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MODERNIZATION, EUROPEANIZATION AND AESTHETIC MODERNITY IN THE BALKANS

Abstract: The author argues that the terms modernization and Europeanization should not be used interchangeably, as has been the case in the Balkans – as well as in many non-European societies – since the early nineteenth century. Instead, the former should be reserved for the process of becoming modern, while the latter can designate the process of importing or imitating north-west European everyday and high culture, which did not substantially contribute to political, social and economic modernization. In both modernization and Europeanization the key concept was copying. In aesthetic modernization at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, copying was explicitly rejected, thus demonstrating that (aesthetic) modernity can and should be multiple, and in the process it aestheticized the nation.

Keywords: modernization, Europeanization

The terms modernization and Europeanization tend to be used to designate the same process: the process of becoming modern. As what is sometimes called the original modernity is found in north-west Europe – England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Belgium and France – many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social reformers, statesmen, intellectuals and scholars in the Balkans used these two terms interchangeably, and we collectively inherited this equation. In this chapter we will try to explain the reasons for de-coupling modernization and Europeanization, and to show that they should be used to designate two different processes. We will begin by tracing the development of the standard narrative of modernity, show how it was contaminated by the post-war American modernization theory, and recount the modifications the standard narrative went through after the development of the notion of multiple modernities. We shall then move on to exploring the two meanings Europeanization can preserve after being decoupled from modernization, and finally focus on the notion of aesthetic modernity in the Balkans. The key term in this discussion will be the idea of copying: we shall see that for the modernizing elites in the Balkans the shortest way to modernity was copying or imitating north-west European results of the process of modernization, which resulted in the positions incompatible with the notion of multiple modernities. The aesthetic modernity, however, explicitly rejected copying, and thus exemplified the idea inherent in the notion of multiple modernities: that there is more than one way of being modern. We shall also demonstrate how the demand for creating modern national cultures, voiced by Balkan ideologists of modernization, was implemented in aesthetic modernity: instead

of using culture to support nation building, as was regularly the case in the nineteenth century, modernity aestheticized national cultures.

1.

The standard narrative of modernity says that it appears as a response to a number of challenges, which were gradually brought about by historical developments in three related but distinct spheres of human existence: sometime at the end of the eighteenth or at the beginning of the nineteenth century – thus the story goes – the way we create knowledge, live together and reproduce the material base of our existence radically changed, and this marks the true beginning of modernity. As it initially occurred in the north-western corner of the European continent, we call the sum of these changes European or Western (to include the complementary developments in North America) modernity. As our argument largely depends on the agreement about the nature and extent of these changes, we will have to spend some time reminding the reader of what is otherwise known as *the common core of modernity*.

First, there was a number of changes which are regularly pointed at by the marker *individualism*. It does not mean that modern humans cease being members of larger collectives and continue living as isolated monades, and that, consequently, their participation in collectives such as classes or nations indicates their lapsed modernity, or inability to become modern, as one school in Serbian historiography assumes. Rather, it refers to the increasing significance of individual *autonomy* in knowing the world and living in it together with other individuals. The modern culture is individualist, as Charles Taylor's succinct summary goes,

in the three senses [...]: it prizes autonomy; it gives an important place to self-exploration, in particular of feeling; and its visions of the good life generally involve personal commitment. As a consequence, in its political language, it formulates the immunities due people in terms of subjective rights. Because of its egalitarian bent, it conceives these rights as universal.¹

The moderns are autonomous – i.e. giving laws to themselves, instead of following laws given to them – first and foremost in knowing the world: instead of following the knowledge given to them in holy scriptures or oral traditions, they face the world as autonomous knowing subjects and set the parameters of knowledge themselves. The assumption being, of course, that the world lends itself to be known, by acquiring knowledge about it the moderns became capable of intervening in it, modifying it as to suit their

1 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 305.

needs better, or mastering it completely. The common core of modernity narrative traces the development of the autonomous knowing individual from Descartes (in some version from the Renaissance) to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, when the supreme transcendental authority was finally overthrown. In this sense, individualism in this narrative is not opposed by collectivism, but has the same meaning as secularism: the moderns are individuals free to produce knowledge independently of any religious tradition. This leads to the second group of changes, usually referred to as Industrial Revolution, to which we will return shortly.

The second meaning of individualism is political: the moderns are freed from all traditional political authorities and legitimations of political order. As autonomous and equal individuals they are free to construct a political order which suits them best. This also means a recognition that autonomous individuals may have different goals and interests, and that they do not need to agree on the so-called first principles: namely, that they may offer different answers to the question “what is good”. If the first meaning of individualism implied that the moderns are endowed with reason, the second gives them freedom, both in the form of individual rights and of collective self-determination, i.e. popular sovereignty. The epitome of both was found in two political revolutions: the American in 1776 and the French in 1789.

Epistemically and politically free individuals unleashed a historically unprecedented tide of creativity, putting to good use the knowledge acquired rationally and constructing means to make the satisfaction of human needs easier: this aspect of modernity is called the Industrial Revolution, as a shorthand for development, progress, expansion and growth. The new, dynamic way of production was called capitalism and created self-regulating free markets, in which free, autonomous and rational individuals competed for profit, and freely sold their labour (as opposed to being forced to work on a lord’s land).

To these three basic aspects – a secular, rational, autonomous individual, endowed with universal rights and liberties, capable of collective self-determination and of economic development and growth in the conditions created by self-regulated free markets – the *institutional description* of modernity would add several others, derived from the basic ones: urbanization, mass communications, modern education, law-based bureaucratic administration, democratic and territorial nation-state. The early *critical analysis*, however, emphasised several other features of modernity, none of them particularly favourable. Karl Marx and Max Weber immediately come to mind, but they did have a predecessor, whose intuitions pointed the way for Marx’s and Weber’s analyses: Goethe’s *Faust, Part Two*. Goethe’s theme was modernization, Marshal Berman claimed, and he saw it

as a force for *creative destruction*, capable of everything but stability.² Marx learnt from Goethe that the trouble with capitalism was that it destroyed the possibilities it had created.³ It turns all human relations into relations between things and alienates us from each other and ultimately from ourselves. Weber also followed Goethe,⁴ and warned of the principle of abstraction at work in large-scale bureaucratic systems – corporations, states, parties – which would eventually made them into iron cages, while modernity simultaneously disenchant the world. Adorno and Horkheimer saw in the culture industry not only commodification of culture, but a mechanism for subtle control of thought, an authoritarian and totalitarian apparatus which emerged from the cultivated field of rationality. Not too dissimilar from them, Michel Foucault saw modernity as eliminating certain forms of oppression only to introduce many new ones, subtler and all-encompassing.⁵ And finally, *European* modernity demonstrated its disciplinary, violent aspect in its colonial projects: this was its *darker side*.⁶ These critical analyses of modernity are part and parcel of our common understanding of modernity not as a set of institutions, but of modernity as experience.

The standard narrative of modernity also claims that it had a birth-place – the north-western corner of Europe – wherefrom it spread in concentric circles: this is the process called modernization. The spaces in which modernity did not come into being all by itself, it was either eagerly embraced by the modernizing elites, or had it imposed on them by the already modernized societies. In both cases, modernization progressed through resistance and struggle. As someone was always standing to gain

2 Marshal Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 48.

3 Ibid, p. 98.

4 On Goethe's influence on Weber's theory of modernity in Alan Sica, "Reasonable Science, Unreasonable Life: The Happy Fictions of Marx, Weber and Social Theory", in Robert J. Antonio and Ronald M. Glassman (eds), *Marx – Weber Dialogue* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1985).

