of which were established academically in the aftermath of the West and the United States seizing leadership after 1945. The paradigm places the West at the center, pushing all other societies to the periphery.

The event of modernity is the starting point of the modernization paradigm, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent sections. Modernity is the prism through which the West is portrayed as a success story, and it should be at the center of all narratives about societies or historical experiences outside the West, both for those who invented the modernization paradigm and for those who implemented the modernization paradigm to non-Western societies.

This perspective is more than just West-centric. It is proposed here that all approaches to understanding and interpreting societies in the context of post-19<sup>th</sup>-century circumstances that do not center on their own unique circumstances and historical context should be referred to as "*modernity-centric*" narratives.

After the 19<sup>th</sup> century, non-Western societies gradually began to be exposed to the West to the point that some faced complete subjugation to it. This dynamic resulted in the West's continued progress while other countries faced constant decline. By relying on its substantial military strength derived from advanced firearms, the West turned its attention to other societies and their territories, engaged in colonialism, transformed the capital accumulation from colonialism into a massive financial power, and subjugated more land and people through its mentality of using this financial power to further expand into all other geographies. Thus, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western expansionism, whose origins date back to the 14<sup>th</sup>-century geographical discoveries, evolved into the first imminent threat to the existence of societies across the globe.

One long-term consequence of defeat by the West was the loss of land and people, followed by the annihilation of native cultures and the erasure of their history and previous way of life. Native languages and cultures were largely eradicated, while native communities' histories began to be retold and re-written from a Western perspective. During this period, the victorious West

and its unique experience became the only meaningful story not only for itself but also for the remaining geographies. Thus, native societies, histories, and cultures were eclipsed by the West's tangible achievements.

By utilizing intellectual instruments and military power, the West codified its own experience as the sole developmental path for all humanity and categorized all other societies within that path. In this framework, certain societies were labeled despotic and underdeveloped, while others were dubbed primitive and wild.

The modernity-centric perspective assesses historical events, lifestyles of human communities, institutions, and unique experiences through the lens of Western hegemony. The shape the world took under this hegemony became evident after the 19<sup>th</sup> century and eventually engulfed the entire globe. Accordingly, societies are judged as advanced/underdeveloped, economic structures as developed/less-developed, political regimes as ancient/modern, and scientific, philosophical, and artistic events as archaic/contemporary. In this taxonomy, postmodernity is presented as the ideal, while phenomena associated with pre-modernity are described as invalid due to deficiencies, flaws, and errors. This approach, which strongly categorizes history and human experience, makes it impossible to comprehend historical events or recent developments in their entirety (Genç, 2012:175-86).<sup>1</sup>

### **The Ottoman Empire vs. the West in the Aftermath of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

As with other non-Western societies, the Ottomans also confronted the West in the aforementioned power dynamic. Following a years-long struggle, the nearly 200-year-long arm wrestle between the West and the Ottoman Empire concluded with the Ottoman Empire's demise and the rise of the Republic of

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1 Genç's analysis of the Ottoman economic structure is a significant example in so far as the author states that societies must be assessed in the context of their unique circumstances, presents the Ottoman economic worldview, and criticises the modernity-centric perspective. As is known, post-modernity is the period during which finance capitalism flourished substantially and economic activity ascended to the highest rank among human activities. Thus, economic structures became independent entities within the modern state design, and economics established itself as a distinct scientific discipline. When the Ottoman Empire is viewed in this light, a picture of underdevelopment emerges. The Ottoman economic structure is fraught with flaws and errors. According to Genç, however, the Ottoman economic worldview is profound in and of itself. Thus, based on the political philosophy upon which the Ottoman economic structure is founded, it places a premium on subsistence. This principle, also called the provision principle, prevented famine, which was regarded as the most significant threat, and served the mentality of "letting the people live so the state will live.". To uphold this principle, the size of agricultural enterprises was kept under control and the guild organization and the ahi community were preserved. This revealed yet another facet of the Ottoman economic structure: traditionalism. The fiscalism principle, which was founded on these two principles, aimed to boost revenues, and measures such as spending restraint were implemented to this end. Utilizing a scientific rather than an ideological history methodology to examine the Ottoman economic system, which appears to be rather unproductive and underdeveloped from a modernity-centric perspective, reveals that it is completely compatible with the physical and philosophical circumstances that created it.

Türkiye from its ashes on a relatively small piece of territory in comparison to the empire that preceded it. There is substantial scientific literature on Western dominance, the major event that led to this development and peaked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the dynamics that created it.

When describing major milestones in this literature, we should begin by stating that the world before the 19<sup>th</sup> century was significantly different from the one we know now. The Ottoman Empire was a major power in the East, spanning over three continents and holding a position of leadership in the Eastern world. On the other hand, the West began to awaken from its feudal slumber in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, gaining significant wealth through geographical discoveries and colonialism, and gradually emerged as a center of power. It was recognized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the balance of power between the East and West had shifted in favor of the latter and that the West had evolved into a substantial political power which in time became a military/industrial one. Occupations and military actions undertaken by European countries with the intention of colonizing the entire non-Western world resulted in the West's favor, and the Ottoman Empire also suffered from these developments. Both degradation in the financial structure and territorial losses caused by military defeats led to its dissolution.

