

CONQUERING MODERNITY

Islam, Defensive Modernization and the Challenge of Colonial Modernity²

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Abstract

This paper tries to appropriate the concept of colonial modernity, to the study of the process of modernization that the Islamic civilization has undertaken during the 18th and the early 19th centuries. Our aim is to set the outline and origin of the concept by placing it in a subordinate position inside the overall process of modernization. In our perspective 'colonial modernity' is not seen as a counterpart to the modernization theory, rather as a steppingstone in achieving a specific form of modernity that takes full shape when it is placed in the context of defensive modernization. Through this process of subalternation, the distinct colonial modernity that evolved in the historical and geographical ambience of the Ottoman Empire and its semi-autonomous political dependencies, transcends in a downward motion the effective historical timetable of colonial occupation. In this vein we conclude that initial cultural and civilizational traits of colonial modernity become visible in the wake of military defensive modernization programs long before the incorporation of such territories into European colonial empires. Establishing connections with contemporary understandings and views of modernity/modernization in the Islamic world, though secondary to our objectives, it is critical in illuminating how the military and technological starting points of modernization have shaped current results.

Keywords: Islam, Europe, modernity, multiple modernities, defensive modernization, colonialism, European colonial modernity, Middle East, [self-induced] colonialism, orientalism/orientalization, Ottoman Empire.

Colonial Modernity in the East Asian context

The concept of 'colonial modernity' was first used by Tani E. Barlow in respect to the colonial and post-colonial vast range of experiences that the East Asian region has been subjected to, or developed during most of the 20th century. In a sense, this 'neologistic phrase' is laden with a large

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degree of specificity, being evolved in order to serve both analytically and diachronically the colonial and post-colonial experience of a particular geographical area. Divorcing the concept from previous epistemological uses will not drain its analytical capacities as its basic terminological fabric describes an experience that was hardly the exclusive apantage of the East Asian region. For Barlow, as for other poststructuralist views that build on the concept, 'colonial modernity' means that modernity and colonialism cannot be considered separate historical events, as they represent "indivisible features of the history of industrial capitalism". To further stress this, Barlow asserts that "the modernity of non-European colonies is as indisputable as the colonial core of European modernity", a claim by which the modernization process and the colonial experience become fused with implicit consequences on both colonized and colonizer (Barlow, 1997:1; 2-20). At a certain simplistic level, the crude leftovers of this argumentation would imply that in order to become modern one must either colonize or be colonized.

On the other hand the nature of the interaction between colonizers and colonized in the East Asian context is construed in a more complex manner, as it involves a second relationship of colonial domination that is exercised by a regional actor(Imperial Japan), which at times is able to momentarily disrupt the pivotal Eurocentric monopoly of colonial modernity. Further pursuing this argument we conclude that there are at least two major uses of the concept: firstly, it challenges the much beleaguered modernization thesis offering a new framework for considering the non-Western modernization processes alongside with other perspectives that stress the multiple and vernacular overtones of the phenomenon as well as its authenticity; and secondly, the concept is charged with its own carefully delimited historical timetable, thus becoming in a sense locked in historiography and susceptible of being treated as any other 'tool' specific to its conceptual inventory. In order to surpass this implicit chronological immovability recent elaborations on the concept have chosen to consider it as a "living structure" which though defined concomitantly by temporal and spatial dimensions, mediates a type of cultural production in which present as well as past are continuously negotiated and reshaped(H. Lee and Cho 2012: 1-9).

Indeed, manifesting itself as a 'living structure', colonial modernity surpasses the linearity and causality extremely characteristic to historical narratives. For Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson who discuss colonial modernity in the Korean Peninsula, the danger of competing versions of

ideologically charged historical narratives is very real. Their attempt at moving beyond an almost 'maniheistic' system of historical production in which backwardness, tradition and colonial domination are challenged and finally overcome by modernity, modernization programs and progress, places colonial modernity in a context where colonialism, modernity and nationalism are entangled in a complex dynamic. All three ideas, though naturally independent concepts, represent in their view 'mutually reinforcing frames', which are constantly engaged in constructing and defining each other. Through this assessment, the basic nature and impact of colonialism is reconsidered and reevaluated inside the modernization process. On the one hand, former established historical approaches gave no value to the way in which the culture of the colonizing society was affected and transformed by its colonial enterprise. The reflexive qualities of this process become illuminated when the nature of colonial experience stops revolving around patterns of economic and political oppression and move to a field of cultural production in which the colonial authorities employ modern technics of domination and hegemony. It is exactly at this juncture where major processes of modernization are mediated and "entwined with outside economic and political influence" that colonial modernity starts showing its "liberating forces and a raw, transformative power" (Shin and Robinson 2004: 1-16).