5 On the similarities between Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Foucault conclusions in *Discipline and Punish* see Axel Honneth, "Foucault and Adorno: Two forms of the critique of modernity", *Thesis Eleven*, 15.1 (1986).

6 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). Or the other way around: just as the bourgeoisie had to discipline itself before it set out to discipline the rest of society, Europe had to modernise/colonise itself before it did so with the rest of the world. In the final pages of his *Peasants into Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914* (London: Chatto and Windis, 1979) Eugen Weber sums up the modernization of rural France in the following manner: "What happened was akin to colonization, and may be easier to understand if one bears this in mind". Ibid, 486.

or to lose by abandoning the traditional setup, modernization always meant conflict. After the dust settled, modernity always appeared victorious, the standard narrative maintains, as it simply was a better way of managing human affairs than any of the traditional orders, not least because it has built-in mechanisms for self-correction and adaptation. This is the moment in which the institutional analysis of modernity acquires its own philosophy of history: we are not all modern simply by virtue of living in the present, but we all have the capacity to become such by following the example of institutional changes set by the first moderns who appeared in the north-west corner of Europe, and the process of modernization will eventually result in the whole planet becoming modern in the same way. This idea is known as the *convergence hypothesis*.

A slimmed-down and pragmatic version of this standard narrative, which appeared in the United States after the Second World War, today is known as *the modernization theory*. It became the master plot of American social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s, and influenced much of the historiography in both the US and Europe. Although, as we shall see shortly, the modernization theory crumbled in the 1970s, it was resurrected after the fall of the communist regimes in the form of the neoliberal theory of history, for which Frances Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) offers the best example. When modernization became the topic of Serbian historiography in the 1990s, it was not the standard narrative of modernity that directed its research agenda, but an even more reduced American modernization theory.

The modernization theory, maintains Michael E. Latham, was based on several assumptions:

- (1) "traditional" and "modern" societies are separated by a sharp dichotomy; (2) economic, political and social changes are integrated and interdependent; (3) development tends to proceed toward the modern state along a common, linear path; and (4) the progress of developing societies can be dramatically accelerated through contact with developed ones. Theorists placed Western, industrial, capitalist democracies, and the United States in particular, at the apex of their historical scale and then set about marking off the distance of less modern societies from that point.⁷

Modernization was fashioned as "a series of interlocked changes in economy, political institutions and social values, and the researchers' task was to create a set of empirical benchmarks with which a particular society can be placed on the universal scale – from the "traditional" ones, at the bottom, to the "modern" ones, at the top. These benchmarks were

7 Michael E. Latham, *Modernism as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 4.

derived from a postulated common pattern of development which all traditional societies had to follow, as it was imagined as the only correct one. The traditional societies were said to be “closed”, which meant “inward looking, inert, passive toward nature, superstitious, fearful of change, and economically simple”, as opposed to the modernized ones, which were “cosmopolitan, mobile, controlling of the environment, secular, welcoming of change, and characterized by a complex division of labour”.⁸ The elements from the standard narrative of modernity – urbanization, secularization, democratization, education – were imagined as working in synergy in a smooth, conflict-less process, and the idea that “modernity might be riven by internal tensions, that modernity might contain unsavoury aspects, or that modernity’s various features might play themselves out very differently in different places” was suppressed.⁹ The modernization theorists “took their ideas about the ‘modernity’ from discourses about American national identity that were taking place at the same time as the formation of the modernization paradigm”, claims Gilman.¹⁰ One striking feature of the modernization theory was its authoritarianism: its proponents “identified progress with the imposition of elite economic, social and cultural norms onto the masses”.¹¹ Although democratization was one of the key components of this process, the resolutely anti-populist modernization theorists emphasised its procedural rather than its substantive definition:

Because modern societies were too complicated for most citizens to understand, the theory went, policy decisions had to be made by experts; under complex modern conditions, democracy could only be representative, never direct. Popular involvement in practical policy decisions making had only dangerous implications. [...] “That democracy is best”, modernization theory implied, “in which the people participate least”. Keeping the people from getting “too involved” with politics remained the abiding goal of postwar American intellectuals.¹²

This can serve as a useful reminder that the opposite of “populism” is not “democracy”, but “elitism”, as Emanuel Todd recently noted.¹³ To avoid the contradiction, the modernization theorists “added another term, claiming that proper democratic practice had to involve

8 Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future. Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003, Kindle edition), loc. 107–108.

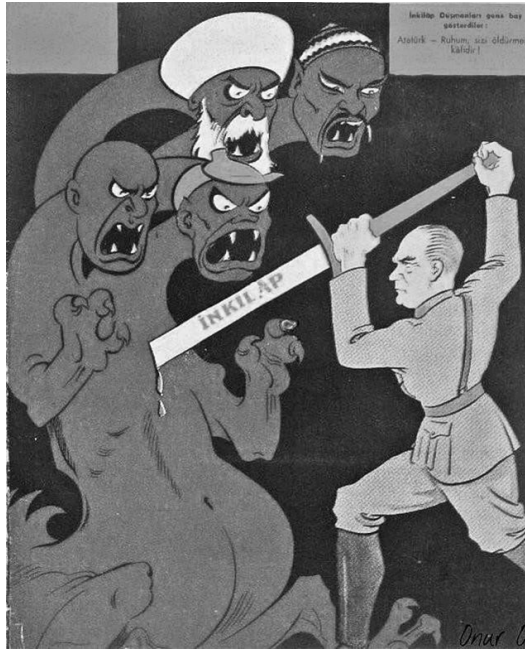
9 Ibid, loc. 114.

10 Ibid, loc. 253.

11 Ibid, loc. 152.

12 Ibid, loc. 676–681.

13 Emanuel Todd, *Lineages of Modernity. A History of Humanity from the Stone Age to Homo Americanus* (London: Polity, 2017), 256.



Cover-page of Mizah celebrating Atatürk fighting against the enemies of the Turkish revolution, June 12, 1947. Author: Ramiz Gökçe (1900–1953)

pluralism”,¹⁴ which stood for the competition for power between various elite groups, thus excluding “the masses” from political decision making. Despite the claim about the end of ideology, this theory predicted the convergence of all societies at the end of the modernization process: its expected result should have been the planetary triumph of the image of American postwar society. Modernism – not modernity – was “also an ideology, a conceptual framework that articulated a common assumption about the nature of American society and its ability to transform a world perceived as both materially and culturally deficient. [...] As practiced in the early 1960s, modernization resonated strongly with earlier ideologies of Manifest Destiny and imperialism.”¹⁵

If the modernization theory is allowed to set the research agenda, the study of modernity in the Balkans becomes a simple project: one only needs to copy the list of benchmarks, the checklist, assess the distance of the Balkan societies from the top of the hierarchy, and blame the “elites” for not knowing how, or not wanting to impose modern values, processes and institutions. However, this would mean ignoring the difficulties the modernization theory ran into in 1970s, as well as the development of

¹⁴ Nils Gilman, op. cit., loc. 691.

¹⁵ Michael E. Latham, op. cit., 5–6.