After overcoming the initial shock of their unexpected defeats, the Ottomans, like all communities heavily defeated by the West, began to analyze the issue confronting them. According to M. Şükrü Hanioglu, the feeling of obligation determined the Ottoman officials' first inclination toward the West. Due to the dominant belief that the state was being defeated by "infidels" familiar with the "new order," developments needed to be closely monitored. In this setting, the idea of inclining toward the West and implementing many of its methods in the Ottoman state began to emerge, along with the perception that knowledge of the West could bring back its superiority over the state (Hanioglu, 1986).

After the Ottoman administrators realized that the achievements of the West could not be overlooked, they undertook a number of measures. The prevalent belief was that the West's advances were the product of scientific and technological breakthroughs and that the status quo that had favored the Ottoman Empire for centuries could be restored if those advancements were replicated. Since the first clear and serious defeats were military failures, they began to reorganize the military in the Western-style. However, it was understood that this on its own would be insufficient, and officers trained in the Western tradition were necessary to maintain this type of army. The tradition of sending cadets to the West for training was established in order for them, upon their return, to continue the efforts that had initially been supported by foreigners. This practice was carried on with military and medical schools that provided Western-style training, and since the state endeavored

to innovate, it opened new educational institutions to replace the old madrasahs, educational institutions, and scientific institutes (Ülken, 2013: 46).

Mahmud II is one of the most important figures of this historic moment. Despite the opposition, he embarked on an extremely comprehensive reform program in 1826 that began with the abolition of the Guild of Janissaries and the establishment of the Mansure Army (*Asakir-i Mansure-i Muhammediye*), organized in the Western-style. His reform program continued until his death in 1839. These reforms laid the groundwork for Turkish reformists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, to a lesser extent, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first considerable need after the reform was in the field of education as the new army suffered from a severe lack of qualified officers. Despite strong opposition, students were sent to Paris for the first time in 1827 to meet this need. In the same year, a medical school was opened in Istanbul to train physicians for the new army. The Imperial Music School (*Muzika-i Hümayun*) and the School of Military Sciences (*Mekteb-i Ulumu Harbiye*), both military colleges, were established in 1831 and 1834, respectively, as were the *Mektebi Maârifî Adliye* and the *Mektebi Ulûmi Edebiye*, which were established to train public officers and translators. Each of these schools was a Western-style educational institution that focused on foreign languages and particularly French. In addition, after the first four students went to Paris, a significant number of students were sent to Europe. Students, who studied abroad as well as those who received Western-style education within the empire, became the prominent figures who altered the course of the Ottoman Empire in the years that followed (Lewis, 2000: 83-86).

Following these practices in the military and education sectors, various changes were introduced to the management mechanism, which was not fundamentalist in nature and mostly demonstrated a series of features of bureaucratic conservatism. The meaning attributed to change was associated with resistance to the West, and the way to do it was through repairing and restoring traditional Ottoman structures and power relations (Öğün, 1995: 53). These broad bureaucratic reforms, which primarily concerned the ruling class, had little influence on people's daily life. According to Ejder Okumuş, this was because the political structure, or state, was at the center of the transformation of both the empire and its social life. Although state-level innovations had some effect on society, it is striking that the state was ahead of society in terms of change and that it took initiatives to address issues raised by changing circumstances. (Okumuş, 1999: 175).

Carter V. Findley argues that the Ottoman Empire's initiatives were linked to strong traditions that had lasted since the birth of Islamic civilization and which had pre-Islamic roots. Findley argues that in an era when the empire as a form of a political organization became obsolete, the Ottomans embarked on radical reforms to overcome the consequences of the decline and

to cope with the realities of the world in which they lived (Findley, 2019: 29). In this manner, they became the only state to maintain and improve its administrative tradition without “entering the modernization age” (Kissinger 2016: 125).<sup>2</sup> This reformist approach enabled the Ottoman Empire to shine as one of the few societies that remained largely independent during the era of 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialism. In fact, experiences and solutions developed by the Ottomans during the 130-year administrative reform process had an impact on societies all over the world - societies that were otherwise unable to respond to Western dominance due to the lack of a deep-rooted tradition on which the Ottoman Empire relied (Findley, 2019: 29-31). According to Sean McMeekin, citing Herbert A. Gibbons, it is astonishing that the Ottoman Empire persisted for as long as it did. From this perspective, although the Ottoman Empire’s territories were much more appealing to predatory European states than distant lands and were therefore under tremendous pressure, the Ottomans withstood European attacks far better than the Aztecs and Incas in America, the Mughal dynasty of India, the Manchus of China, the Qajar shahs of Persia, and the entire African continent (McMeekin, 2019: 30).