Ottoman Greek lithography celebrating the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the introduction of a constitutional regime in the Ottoman Empire. The angel holds a banner bearing the words “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”. Lithographer: Sotiris/Sotirios Christidis (1858-1940).

the standard theory of modernity in later years. As for the former, it has never been sufficiently explained why socialist modernization should be considered a pathological form of modernity: that its undeniable success did not support the convergence hypothesis was obvious enough, but if the only difference was that the capitalist-democratic modernization was conducted by elites which competed for power in a “pluralist” environment, while socialist modernization was led by an elite which rejected any form of “pluralism”, this difference does not devalue the results the latter achieved in all other aspects – namely, in urbanization, industrialization, growth, development, secularization, education, etc. Moreover, the fascist modernity would also deserve some consideration: in the 1920s Mussolini’s Italy was often praised as an example of a successful, rapid transformation of a traditional society, on a par with the authoritarian Kemalist modernization in Turkey, otherwise praised by the modernization theorists.¹⁶ The other line of criticism was mounted from the left: *the dependency theory* questioned the assumption that modernization spreads from the Western centre to the peripheries, which only benefit from the contact with the already modernized societies and from inclusion in the

16 Nils Gilman, op. cit., loc. 439.

global process of becoming modern. The dependency theory provided evidence that in the long run the terms of trade always put the peripheries at an disadvantage, instead of setting them on the path of growth and development. The critics of the modernization theory demonstrated that “underdevelopment did not result from a lack of capitalism, nor did it indicate ‘stagnation’, as modernization theory claimed, but rather it was the necessary counterpart to capitalist development in the first world”.¹⁷

Similarly, the standard narrative of modernity had to modify the assumption that the core components of modernity – individualism, capitalist free market, democracy – work in synergy to form the royal road to modernity. Not only because it had to be recognized that democracy was not a *sine qua non* of development – not only in the case of fascist and socialist modernization, but in many other societies as well – but also because it became obvious that the other supposedly core components could be modified to such an extent that they became questionable: how secular must a modern society be, in order to facilitate urbanization, industrialization, growth, development, and education? Did not many societies manage to modernize themselves while limiting free trade, imposing tariffs and protectionist economic policies?¹⁸ Did not Western European societies modify the meaning of capitalism in the long post-Second World War period of social democracy? This questioning, even before the advent of post-modernists critique, threatened to dismantle the whole standard narrative of modernity: if we cannot agree on the basic model of modernity, if even its core components become questionable, the discussion of modernity becomes meaningless, and many researchers did draw this conclusion.

However, the standard narrative survives by virtue of a modification which abandons the “checklist” and ranking tables. Instead of looking

17 Ibid, loc. 3212.

18 Lack of domestic capital and foreign industrial competition delayed industrialization in Serbia throughout the nineteenth century, says Dimitrije Djordjević, but it did make some advances in the 1880s. “However, actual industrialization started during the 1906–1911 customs war waged with Austria-Hungary, at the end of which the industrial establishments numbered 428 and the value of the industrial output increased seven times within six years”, Dimitrije Djordjević, “Ottoman Heritage Versus Modernization: Symbiosis in Serbia During the Nineteenth Century”, *Serbian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1999), 49. Djordjević also quotes John Lampe’s conclusion that “the growth rate of the last prewar decade could have turned into sustained industrialization (...) had not the First World War intervened” (Ibid, 58). This puts into perspective both the claim that modernity makes advances only in the conditions of free markets, as Serbia’s rapid industrialization occurred while the country’s main export route was closed due to the sanctions imposed by Austria-Hungary, and the claim that its slow modernization can be explained solely by the alleged resistance of Serbia’s elites to it.

for the evidence of fully meeting all prescribed criteria of modernity, it is recognized that the core components of modernity represent only a hypothetical model, which can be rarely found in reality as such. They are no more than *promissory notes*, as Björn Wittrock calls them.¹⁹ The standard narrative often conflates conceptual and empirical questions, continues Wittrock, which leads to absurd conclusions: there is a general agreement about the basic core elements which constitute modernity, but they cannot be empirically confirmed even in the societies which are considered their birthplace. If we insisted on following the checklist, we would have to admit that “modernity has a very short history, even in the European context. Modernity is suddenly reduced to a phenomenon that can be found in some parts of Western Europe during some periods of the twentieth century. [...] Maybe European institutions were never as modern as social scientists have claimed”.²⁰ We will return to this point shortly, as it is crucial for understanding possible meanings of Europeanization; at the moment, it is more important to focus on Wittrock’s proposal to consider the core elements of modernity as promissory notes – as “ever more generalized reference points in debates and in the formations of affiliations and the creation of new institutional forms”.²¹ They provide no more than structuring principles, guiding formation of institutions, says Wittrock. If this is so, these structuring principles could have been interpreted differently in different cultural and historical contexts, and the institutions they gave rise to would naturally differ, while remaining located on the modern trajectory. In this sense, we are all equally modern – commuters in Shanghai’s maglev train as much as nomads in Baluchistan – as we cannot *not* be modern. Admittedly, our ways of being modern differ, and consequently there must be more than one modernity. There are multiple modernities: the Iranian one, in which the political and social orders follow the transcendental one; the North Korean modernity, without any transcendental instance, but with a self-selected, all-powerful social group which directs political, societal and economic processes; or the North American and British oligarchic modernity, in which voters are periodically asked which of the two sections of the elite shall have the opportunity to manage the public affairs while following the same, or at least largely similar, programme.

This is the notion of multiple modernities. Instead of using the checklist to assess how much particular societies stray away from the right path,

19 Björn Wittrock, “Modernity: one, none, or many? European origins and modernity as a global condition”, in Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (ed.), *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

20 Ibid, 36

21 Ibid, 38.

or hopelessly slowly tag along, we should try to tell the “story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs”, says Shmuel N. Eisenstadt.²² One of these is Western modernity, but it is not the only “authentic” modernity. Westernization and modernity are not the same: European or Western modernity is but one particular form modernity can take. This, then, enables the understanding of fascist and socialist modernities as variations of the same story, instead of considering them to be anti-modern or pathological. Modernity was, from the very beginning, “beset by internal antinomies and contradictions, giving rise to continual critical discourses and political contestations”.²³ As the promissory notes spread around the globe, either by conquest and imposition or by eager imitation, they clashed with cultural premises and institutions in other societies, says Eisenstadt, and their appropriation involved copying, modification or partial rejection, but in all instances it permitted non-Western societies to participate actively in the global modernity.

Antinomies, contradictions and contestations, as well as the clashes they caused and their culture-specific outcomes, should be seen as part and parcel of modernization, not as its rejection. When at the Berlin Congress in 1878 Austria-Hungary demanded that Serbia constructed a railway line from Belgrade to the Bulgarian border within three years, there were many voices of opposition to be heard in Serbia. It was widely understood that this railway would primarily benefit Austria-Hungary and its interests in the Balkans and the Middle East, while burdening an already heavily indebted state with a huge new loan. These voices were not opposing what in the nineteenth century was the main vehicle of modernization, or modernization as such: they were the testimony of the ambivalent nature of modernization, and of the contestations and clashes it regularly caused. Nevertheless, the railway was completed in three years. Even less should egalitarianism, deeply ingrained in Serbian traditional culture, be understood as an obstacle to modernization: as we have already seen in Charles Taylor’s brief definition of modern culture, egalitarianism was one of the features which facilitated modernization rather than hindering it, chiefly by easing the way to understanding individual rights as universal. If Serbian parliament at the beginning of the twentieth century saw many heated discussions and the use of crude language, and even if its members treated their opponents as enemies, in comparative context the overall picture still demonstrates a successful development of parliamentary democracy.²⁴ The fact that it took Belgrade

22 S. N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities”, *Daedalus* 129.1(2000) 2.

23 Ibid, 7.

24 Slobodan Antonić, “Demokratija”, Miloš Ković (ed.), *Srbi 1903–1914. Istorija ideja* (Belgrade: Clio, 2015).

local authorities forty years to complete sewer may be yet another proof of inefficient, sloppy and slow working of Serbian administration, rather than of a deliberate obstruction of modernization.