However, a distinct aspect of Western expansionism began to impact the Ottoman Empire. While commemorating the centennial of the French Revolution in 1889, François Georgeon mentioned that a group of students from the Military Medical School in Istanbul secretly laid the groundwork for a movement known as the Young Turks against Abdülhamid’s regime (Georgeon, 2006: 120-21). This group, first known as Young Ottomans and then Young Turks, formed the backbone of the Committee of Union and Progress, which was instrumental in dethroning Abdülhamid II in 1908 (Hanioglu 1995: 71-72). Claiming to be the successors of the French Revolution, their first goal was the sultan’s dethronement and proclaiming a constitution. According to Georgeon, the Young Turks, who attended the classes of historians such as Albert Sorel and Emile Boutmy at the *École des Sciences Politiques* and were influenced by their views of the French Revolution, were more inspired by the French Third Republic’s vision of “radical” revolution (Georgeon, 2006: 120-21). Thus, Western expansionism reached the Ottoman territories through Western-style educational institutions established for the training of army officers and students sent abroad. It, thus, became clear that the new generations of a defeated society would be unable to resist the West, which used its colonial-based financial power to provide not only military but also cultural tools. This process reached a tipping point with the emergence of a view among students receiving Western-style education that the West was superior to the East not only militarily but also spiritually and ideationally. Students

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2 Henry Kissinger disregards the solutions generated by the Ottoman Empire based on its own traditions and circumstances, and explains the process from a modernity-centric perspective claiming that the “Ottoman Empire began to get infected when the strict religious groups in the palace resisted against modernization.”

with similar views banded together in peer solidarity, which eventually led to the emergence of the first organized internal opposition to the Ottoman Empire (Ergut & Uysal, 2012: 81), which eventually led to the emergence of the first organized internal opposition to the Ottoman Empire. Even though these opposition movements, which were organized in the field of education and were well-known for their opposition to Abdülhamid II, believed in the philosophical superiority of the West, their fundamental question was "How can this state be saved?" (Lewis, 2000: 212) Early views advocated that the only remedy to overcome the failure against the West was to recognize its superiority in military and technological terms, as well as in the generation of knowledge. These views also emerged within this movement and gained many followers.

Although some of the answers produced by the established Ottoman order paradoxically constituted the foundation of its opposition, the Ottoman establishment was confronted with the question "How can this state be saved?" long before the aforementioned opposition movements. In addition to military and educational measures, the establishment made a series of intellectual/political moves to reverse the political developments. These policies or styles of politics, according to Yusuf Akçura, can be classified into three categories. The first is Ottomanism (Ottoman unity), whose goal was to build an "Ottoman nation" that blended different elements, similar to the United States. This idea was developed during the reign of Mahmud II, and although it was in the spirit of the time and was supported by Ali and Fuat Pashas, it was weakened by the rise of German nationalism. When the destructive effects of nationalist movements on the Ottoman territory were realized, Islamism was adopted as a different style of politics after the ideal of Ottomanism failed. Islamism was presented as an alternative nationalism emphasizing the national system. Abdülhamid II adopted the Islamism policy, which was even mentioned in diplomatic correspondence during Abdülaziz's final years. This policy was implemented to put an end to the rebellions and provocations that began in the southern regions that were densely populated by Arabs and to keep the Muslim population of the empire together. However, due to the incapacity to quell the rebellions in the south and the rise of Arab nationalism, Islamism was destined to fail. As a result, the Pan-Turkism policy was implemented to keep the Turkish community united as the empire's founding and most populous ethnic element. The pan-Turkism policy, like the Islamic policy, is universal and extends wherever Turks live (Ülken, 2013: 573-574).

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state adopted these three political styles consecutively and implemented them dynamically in response to changing circumstances. The motivation behind these approaches, which could be considered as state policies, was not to view the Ottoman Empire as a historical stage that needed to be overcome but instead to preserve the empire along

with the state and society and to avoid transforming them into something other than what they were.

Westernism, on the other hand, is a completely different political style that became influential when the aforementioned opposition students began to fill positions in the bureaucracy (Mardin, 1997: 16). This movement gained strength as the center of power shifted from the palace to the Sublime Porte, particularly during the reign of Mahmud II. During this period, the traditional scribal service (*kalemiye*) began to be transformed into a structure resembling modern bureaucracy, and bureaucracy emerged as an independent power that was extremely difficult to control. In fact, when reformist Foreign Minister Reşit Pasha read the Imperial Edict of Gülhane (*Gülhane Hatt-ı Şerif*) on November 3, 1839, he intended not only to ease Western states' pressure on the empire but also to represent the aspirations of Ottoman bureaucrats, who had visited Europe, spoke European languages, and had adopted classical liberal thoughts, and who sought to be relieved from their vulnerable positions as the sultan's subjects (Zürcher, 1995: 78-80) and gain control over the state. The Edict was recorded as one of the most powerful manifestations of Westernism as a political approach and one of the first triumphs of Westerners as a group. This is why Western newspapers portrayed the Ottoman Empire's domestic transformation as "a kind of evidence of joining the Great European family"<sup>3</sup> and a "triumph of the Western civilization."