The original meaning of the word “Europeanization” is clear. We inherited it from Balkan politicians, social reformers and intellectuals active at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century: by Europeanization they meant imitating, importing, or adapting to their own cultural, economic and political contexts those institutions, values, lifestyles and programmes which they believed had brought success to powerful, rich and developed societies in north-western corner of Europe. This belief they shared with their non-European counterparts, who were also trying to find the shortcut to success: do as they do, if you want to have what they have. They did not yet have the word modernization – for this is what they meant by Europeanization. We have both words, and there is no justification for conflating them. There are two reasons for keeping them separate: first, modernization is not necessarily the same as Europeanization, as should have become clear from the notion of multiple modernities; second, we need the word Europeanization to designate a different process, which was cultural rather than economic and political.

Conflating modernization and Europeanization is historically mistaken. Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner have re-examined the thesis that modernity found its full form in north-western corner of Europe, and demonstrated that modernity is less European, and Europe less modern, than has been previously believed.²⁵ European superiority and rise to world-domination in the nineteenth century cannot be explained solely by its entering modernity, as none of the core components of the standard narrative of modernity can be confirmed in that period:

Political modernity is today normally identified with the commitment to popular sovereignty expressed in the democratic nation-state. But by 1900, most European societies were not nation-states but colonial empires. They were not inclusive democracies either but oligarchies that operated with restricted suffrage. Economic modernity, in turn, is today often equated with liberating markets from state regulation and created the free economic agent operating on markets. But even though industrial capitalism spread, market self-regulation had widely been found deficient and economic exchange remained highly regulated in Europe. Economic growth occurred more through industrialization than through market exchange. [...] Thirdly, one tends to think of modernity as separating religion from politics, but in Europe the Christian churches mostly operated in close institutionalized alliance with the state. Finally, and maybe most impor-

25 Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner, *European Modernity. A Global Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1.

tantly, we tend to think of modernity as committed to the idea of the autonomous individual, but in nineteenth- and much of twentieth-century Europe this idea remained largely limited to bourgeois and “bohémien”, entrepreneurial and artistic models of self-realization, thus to small groups in society, while “the masses” were conceptualized as classes and nations, thus as collectivities with little scope for individuality.²⁶

There was little difference between European socio-economic life and the other parts of the world before 1800, they maintain. By 1900, however, Europe dominated the world through its military force, colonization and economic exchange, the terms of which were dictated by Europe. Due to this domination, elites in other world regions ascribed their lagging behind to the lack of European ideas and concepts and tried to import as many as possible in order to catch up. The “Great Divergence” between Europe and the rest of the world, however, was less a mathematically predictable result of European institutionalization of the core components of modernity, than a contingent event, claim Stråth and Wagner. It was conditioned by the triangular commercial relations across the Atlantic: using African slave labour and American soil under European military superiority. Whatever impact new legal regimes, technological advances, the rise of universities, and separation of church and state might have had, it pales in comparison with the impact resulting from this Atlantic triangulation and the exploitation of new techno-economic possibilities it enabled. This is a deep ambivalence of modernity: it inaugurated a history of oppression while at the same time setting the standards for resistance to oppression and struggle for justice.

Stråth and Wagner re-examined the standard narrative of modernity in Europe and found it wanting. Set against the “promissory notes”, the historical developments look rather different: the liberal concept of freedom, inherited from the Enlightenment thinkers, did result in emergence of human rights and the rule of law, but not necessarily in democracy. The idea that all adult males should participate in decision-making was rejected by European political elites at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The post-First World War debate on democracy was dominated by those who considered universal suffrage undesirable, and the post-Second World War period brought the Schumpeterian model, which we already mentioned discussing the modernization theory, in which democracy means the periodical selection of a small number of decision-makers by the electorate which otherwise remains passive between elections: the liberal oligarchies which guarantee the human and civil rights, but reserve the right to rule to themselves. Instead of ascribing the economic rise of Europe to capitalism and free markets, Stråth and Wagner demonstrate that “global colonialism based on naval power over the oceans

²⁶ Ibid, 4.

since the sixteenth century, which in the nineteenth century ever more involved state power in military and administrative fiscal and legal terms, became the key to the European *Sonderweg* when it began to take form after 1800”.²⁷ The emphasis on alleged European individualism as opposed to the collectivism attributed to traditional – non-European – societies appears in a different light when viewed in a comparative context and, above all, when one realizes that it is based on the statements of a limited number of authors and not on evidence of a society-wide spread of the commitment to individualism. Moreover, the commitment to individual autonomy in Europe has always been balanced with a commitment to others, for example in the form of solidarity. The first two thirds of the twentieth century saw a process of collectivization rather than individualization in the form of mass organizations (parties, trade unions, social movements) and a standardization of lifestyles, expectations and behaviours. The authors come to the conclusion that Europe is not the only model of modernity, but that Europe “can be seen as elaborating a particular interpretation of modernity [...] rather than a universal project of modernity of which Europe is the avant-garde and which everyone else needs to follow”.²⁸

If modernization and Europeanization cannot be used as synonyms, the latter can still be used for a cultural process which accompanied the former: for the importing or imitating north-west European dress, furniture, lifestyles, manners, tastes, entertainment – i.e. culture in the broadest sense of the term – and artistic and architectural styles, literary and musical genres and conventions, i.e. culture in the narrower sense. If we understand modernization to mean the effort to catch up economically, technologically, educationally and politically with the more developed societies of north-west Europe, driven by thirst for development and fear of being crushed by those same societies, Europeanization means the effort to look like those societies, driven by prestige and symbolism, and it did not substantially enable modernization. Rather, it was neutral regarding the results. One example illustrates this point well: when Kemalist mod-

27 Ibid, 95. For example, the “cultivation system” introduced by the Dutch colonial authorities on Java, under which the local population had to perform forced labour on sugar, coffee and tea plantations for a wage set by the government, brought 825 million guilders into the Dutch treasury between 1831 and 1877. “This was enough to cover one-quarter of all state spending. The government used the money for various purposes, such as paying off the national debt and building roads and railways”, H. L. Wesseling, *The European Colonial Empires 1815–1919* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 108. It was not only individualism, democracy and capitalist free markets that made Dutch modernization possible in the 19th century: forced labour of the colonized peoples also played a role in the construction of the railways in the Netherlands.

28 Ibid, 4.

ernization in Turkey outlawed fez in 1925 and made European hats mandatory, it was to visually symbolize the state's commitment to modernization. It was, however, conveniently forgotten that the fez itself became mandatory in 1829, when the reformer sultan Mahmud II decided that the fez should replace outlawed turbans as visual symbols of Ottoman traditionalism. Both fezzes and hats were vigorously opposed, as if the survival of Islam depended on what one put on one's head, but neither empowered modernization in any way. A Serbian reader will immediately recall many portraits of Vuk Karadžić in his later years, with a fez on his head: he fought the Ottoman state in the First Serbian Uprising, emigrated to Habsburg Empire after the uprising was put down, settled in Vienna and became one of the most important Serbian *modernizers*. His language standardization and simplification of the script empowered the spread of literacy and the educational modernization which followed in Serbia in the second half of the nineteenth century. The language reform he proposed was eminently democratic and non-elitist: for him, the Serbian language was what Serbs spoke, not what the educated elite of Serbs in Habsburg Empire constructed out of elements from the Church Slavonic, Russian and spoken Serbian. Compared with language reforms in Bulgaria, Greece and even Turkey, which purged and substituted with Russian, archaic Greek and Turkic words that were perceived as Turkish, or in Turkey as Ottoman (Arabic and Persian), and thus introduced a whole new language layer which had to be learnt by the speakers, Karadžić's reform seems remarkably efficient: if Serbs want to continue using Turkish words, this is then their language. His efforts did not go unnoticed in Europe of his time, as evidenced by a number of learnt societies which welcomed him in their ranks, and universities which awarded him honorary degrees. Yet, he sported a fez, quite probably at the honorary degree awarding ceremonies as well.

The same applies to wearing a two-piece suit or a Parisian dress in mid-nineteenth century Serbia and Bulgaria: for some it was a matter of prestige and a visual symbol of their allegiances, social status and aspirations, for others shameful aping of foreigners. Could Serbs have modernized their society in the nineteenth century while wearing their traditional costumes, dancing *kolo* instead of waltz on Sundays, squatting of pillows instead of sitting in chairs? This is what should be called Europeanization proper: imitating north-west European societies in matters which did not substantially change the outcome of modernization process but were symbolically charged and conferred prestige. In this sense, Europeanization was a cultural shadow of modernization which devalued everything local and argued that something particular to Holland or France was inspired by universality, while everything particular to Bulgaria or Greece was hopelessly local, parochial and backward.

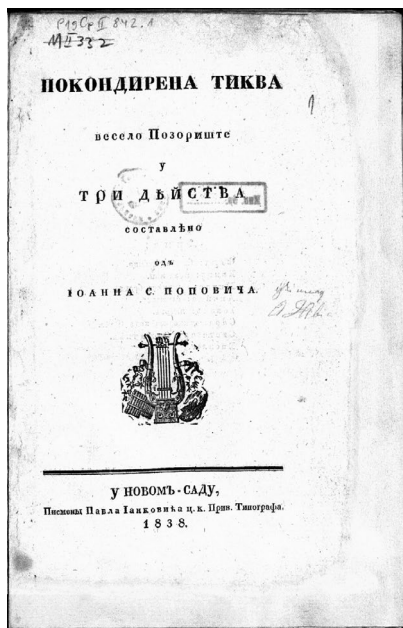
This term can also be used to designate the transfer of cultural capital from European cultures rich in resources to Balkan countries: in-translation, from the eighteenth century onwards, of ideas, cultural values and webs of meanings created in France, England, Italy, Germany and Russia. As can be immediately seen, this list includes three societies which were themselves lagging behind in development – at least until the second half of the nineteenth century – yet had accumulated cultural capital which others considered worth translating. The creation of cultural capital does not necessarily correspond with the level of development achieved: Russia in the nineteenth century is a good example, which is one more reason to de-couple modernization and Europeanization. However, the opportunities for cultural transfer, or in-translation, hugely depended on the level of development achieved both in cultures rich in resources, and in those that tried to transfer these resources. One should think of the outcomes of political, social, economic and technological modernization which made wider availability of books possible in the eighteenth century: the decline of censorship and ecclesiastical control over printing, the spread of education and literacy, the growth of libraries, the decline of cost of publishing and the development of book-trading networks, which all contributed to the emergence of modern publishing in the nineteenth century and the wider availability of cultural capital to be in-translated. When we add to this the introduction of steel rails and the steam engine in the second half of the nineteenth century, which made possible for someone from Sofia to travel to Leipzig to attend university, and to return home carrying the cultural capital to be in-translated in their head, heart and suitcase, we can easily see that Europeanization proper – both as a cultural shadow of modernization and as a transfer of cultural capital – was closely intertwined with modernization. Yet, these two processes were not one and the same.

3.

However, when discussing culture, the conceptual framework we construct must be different. Economic and technological modernity cannot be easily replicated in cultural and aesthetic modernity. While it is obvious why traveling by train is much better than sitting in ox-driven cart, it is not at all obvious why Beckett should be preferred to Shakespeare. In its best achievements aesthetic modernity was not an allay of political, social and economic modernity, but their fiercest critic. Instead of promoting modernization, aesthetic modernity has always been the sphere in which modernization's ambiguities, discontents and darker sides were thematized. This is one more aspect of the notion that modernization is not a straight path from a traditional, underdeveloped state to the modern and developed one, but a perpetual constitution and re-



Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–1856)



Title page of *Pokondirena Tikva* by Jovan Sterija Popović, Novi Sad, 1838.

constitution of social, political, economic and cultural programs. It is even more obvious in case of Europeanization of the Balkans, as the following example will illustrate.

In all Balkan nineteenth-century literatures the same phenomenon can be seen: the opposition to “foreign fashions”: to the new, imported dress *à la franca*, to the use of foreign words and imitation of lifestyles. Bulgarian writer Dobri Voynikov (1833–1878) ridiculed it as “aping” in his play *Civilization Wrongly Understood* (1871); Romanian writer Ioan Maiorescu (1811–1864) used the same term – *măimutăria*, monkey-like imitation – for the adoration of everything foreign, especially French; Periklis Yannopoulos (1869–1910) called it *xenomania*: imitating Europeans, but without anything truly European in it.²⁹ Serbian writer Jovan Sterija Popović (1806–1856) in his comedy *Pokondirena tikva* (1838) created a female character Fema, a provincial shoemaker’s widow, who spends her inheritance on French fashion and utters meaningless words resembling the sounds of the French language – whose name even gave rise to a new verb in Serbian: *femkati se*, to play-act or pretend. All these examples testify to a “critique of the external and superficial

29 Diana Mishkova, “Forms Without Substance”, in Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (eds), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, Vol. Two: *Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 6–7.

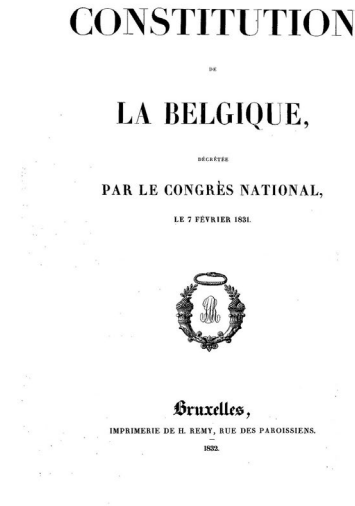
(and purely imitative) ‘civilizing’ which did not constitute real progress’.³⁰ However, Sterija’s critique was voiced in a *comedy*, a literary genre which was itself imported, in-translated, or imitated. There was nothing specifically Serbian in writing comedies: this genre appeared in Serbian literature only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sterija was a classicist, who received predominantly Latin-based education in Hungarian schools in Karlowitz, Timișoara and Budapest, and at the university in Kásmark, taught Latin in his hometown of Vršac, and as an official of the Ministry of Education in Principality of Serbia from 1842 to 1848 worked on introducing new curricula in schools. Both as the creator of the new – European – curricula, and as a classicist writer, who looked up to Plautus and Molière for inspiration,³¹ and in-translated an eminently European literary genre in Serbian literature, Sterija worked on *Europeanization* of Serbian culture. His criticism of “aping”, “monkey-like imitation” and “*xenomania*”, which was one side of Europeanization of the Balkans, was voiced in a European form of cultural expression, which was its other side. In order to criticise external and superficial copying of “European ways”, Sterija needed to master the skill of expressing himself in a European way first. This brings us to the key notion in understanding cultural and aesthetic modernity, as opposed to political, social and economic modernization in the Balkans: copying.