The groups supporting juridical Westernism seized power during the final years of the Ottoman Empire and acted with the notion that one could catch up with the West by adopting the Western philosophy in its entirety (Ortaylı, 2001: 230). According to Orhan Türkdoğan, the groups seeking to implement policies that would transform Westernism into a kind of philosophical migration introduced an imitation mechanism rather than a mental process characterized by understanding, comprehension, recognition, and digestion. This approach contributed to the persistence of imitation over creativity in subsequent cultural exchanges (Türkdoğan, 2012: 368).

Despite differences in methods and philosophical preferences, it is clear that the common ground between the Ottoman state policy and the opposing classes, which had received Western-style education and saw the West as superior, was their desire to prevent the empire from dissolving (Lewis, 2000: 212). Both viewpoints believed that necessary conditions for competing with the rising Western power needed to be in place to avoid this outcome, and major policies needed to be adopted to achieve it.

However, neither the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ottoman bureaucracy and high palace officials nor the Ottoman intelligentsia referred to these movements as

3 Orhan Türkdoğan quoting the newspaper *Le Temps* (November 9, 1839) in *Türk Toplum Sistemi ve Yapısal Sorunları*, p. 371.

modernization movements. Identifying these efforts as "modernization efforts" is associated with the subsequent period, particularly the process that began after the 1950s and is primarily political in nature. This becomes clear when we analyze the theory of modernization and the political/academic climate that gave rise to this concept.

### **The Concept of Modernization and Modernization Theory**

Modernity emerged as a direct result of capitalism. According to S. N. Eisenstadt, modernity, the practice typical to Western societies, emerged as a result of the changes that took place in the social, economic, and political systems in Western Europe and North America from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Eisenstadt, 2007: 11). When confronted with the West's military and economic power, many societies sought ways to resist it, and within that context, they voluntarily introduced Western-made items, particularly military and technological products, to their lands. However, history shows that these efforts were not successful, and no single society emerged that could stand up to Western expansionism and resist being conquered. Along with the West's military superiority, cultural expansionism contributed significantly to events unfolding in this direction. The items initially transferred to resist the West and to defend their own social/national existence brought with them the culture of the world to which they belonged and small islets of power, mostly composed of ruling elites who adopted the culture of the hostile society at varying rates, emerged within these societies. Thus, these societies which came within a hair's breadth of the enemy society's military pressure, on the one hand, and which were caught in a mentality conflict with their elites who admired the enemy society's culture, on the other, were taken over by the West at various times.

### **"Modernization Theory" as a Political Construct**

"Modernization Theory" is a theory coined after 1945 that examines the stages of social development based on industrialization and compiles it to provide non-Western societies with paths to follow. According to Madan Sarup, this concept and all of the developments that it evokes, such as scientific discoveries, technological innovations, advances in the industry, population movements, urbanization, the establishment of nation-states, and various socio-economic changes brought about by mass political movements, are not independent of the emergence of the capitalist world market (Sarup, 1995: 187). The latter and the dynamics underlying capitalism, in general, have given the concept of modernization its main characteristics. These characteristics can be seen in the West's wide-scale economic strategy. According to David Landes, the first capital accumulation that allowed capitalist expansionism to appear on the historical stage and the role played by the non-Western world at this historical moment continued in subsequent periods. After a certain point,

the activities that revealed the West's initial capital accumulation, which Landes mentioned and were essentially illegitimate, began to be abandoned by the Western world, but the Western perspective persisted. The role assigned to the non-Western world has been that of not objecting to the transfer of its underground and ground riches to the West as cheap raw materials; functioning as lucrative markets for Western-manufactured goods; and serving as cheap labor whenever necessary. Despite encountering local resistance, the West carried out this strategy, with "economic" activities such as colonization, looting, smuggling, piracy, and enslavement at its very center. (Landes, 1995: 72-73) After sufficient capital accumulation, it moved to a different phase.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, there was a paradigm shift away from illegitimate methods that cannot be justified discursively toward a more legitimate ground that permits doing so. Throughout this process, politics and diplomacy were organized and instrumentalized on a global scale with the goal of ensuring that international trade served the interests of the West. In accordance with this goal, international institutions were established, and non-Western countries were compelled to adhere to this design through political, military, and economic pressures. These dynamics, which persisted through the organization of international trade and the systematic and institutional regulation of relations established with the rest of the world from the second half of the twentieth century onward, have gained an academic framework through modernization theses which argue that the West should be taken as a model and that the non-Western world should go through the same stages of development by following in the footsteps of the former.