The 1831 Belgian constitution was widely copied in the Balkans; no one attempted to invent a “Balkan railway”, different from railways in England and France; educational institutions and their curricula, from primary schools to universities, were copied as closely as possible; Balkan banks functioned in the same manner as those in Belgium. In all those realms copying was the highest imperative, and success of modernization usually measured by the similarity between European originals and Balkan copies. Of all Balkan countries, Turkey offers a rather extreme example of fast, uncompromising modernization and Europeanization understood as copying. Kemalist Turkey was a one-party state, without any legal opposition.³² Although *Tanzimat* and Unionist reforms had already modernized many aspects of educational, social and political life, Kemalist authoritarian modernization was conducted at a breakneck speed: in 1925 the religious shrines and dervish convents were closed down; in 1926 the European calendar adopted, and Swiss and Italian penal codes copied; all courtesy titles – bey and pasha – abolished, family law secularized, religious marriages and polygamy outlawed; religion was removed from public life and the state resumed full control over the remaining religious institutions; in 1926 the forming of associations on a religious basis was

30 Ibid, 6

31 Miron Flašar, *Studije o Steriji* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1988), 22–78.

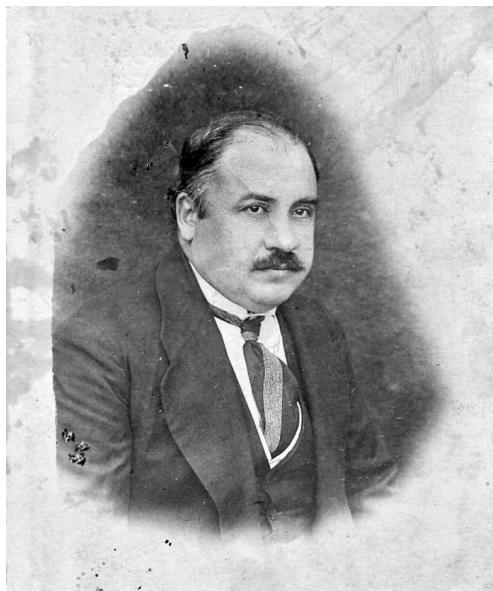
32 The following data are taken from Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 173–195.



Title page of the Consitution of Belgium of 1831.

banned, and in 1928 the clause declaring Islam the state religion removed from the Constitution; medreses were also abolished, as was the institution of Sheyhuelislam; Sunday, instead of Friday, became the official day of rest; Western clock and calendar, numerals, weights and measures were introduced; Latin alphabet was adopted in 1928, and the language reform – albeit unsuccessful – introduced; and family names and female suffrage introduced in 1934. In many respects Kemalist modernization went further than modernization in the rest of the Balkans, and in some even further than in Western Europe. It is important to recall that these reforms were not imposed on Turkey from a foreign power, as for example in Algeria, but eagerly embraced by the modernizing elite itself, and in that respect Ibrahim Kaya's suggestion that Turkey should be put in the category of "later modernities", the societies which sought to modernize themselves in the absence of colonization, as opposed to the "original modernities" in north-western Europe, seems quite convincing.³³ However, even if not imposed by colonizers but self-imposed by the modernizing, authoritarian elite, these reforms were *copying*: not only of the promissory notes of modernity, but of their particular outcomes in Europe too. That they did not result in the way the elite hoped, is quite another matter: they resulted in a

33 Ibrahim Kaya, *Social Theory and Later Modernities. The Turkish Experience* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 6–7.



Ziya Gökalp (1876-1924)

specific Turkish form of modernity. What matters is that they were meant to create a copy of what can be seen elsewhere, and that introduction took the form of removing the Ottoman, Islamic tradition.

This copying was intentional. The ideologue of Turkish modernization Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) recognized the efforts of the *Tanzimat* reformers, but reproached them for implementing the reforms only partially: they tried to adapt the modernizing models to Ottoman society, and this is why they failed. “There is only one road to salvation: To advance in order to reach – that is, in order to be equal to – Europeans in the sciences and industry as well as in military and judicial institutions. And there is only one means to achieve it: to adapt ourselves to Western civilization completely!”³⁴ Any attempt to reconcile Ottoman medieval traditions and modernity means trying to keep the former alive, claimed Gökalp; only full and uncompromising copying of Europe would produce modernity in Turkey. This is the way to success, and success here means *survival*: “We have to accept the civilization of the West, because, if we do not we shall be enslaved by the powers of the West. To master the civilization of the West, or to be mastered by the powers of the West: between these alternatives we must choose!”³⁵

34 Ziya Gökalp, *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1959), 276.

35 *Ibid*, 266.

Gökalp, however, made a clear distinction between *Çivilisation* and *Kultur*. While Western civilization – sciences, industry, military and judicial institutions – was to be faithfully and completely copied, Western culture was not. Modernization of Turkey, claimed Gökalp, must entail a creation of a truly Turkish culture. Copying Western culture would not help Turkish modernization. Scattered in Gökalp's writings are three reasons why Turks should not faithfully copy French or German culture but create their own.³⁶ In sphere of culture, "originality is the basic concept".³⁷ This applies to individual artists as much as to national cultures. There is no value in copies, especially if they are faithful. If Turkish culture is to be of any value, it must be original. The second reason is: a copy of German or French culture would not facilitate *national integration* of Turkey, and modernization is impossible without national integration. While copying Western civilization completely is necessary in order to modernize Turkey, copying any of the Western cultures is counterproductive: it would be an obstacle to modernization, instead of supporting it. This is a question, says Gökalp, of "the preservation of our national unity and integrity".³⁸ And here appears the third reason for rejecting cultural copying: although Turks can admire French, German, Russian and Italian culture,

we cannot be captured by it. [...] We do not deny that we are far behind European peoples in civilization, in learning, in economic life, and in refinement, or that we have to work hard to catch up with them. But we cannot regard any nation as culturally superior to us. For us, our own culture is the best of all cultures imaginable. Therefore, we can imitate and follow neither French *culture* nor German *Kultur*.³⁹

There is a tacit international competition in culture as much as in industrialization, Gökalp implies, and it is not won by copying and imitating, as here "originality is the basic concept". Turkish culture can demand international recognition only if it becomes truly original. Gökalp maintains that creators of the new national culture will

have to attain the standards of international perfection in techniques in order to be the great artists of all nations... If one source of art is the creation of the people, the other source is the creations of men of international attainment. Only those who drink the magic waters of both these springs will attain great achievements in art..⁴⁰

36 Gökalp is clear about creating a new national culture, as opposed to preserving the Ottoman one: Ottoman culture suppressed Turkish, and in this respect cultural modernization in Turkey can mean only rejection of the former and creation of the latter.