According to Roland Robertson, the modernization argument, which began to be discussed after 1945 and became popular in the 1960s, is directly related to the traditional sociological perspective of transition from "community" (*Gemeinschaft*) to "society" (*Gesellschaft*). Modernization theories, he claims, were developed to discuss what modern life brought and took from Europe and North America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and how these would relate to the rest of the world (Robertson, 1992: 11). When the United States became influential in world politics after 1945, a heated debate erupted around this viewpoint, the frame of which was formed by American academic circles, and many different definitions of modernization emerged. According to Fahrettin Altun, Anthony D. Smith evaluates modernization definitions under three categories: modernization as "a process of social change or the sum of such processes that are theoretically universal in space and time"; modernization as a historical experience "distinguished by secularization and the rise of capitalism," often traced back to the Renaissance and the Reformation; and modernization as a concept characterizing "a series of policies pursued by leaders or elites of developing countries." (Altun, 2011: 12) The concept of modernization, according to Dankwart A. Rustow and Robert E. Ward, refers to the "colossal transformation in Western Europe that began at the end of

the Middle Ages and today includes even the most distant countries." (Altun, 2011: 12) Wilbert E. Moore defines modernization as "contemporary transformations of 'traditional' or 'underdeveloped' countries in order to acquire the economic and other structural characteristics of technologically advanced nations." (Altun, 2011: 12) Eisenstadt defines modernization as the transformations that occurred as a result of economic, political, and social processes that developed in Western Europe and North America from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, then spread to other European states, and finally to Asia, Africa, and South America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. David Apter, on the other hand, considers modernization as a social system that has the ability to be new constantly; employs change as its main belief; and claims that it contains differentiated, flexible social structures and a social skeleton that provides the knowledge and skills required to live in a technologically advanced world (Altun, 2011: 12). All definitions converge on the point that the target of the modernization paradigm is always non-Western parts of the world.

According to İnalçık, the modernization theory or program, like the classical theories of Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and, to a lesser extent, Max Weber, is based on the adoption of the main theoretical projects and frameworks that emerged in early European modernity, namely phenomena such as social differentiation, urbanization, industrialization, by all societies seeking modernization (İnalçık, 2011: 369-70). Eisenstadt does not distinguish between modern and modernizing societies and describes the modernization process as an unavoidable process that began at different times for different societies. He explains concrete modernization phenomena such as social differentiation and specialization, markets in economic life, party activities and voting in politics, bureaucratic organization and the improvement of functions in many institutional areas, the distinction between professional and political roles, and family and kinship roles. In the economic field, he offers the development of cutting-edge technology; the emergence of secondary (industrial and commercial) and tertiary (service) sectors as opposed to key sectors that provide core services; increase in production, consumption, marketing; specialization; the growth of fields of activity; the increase in the complexity of markets, goods, and workers; and the expansion of financial markets. In the political field, he discusses the concentration of power by central, legal, administrative, and political instruments; the potential power to contact large segments of society; and democracies and populism. In the cultural field, Eisenstadt discusses mass education, mass media, the increase of interaction between cultural elites and large masses in order to spread secular education and literacy; and the emergence of a new cultural perspective, which is at the zenith of all these developments. This viewpoint manifests itself as an emphasis on progress and development; the spontaneous expression of happiness, abilities, and emotions; the emergence of individuality as a moral value; and the simultaneous suppression of the individual's dignity and an emphasis on

efficiency (Eisenstadt, 2007: 13-16). As a result, modernization is an outcome of the West's attempt to sustain its modernity experience in accordance with the roles it has assigned to the non-Western world. Its main thesis is that if the formulae proposed by the West are accepted, non-Western societies will share in the West's wealth and success. Acceptance of this thesis by non-Western societies directly results in the importation of the modernization paradigm developed in Western academies and all the solution proposals it contains.

Early modernization theorists were preoccupied with objectively measurable characteristics such as education, occupation, literacy, income, and wealth, and showed little interest in the subjective and interpretive aspects of modernization. When discussing culture, references to concepts such as Protestant ethics and political participation are made in the hope of eliciting disciplined work. Robertson points out that the modernization theories that emerged during this first period were discussed in terms of "*convergence and divergence*." Accordingly, proponents of convergence argue that all societies progress towards the same point at different rates. The birth of the "industrial man" is the culmination of this process. Divergence thesis proponents believe that the same point will be reached in different ways and forms, referring to plural modernities. These arguments, in essence, envision a monolithic "world system" and an ideal model in which all societies become identical. Robertson also mentions a third point of view proposed by Zygmunt Bauman: *invariance*. According to Bauman, societies mostly converge in economic and technological aspects, diverge in social relations, and remain unchanged in some others. Robertson believes that this development introduces "*social continuity*" to modernization discussions but that this point of view is only taken into account by a few who speak from within the paradigm. According to Robertson and J. P. Nettle, modernization is much more "subjective," fluid, and "cultural" than many modernization theorists demonstrate in their "objective" approach. Using Japan's Meiji era and Russia's Peter I period, which can be referred to as "latecomers" as examples, it becomes evident that the latter and all societies that have implemented the modernization project are in mutual interaction with one another. This demonstrates the *reflexive* character of modernity. Robertson also refers to the "world systems" theory proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein in the 1970s under the category of modernization theories. According to Wallerstein, modernization theory's classical framework construes non-Western societies comparatively to Western societies. Western societies serve as the primary frame of reference in this perspective. It is claimed that all societies are comprehended within a pattern of inter-societal systematic relations, that capitalism grows stronger as the system expands, that societies play their roles in the world system based on their place in the systematic global division of labor, and that political and military relations continue reciprocally (Robertson, 1992: 12).