37 Ibid, 262.

38 Ibid, 266.

39 Ibid, 283.

40 Ibid, 264.

His vision of a national culture does not envisage isolationism, traditionalism and autochthonism, but a synergy between what can be labelled cultural Turkishness and international standards of artistic expression. Turkish authors must learn to speak the language of international – not merely European – art, and only then express in it what is their own. By expressing themselves in this international mode, instead of in the traditional Turkish one, they will make their art, and Turkish culture, available for international consumption, and ready for international competition.

Gökalp's second and third reasons for demanding the creation of Turkish national culture confirm that the root of this demand is nationalism. Nationalism is a part of modernizing process, claims Gregory Jusdanis.⁴¹ It brings together the idea that power resides with the people, and the idea that the people sufficiently different from others has a right to rule itself; it promotes self-confidence by encouraging the people to rely on their own cultural resources, and to fight oppression and foreign domination; it ensures their cultural integrity and survival in modernity; it permits them to seek justice and self-respect, while participating in the transnational world; in short, nationalism appropriates culture in the project of modernization.⁴² "Nationalism promotes modernization by reassuring the *Volk* that its way of life will survive because it, rather than the monarchy, the church, or the colonial ruler, now forms the life and structure of the state. The nation is modern insofar as culture legitimates political sovereignty."⁴³ Jusdanis offers a wide range of examples for this process of appropriation, not limited to the Balkans – to which we will return shortly – but encompasses cases such as Germany, England, United States, Canada, Brazil and Egypt. A classical example, although preceding modernity, which is not mentioned in Jusdanis' book – as he deals primarily with *literary* culture – is Dutch Golden Age painting: during and after the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) in which Dutch won independence, Dutch bourgeoisie did not want to buy paintings with motifs from classical antiquity or the Bible, let alone portraits of Habsburg monarchs; they wanted to see on their walls Dutch landscapes, windmills, scenes from village life, Dutch cities, courtyards, their families, their own portraits, their daughters pouring milk in their kitchens, gentlemen smoking in a tavern, guild members at a meeting, even scenes from brothels. They wanted to see themselves on the paintings they bought, and painters followed the market demand. This is a young nation, one of the pioneers of the north-west European modernization, representing itself to itself: the

41 Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

42 Ibid, 7.

43 Ibid, 10.

language of this art is international, but what it tells is Dutchness. This is what Gökalp demands: he wants to see an artistic culture which speaks the international language of aesthetic expression, but tells the story of Turkishness. As Jusdanis' approach is historical rather than ethical – the latter would demand that the cultural critic slays the malevolent nationalist dragon⁴⁴ – it is appropriate to ask the following question: what would be the alternative? Why would a copy of, say, Dutch *national* culture produced in Turkey in the time of legitimizing national sovereignty be in any way preferable to what Gökalp demanded? We enjoy Dutch Golden Age painting today not because we see Dutchness in it, but because we see Gökalp's "standards of international perfection" married with representations of our common humanity. Gökalp's hoped that one day the international audience would recognize our common humanity in Turks represented in the new Turkish national culture.

However, both Gökalp's demand, and Jusdanis' justification of it, belong to the nineteenth century nation-building process, and our example of the Dutch Golden Age painting to an even earlier period. Instead of nationalizing culture, twentieth-century aesthetic modernity aestheticized national patrimonies: it used them as aesthetic material, rather than offering the nation its services.

Two of the three reasons for creating a Turkish national culture, instead of copying any of the already existing European ones – aesthetic originality and international competition – can be found in thinking of other authors in the same period. In Turkish novel, literary criticism saw "characters who are prisoners of imitated desires, copied sensibilities, bookish aspirations and belated torments"; the original was elsewhere, and carrying the model of European novel to a different cultural scene could have resulted only in its deformation.⁴⁵ Novelist, poet and critic Ahmed Hamdi Taripinar (1901–1962) wrote in his essay "Our Novel" (1936): "It is impossible for Europeans to admire us because of things we have borrowed from them. The most they will say is a short 'Well done'. It is only when we introduce to them things that are specifically ours that they will like us, treating us as their equals in the path of beauty and self-realization."⁴⁶ Poet Yahya Kemal (1884–1958) recounted his admiration of French models: he loved Hugo, admired Baudelaire, who led him to Verlaine, knew Maeterlinck and José Maria de Heredia. Through the latter, he encountered the classical world, Greek and Latin poetry. "And it was in this way", writes Kemal, "that I realised I had come very close to the new Turkish I had long sought: our spoken Turkish was something like that white language found in Latin and

44 Ibid, 5.

45 Nurdan Gürbilek, "Dandies and Originals: Authenticity, Belatedness and the Turkish Novel", *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, No. 2–3 (2003), 602.

46 Ibid.

Greek poetry. Thus I began to sense the wisdom behind the beauty of our Divan verses".⁴⁷ Orhan Koçak's essay, where these Kemal's sentences come from, is entitled "Westernization against the West", and it appropriately sums up the movement of Balkan aesthetic modernity we are trying to follow here: rejecting Europeanization, in the sense of copying and imitating, in order to become European. Kemal did not reject French poetry only to embrace his own national patrimony, the Divan verses. This would have to be called isolationism, traditionalism or autochthonism. Kemal went to the school of French modern poetry and learnt to speak its language, but in this school he learnt that his own patrimony, the Divan verses, could give him exactly what Greek and Latin poetry gave José Maria de Heredia. "Back to our roots" does not describe this manoeuvre accurately. The Divan verses are read differently through the glasses of modern French poetry: there are no original roots to go back to any longer, they have already been altered by the gaze schooled in modern French poetry. Kemal could copy neither the Divan verses, because they were no longer there in their pristine, primordial form, nor modern French poetry, because he did not want to do it any longer. What he wrote had to be original. "*Do as they do*", translates Koçak this message, "*and you will encounter yourself*".⁴⁸ Kemal got over Baudelaire, Verlaine and de Heredia, learnt to speak the language of modern poetry, and only then discovered what was valuable in his own patrimony.

What happened with the third Gökalp's reason for creating a new Turkish national culture – with national integration? As a political demand, it was omitted, ignored, forgotten as insubstantial and irrelevant. However, it was *aestheticized*. "You will encounter yourself" does not merely refer to Yahya Kemal, with his individual experiences and human singularity, it means Yahya Kemal as a product of the long cultural tradition, of which the Divan verses are merely a part. This is at the same time larger than the national integration, as it spreads deep into the past and promises a future, and narrower than it, as it does not quite serve the purpose Gökalp had in mind – literature in the service of the nation. This is the nation, with its language and traditions, in the service of literature.

To a Serbian reader, poet and essayist Jovan Dučić (1874–1943) represents the most zealous Europeanizer: his admiration for everything French knew no bounds, to the extent that one begins to wonder if his travelogues and essays, devoted to worshiping French culture, were given

47 Orhan Koçak, "'Westernisation against the West': Cultural politics in the Early Turkish Republic", in C. Kerslake, K. Öktem, P. Robins (eds), *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 317.

48 Ibid.

an intentionally comical tone.⁴⁹ Stanislav Vinaver testified that Dučić himself had told him that he “had always translated his poems into French, and when he saw that they fitted the French pattern, he would be happy and convinced that he achieved what he wanted”.⁵⁰ His verses had to sound French in order to be good. The following generation of poets, however, measured success by different standards: Momčilo Nastasijević (1894–1938), a teacher of French language, wrote the following in his programmatic essay “For a native melody”:

If there remains any urge to communicate to ourselves and others with the deepest (read: universal) part of our nature, we need to literally return to our native melody. [...] By accidental grafting, from the outside, nothing of universal value ever come into being. [...] Because the flower of the universal in art is above national as much as its root is below it.