Altun draws attention to certain a priori present in the road map laid out for societies within the framework of modernization theory. Non-Western societies, Altun argues, must systematically carry out an *internal purge* and *external intervention* in order to achieve their goal of modernization. In any case, the traditional elements that stand in the way of modernity must be removed from the social sphere and historical memory. In terms of external intervention processes, the *image of the West* as a transcendent concept and the *American model* as a practical demonstration are consecrated. Non-Western societies that want to modernize must follow the United States' footsteps, the *world's leading society*. External intervention mechanisms should be established in this context, and these mechanisms, organized on an international scale, should assist other societies within the world order designed by the U.S. In addition to the political regulations in question, it should be possible to raise local *modernizing elites* in non-Western societies, which will have the opportunity to influence society. These elites, which emerge as social actors who have internalized Western values, should be given considerable space to direct the modernization processes. Altun argues that it has been attempted to form a theoretical framework around issues such as how intercommunal institutions can construct intervention areas in a healthy way and to what extent various social leaders, such as intellectuals, the military, and actors who are viewed as drivers of change and innovators in developing countries, can fulfil their "mission to pave the way for history" (Altun, 2011: 154-55).

The main reason for the emergence of modernization theory and its widespread discussion around the world is the steps taken by Europe and then the United States to expand the capitalist world market following their rise as military, commercial, and political powers. During this period, the United States and Europe launched a massive propaganda campaign (Kaynar, 2020: 624-26) against non-Western societies, taking advantage of all the opportunities provided by the audio, written, and visual mass media. With the help of these efforts, they consolidated their position as hegemonic powers in the historical scene. The recognition of the West as a teacher and the non-Western world as a student is the most important feature determining the nature of these discussions. The "recipient civilization/contributing civilization" categorization, whose most definite forms are encountered in the experiences of colonialism and imperialism, is active here, and a top-down road map is dictated to all societies under the leadership of the U.S. Societies that do not adhere to this road map would be unable to participate in global trade or find a place in the global division of labor. Modernization practices, which appear to be the preferred path, are essentially a series of bitter pills that non-Western societies must swallow in order to remain in the international system. Non-Western communities are coded as either raw material suppliers, cheap labor, or profitable markets for finished goods in this form of relationship, and reversing the relationship is structurally impossible.

According to Ronald Inglehart, modernization studies played an active role in social sciences in the 1950s and early 1960s but lost prominence in the 1970s. Inglehart conducted a detailed study of 43 countries in 1995, asserting that the modernization framework was a functional system, evoking Lucian Pye's 1990 thesis, in which he stated that a return to modernization studies was necessary (Inglehart, 1997: 8). Following the publication of this work in 1997, the issue of modernization resurfaced as a global topic of discussion.

### **Is it possible to speak of an "Ottoman modernization"?**

In light of all this information, it is apparent that neither Western reforms recorded in the history of the Republic of Türkiye prior to 1945 nor movements of renovation and reform introduced in the last century of the Ottoman Empire can be regarded as modernizations. According to the Ottoman experience, even if the initiatives were taken and practices are known as renovation, reform, and innovation were implemented as a result of compelling historical conditions in order to achieve the technical superiority of the West, they emerged as a result of an internal choice. The Ottoman elites established their framework and put it into practice. The practices that went on after 1923 as an extension of the Ottoman Empire's reform agenda and the spread of Western perspectives in society also emerged as a result of domestic debates and were based on choices. Therefore, one cannot speak of "Ottoman modernization" in the same way that one cannot speak of "Turkish modernization" prior to 1945.

The Ottoman Empire was well aware of modernity developments in the West from an early date and wanted to keep abreast of these developments at various levels. According to A. Adnan Adıvar, Selim III, in particular, closely followed the French Revolution, which occurred during his reign, and took steps to build up an army capable of opposing the European armies trained in accordance with modern science and techniques. In this framework, he considered renovating the armory and brought engineers from France and Sweden to establish factories (1790). However, the state considered that relying on the science and techniques of foreign engineers would prove unreliable and thus decided to establish a modern school of mathematics and artillery to train officers and military engineers. The Imperial School of Military Engineering was founded in this period, and it later merged with the Imperial School of Naval Engineering and started to serve as a single school. Later, initiatives to write and translate scientific publications to be taught there began. With an edict of Selim III, arithmetic, geometry, geography, trigonometry, algebra, topography, military history, integral and differential calculus, mechanics, astronomy, military engineering, and ballistics were added to the curriculum, in addition to Turkish, Arabic, and French (Adıvar, 1970: 187-88).

Hanioglu underlines that scientific analyses were prevailing at that time. Accordingly, in a short time, "The people of Europe built America and even

spread to other continents. Even though other nations cannot depart from the coasts of their own countries, Europeans travel from one pole of the globe to the other under the guidance of science and industry." (Hanioğlu, 1986: 18). This demonstrates that functions assumed by science were praised, and supporters of renovation, who were aware of the need for "*knowledge and science*," began to rise fast among the empire's intellectuals. It became the most notable feature of the time that "engineers" were introduced as a new figure in narratives that contained dialogues about how to reform a province, and that the fundamental problem highlighted was awareness of "*knowledge and science*" (Hanioğlu, 1986: 18). Countless articles and anecdotes about this issue made an indelible mark on the era. Among them is an article authored by Munif Pasha, representing the zeitgeist of the time:

Apart from the major difference between scholars and illiterates in terms of prosperity and well-being, it is evident proof of our argument that illiterates are always defeated and enslaved by contemporary nations, and a small community like Britain can enslave and occupy foreign states that are twenty times larger than itself, and it can influence the entire world to some extent. Some people prefer a nomadic and simple life to civilisation; this is a completely erroneous view. Nothing can be said about those who support this erroneous view other than they are "ill-intentioned" or "malevolent". It is a great fallacy for some illiterate people to claim that science produces a corrupt belief. However, the foolish friends of religion profess such an impertinent statement out of zealotry, but they actually ruin religion. (Hanioğlu 1986:19)

The emphasis on knowledge and science with extremely presumptuous statements also gave rise to the idea of innovation. According to Hanioğlu, the magic component of the era was "New Progress". The phrase "progress" gained popularity in the sense used by Marquis de Condorcet and Jacques Turgot. For the metropolitan bureaucrats and upper classes who were familiar with the Western culture in addition to its science, the phrases "knowledge and science" and "development" summed up what was understood by Europe and its superiority. Hanioğlu carefully underlines that the science discussed here was given a transcendent identity. He argues that it was quite simple to make such a change in a society that saw science and scientific knowledge as synonymous with "religion." Similarly, the "need for progress" was an idea that emerged as a result of cultivating Islamic thought. However, the concepts of "new progress" and "new science" that were the path to that progress were, above all, of tangible worth. The superiority of "science," which was prepared to take on all the roles played by religion, including legitimacy, with its new identity, was based on this tangible nature, and its supporters never hesitated to express this feature (Hanioğlu 1986: 21).

Moving on from knowledge and science, after the concepts of progress and innovation became clear, extremely radical ideas began to gain a foothold in a dual structure that saw society divided between adopters and non-adopters of these concepts. Unhesitatingly stating that the gap between these two groups constituted the major divide in society, Şemseddin Sami Bey wrote,

In today's world, a man familiar with knowledge and science does not rely on anything else. Today, science has advanced to the point that it is no longer an impossible dream, a shadow, an illusion, but a tangible and evident reality that can be seen, touched, and the scent of its flower can be smelled, and the flavour of its fruit can be tasted... Just as the people of Egypt and India were formerly separated into classes, we notice that the people of civilised nations are still divided into three classes even today: scientists, artists and workers... (Hanioglu, 1986: 18-19)

This process continued with the spread of statements claiming that engaging with science would liberate people from superstitious beliefs (mostly Islamic beliefs), that even cases such as child labor are legitimized through scientific judgments, and that the ground had been laid to put aside ethical perspectives completely. Later, like in Europe, biological materialism and the views of Charles Darwin influenced these groups, and a new generation emerged among the Ottoman intellectuals and bureaucracy (Hanioglu, 1986: 22-26).

During the Ottoman Empire's final years, this dissidence among the elites also led to some disagreements about how to address the problem of confronting the West in particular. Nonetheless, there was no dissidence about introducing several innovations or reforms based on knowledge and science - there was actually an agreement among Ottoman elites on this. The policies implemented during this period were always referred to as "innovation, novation, reform, and progress."