There are two ways of receiving. When spirit is firmly in what is its own, it not only resists what is foreign, but the foreign awakes it and brings fruit. [...] To all melodic stimulus from the outside, one responds with one's own melody. This is the active taking.

And the other way around, when one takes slavishly (and this occurs when the native melody is untampered), the greatest part of one's personal strength is spent on adjusting to the foreign; one eventually adjusts oneself to the position of a perfect receiver, and to the same extent the power of ever emitting one's own voice is lost.⁵¹

Jovan Dučić copied the melody of French verses: he was a Europeanized Serbian poet, but his poetry, compared to that of his European contemporaries, remained second-class. Momčilo Nastasijević did what his European counterparts were doing – explored the melody of his own language – and became a great modern European poet. The aesthetic modernity in Serbian literature began with his generation. There is nothing nationalist in this poetry, nor can singing or reciting his poems at political rallies be imagined: the political demand for creating a national culture has been *aestheticized* here. This is not poetry in the service of the nation, but nation, through its language, in the service of poetry. Its aim was neither national integration, nor international competition, but communicating “to ourselves and others with the deepest (read: universal) part of our nature”.

Another poet from the same generation, Rastko Petrović (1898–1949), a French student, expressed the same idea quite explicitly: “Until we get

49 On Dučić's “Frenchness” see Zoran Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe. The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 137–146.

50 Stanislav Vinaver, *Žanosi i prkosi Laze Kostića* (Belgrade: Dereta, 2005), 171.

51 Momčilo Nastasijević, “Za maternju melodiju”, *Sabrana dela*, vol IV (Gornji Milanovac and Belgrade: Dečije novine and Srpska književna zadruga, 1991), 44–45.

over Europe and learn to speak European, we will not succeed in discovering anything of value in ourselves, let alone express it in such a manner that it has some value for the rest of the world".⁵² Until we stop copying European poetry and learn to do what European poets are doing, we will neither *encounter ourselves*, nor learn how to express what is universal in us. This does not call for re-traditionalization of literature, to reverting to "what is truly ours" and free from any European experience. For Serbian literature, "truly ours", untouched by Europeanization, would be only oral epic poetry. Petrović declines this: formally imitating oral epic poetry would be a wrong way of encountering ourselves, as much as imitating modern French poetry is. "The people", the creators of oral epic poetry, "had some true and human things to say, it had to say what it meant to be born, to die, to be a hero, etc", wrote he in 1930.⁵³ "However, one shouldn't believe that this can be achieved in any artificial manner. It can be achieved by speaking the language of humanity, in the name of human thought, as much as the people spoke in its name."⁵⁴ When "the people" sang about Mother of Jugović's – a character in one of the Kosovo Circle oral epic poems – "the people" sang about mother as such, and exactly this made it characteristically Serbian, claims Petrović.

In his writing, Petrović explored old Slavic mythology thematically in a similar way Ezra Pound relied on the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Seafarer*, the legend of *El Cid* or *Song of Roland* in *Cantos*. In his essays he also pointed at Ivan Meštović's sculptures inspired by the Kosovo Circle of Serbian oral epic poetry, underlying that Meštović "did not imitate" that poetry, but used its themes: he did not "helped himself formally with what the people created before him", but was "inspired by the people's destiny".⁵⁵ Both Petrović and Meštović nominated Slav and Serbian mythology and tradition to be considered as universal human patrimony, on a pair with *The Seafarer*, the legend of *El Cid*, *Song of Roland*, or *Niebelungslied*, and available as aesthetic material for further use. Just as Yahya Kemal could not have become a poet of the Divan verses after having read Baudelaire, Verlaine and Maeterlinck, but could have seen their beauty – perhaps in a way different from that of the original Divan verses' audiences – and resolved to use this aesthetic material, so did Petrović and Meštović use Slav mythology and Serbian oral epic poetry, aestheticized it and claimed: this is also our European and universally human patrimony. Instead of nationalizing culture and serving as a tool of nation building, aesthetic modernity aestheticizes and universalizes it. It finds in the Divan verses,

52 Rastko Petrović, "Izložba Bijelića, Dobrovića i Miličića", *Eseji i članci* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1974), 19.

53 Rastko Petrović, "Da naša knjiga bude uistinu naša", op. cit., 187.

54 Ibid, 189.

55 Ibid, 186.



Jovan Skerlić (1877-1914)

in native melody of a language and in oral epic poetry what is *ours* and recognizes it as *universally human*.

This is why aesthetic modernists must betray the expectations of the ideologists of political, social and economic modernization, or even come into conflict with them. Gökalp counterpart in Serbia, at exactly the same time, was literary critic, politician and professor Jovan Skerlić (1877–1914). Serbs “suffer from the adjustment of a young people to modern life”,⁵⁶ he claimed, and there is only one remedy for this:

...the ideal, the direction, and examples can be found in one place only, in their genuine source: in the West. First of all, one should be a good European. [...] Everything good, beautiful and great that humanity knows comes from the thinking, free, active and energetic West”⁵⁷

After centuries under the Ottoman rule, claimed Skerlić, Serbs

... are suffocating in this passive, stale, Oriental spirit, and there is only one cure for us: to open wide the door to the West and its ideas, to the West which thinks, which acts, which creates, which lives a full and intensive life, the only life that deserves to be called human.⁵⁸

56 Jovan Skerlić, *Pisci i knjige 5* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1964), 219.

57 Jovan Skerlić, *Feljtoni, skice i govori* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1964), 89.

58 Ibid, 67.

However, when two modernist poets, Sima Pandurović (1883–1960) and Vladislav Petković Dis (1880–1917) published their collections inspired by modern French poetry, Skerlić dismissed them with indignation as “decadents”. After centuries under the Ottomans, Serbs were decadent enough, maintained Skerlić, and needed some serene, uplifting, forward-looking poetry which injects energy and motivates work and progress. There was nothing in their poetry to bring the nation together around the great project of modernization. His rejection of Isidora Sekulić (1877–1958) was even harsher: she had the misfortune that her modernist prose collection *Saputnici* (Fellow Travellers, 1913) appeared at the moment when in Skerlić’s view, the whole nation’s effort should have been concentrated on the final act of national liberation – but instead she wrote about her headache, complained Skerlić. What he was not able to recognize, is her aesthetization of the nation in her travelogue *Pisma iz Norveške* (Letters from Norway, 1914), in which she celebrated Norwegians for their relentless struggle against the frightening, threatening and sublime nature, in terms which recalled both Kant’s understanding of the sublime and the contemporary Serbian re-interpretation of the Kosovo myth in ethical terms: small nations are sublime because of their ceaseless struggle against mightier adversary, and even though they cannot hope to ever celebrate a triumph, they never surrender but fight and survive. In the act of confronting a mightier adversary, small nations create their moral universe, maintained Sekulić, and this is the only triumph they can ever hope for.

This kind of aesthetization cannot be instrumentalized: an aesthetized nation cannot be a tool in the process of nation-building, and hence does not contribute to the process of modernization. It is itself the result of modernization, and of its separation of various spheres of social life.

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