Although the analyses produced in the Ottoman Empire and the mechanisms provided to resist the West yielded results for over a century at various levels, they failed to prevent the inevitable ending. With World War I, the Western world succeeded in ending the Ottoman Empire and sharing its territory. After the West recovered from the Great Depression of 1929, one of the most severe crises of capitalism, it found itself embroiled in a new struggle for division with World War II, and the United States emerged stronger as a result of this struggle. After 1945, the world moved forward to a new international organization led by the United States. International political, judicial, and economic organizations that would ensure the West's leading position and interests were established following 1945 under U.S. leadership. After 1945, the countries whose ground and underground resources were transported to the West under the classical colonialism led by Britain were affiliated with the center in a mechanism called "new colonialism." No society that wished to survive thereafter had any choice but to become a part of the "international"

system. Under the leadership of the West, countries became involved in the global organization of cooperation, and they were given various recipes to achieve this most efficiently. Within this framework, the modernization paradigm is one of the most effective instruments used for this purpose. After the 1950s, the fundamental question of the modernization paradigm, which was developed at universities in the United States, was how to conduct individual analyses of countries that would be integrated into the global system and provide prescriptions for their modernization. Given that it was decades after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire when this paradigm was introduced, one could argue that the Ottomans did not deal with the paradigm of modernization or the theory of modernization and that when confronted by the West, they used their unique solutions, allowing them to resist Western expansionism for much longer than other civilizations.

### Conclusion

"West" is intrinsic to modernity so that "modernity" as a term serves merely to describe the unique experience of the Western world. From this perspective, the concept of modernity has no meaningful equivalent in the non-Western world.<sup>4</sup> Although the term "modernity" is widely used while speaking about the historical experience of the non-Western world, this is incorrect, as are all anachronistic claims. On the other hand, there is a large body of literature that attempts to explain the way non-Western communities survive in the face of the West's new position as a result of its modernity experience. Almost all of this literature was written from a modernity-centric perspective that views the West's modernity experience as the ultimate goal and seeks to explain the non-Western world through some form of "improvement." The explanation attempts mentioned above, which may be described as mostly orientalist prior to 1945, emerged as the "paradigm of modernization" after 1945.

The critical aspect of this paradigm may be that it is a discursive construction of Western academic circles, primarily within U.S. universities, developed for the non-Western world after 1945 and that its limits were artificially defined. The concept of "modernization" developed within this paradigm, and the "theory of modernization," built on this concept, emerged as a theoretical/political framework that describes how the non-Western world can become more like the West or that reviews the experiences of the communities aspiring to be like the West, compiling their failures or good practices. From this perspective, one can easily argue that the non-Western world referred to its problem of confronting the West and its solutions for that problem with a variety of names, but the paradigm of modernization emerged as a post-1945 phenomenon. There were some changes after 1945: societies were no

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4 For a different perspective on multiple modernities see Atsuko Ichijo, *Nationalism and Multiple Modernities, Europe and Beyond*, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

longer permitted to use their unique solutions to the problem of confronting the West; the West once again offered solutions and prescriptions for the target societies; and the target societies were denied their right to choose on the matter. As a direct result of this forced choice, these societies had to abandon their solution proposals for resistance toward the West, and acknowledge the Western dominance, consciously or unconsciously, at a systemic level by importing the modernization paradigm. Upon this, they were integrated into the international system and trade network formed in accordance with the interests of the West, and they agreed to work in line with these interests.

On the other hand, the societies that are consoled with the promise of success and motivated by the dream of achieving wealth as Westerners did, failed to achieve the objective of “modernization” regardless of how hard they tried. Although there are attempts to obscure this fact through new theoretical initiatives like “multiple modernizations” or “multiple modernities,” it cannot be concealed that there is an obvious failure. However, this failure is an unavoidable consequence of the “paradigm of modernization” because the majority of tangible and intangible indicators put forth by the West are not significant from a cultural, historical, or social perspective for the non-Western world. Therefore, the steps towards modernization remain cursory, and amorphous community structures emerge. That said, societies are bound to absolute failure by approaches that view history and non-Western societies from this perspective and try to explain them on a true or false scale. This inevitable failure ensures that societies do not question why they cannot attain a share of the prosperity and success of the West, despite having acknowledged the Western dominance and agreeing to play the role assigned to them in the world system. These societies, which accept being classified as developing or underdeveloped, continue their hopeless attempts with a yearning for the day they will succeed and in the meantime, remain within the system. As suggested by the “paradigm of modernization,” these countries play the roles assigned to them from the very beginning, and they continue to lose in order for the West to win by providing cheap raw materials and labor and maintaining their position as a market for value-added products created by the West.

This type of relationship between the Western world and the non-Western world is a post-1945 phenomenon, and it is anachronistic to use the concept of “modernization” that accompanies this phenomenon to characterize the period preceding 1945. It is understood that this anachronism is used to provide a historical context for the modernization paradigm and to turn it into a narrative by linking it to non-Western societies’ past experiences. The discussions about “Ottoman modernization” or “Turkish modernization,” which began among our academics, especially after the 1970s and peaked after the 1980s, are of a similar character. Although the concept of “Ottoman modernization” first emerged in the 1960s in studies at U.S. universities, this term was recognized especially after the 1970s and 1980s, and terms like “Ottoman

modernization" or "Turkish modernization" were used in academic works in this field without argument. However, it is impossible to speak of a potential "Ottoman modernization" within the context of the abovementioned claims. It is hardly hyperbole to argue that the discussions about Ottoman modernization were injected into our academia as a retrospective effort of review and interpretation, and that they were later adopted without being questioned.

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