Regardless of its origin and specificity, our final aim is to integrate the concept of colonial modernity in its dual form, both as a temporal delimitative historical period, and more specifically in its analytical capacities, in a conceptual framework capable of interpreting the vast array of social, institutional, political and cultural behaviors that various modernization processes have produced across the Ottoman Empire. Out of contextual necessity and prompted by the specificity of the Middle Eastern environment, the structure of colonial modernity must be redefined in order to become a viable analytical tool. In the East Asian context 'colonial modernity' could easily be placed in a synonymy relation with the specific form that modernity assumed in this region, a relationship that becomes obsolete in a different context. In the economy of our study, colonial modernity suffers a process of subalternation, thus becoming an intrinsic component of a modernization process that has as final result multiple and varied forms of modernity, which elude the totalizing claim of the modernization paradigm.

The Multiple Modernities of the Islamic World

Up to the revolutionary events of the Arab Spring that unexpectedly

brought down many of the long entrenched non-monarchical autocracies of the Middle East, the modernization track of the region seemed largely unremarkable. Democratization attempts were usually stifled by a powerful state apparatus that prevailed in maintaining social dissent at a minimum, using a policy coined by the Yemeni scholar Abdul Nasser Al Muwaddah as “the sword and the gold” (quoted in Khatib, 2011). Even when global ‘democratization waves’ were changing the political and ideological landscape of the world, the region’s asthenic forms of civil coagulation, both cultural and institutional, were unable to muster any considerable change (Huntington 1991: 12-34)³. The main reasons which prevented progress were largely seen as a result of the regional inability to overcome its long standing ‘modernization deficit’ (Hunter 2005: 1-18). Poor socio-economic indicators of modernization translated into a regional paradigm in which societies were caught in a pattern of endemic poverty, economic polarization generated by the dissolution of the state indicative planning patterns, and dangerously unsustainable demographic rates seconded by low literacy scores. Governing this scanty social structure was a dictatorial and repressive political establishment believed to draw its legitimacy from cultural imperatives imposed by religious tradition (see Bellin 2004: 139-141). It wasn’t only religious tradition, as the modernization theory suggested, that hampered attempts at political democratization, rather a complex and intertwined historical loop out of which only secular Turkey or post-1979 revolutionary Iran apparently found a way out. For the rest of the Middle Eastern region the continuous existence of military authoritarian regimes was not only a resultant of the political quietism that characterized these societies but also the reiteration of a long established ‘Mamlukian’ political arrangement of statehood and government that was continuously adapted and perfected from the Middle Ages to the present day (Bulliet 2011: 60–67).

³ In his very much acclaimed and also contested work, *The Clash of Civilizations...*, S. P. Huntington establishes a clear connection between Islam’s civilizational assertiveness and its prolific demography. Using historian Jack Goldstone’s theory that the Protestant Revolution was ultimately the result of an impressive ‘youth movement’, he points to a future where last decades high demographic rates, recorded in most Muslim countries, will continue to fuel the basis of the Islamic resurgence. Reading his work in the light of 2011 events, we might concede that S. Huntington has managed to express a certain premonitory disposition when he wrote that, “young people are the protagonists of protest, instability, reform, and revolution”, even though he made no reference to a democratic outcome resulting from the future wave of protests (see Huntington 1996:102-121).

While empirical evidence strongly suggested that something went wrong with the Islamic societies of the Middle East (see Lewis 2002), it is clear that political and economic indicators of modernity could give but a poor account of the complex intellectual, cultural and institutional cycles of modernization that these societies were actually following and in the same time creating. Though trying to steer clear of a culturalist approach, that eventually imposes the strict categories of civilizational specificity, and indeed of Western uniqueness, it is almost necessary to concede that in an Islamic context the fluidity and adaptability of modernization patterns is ultimately the result of a distinct spiritual and cultural outlook. It is exactly for this reason, at a moment when the core elements of Western modernity have already spread throughout the world, that it has become extremely difficult to define the exact nature of modernity or to assess the level of modernization that one society or another might have attained. The global modern panorama that emerges lacks both fluency and linearity, portraying instead an image where different societies show great institutional specificity and diversity based on particular intrinsic ideological premises and cultural dynamics. Thus the 'failure', if one is actually entitled to use this phrase, of achieving a "universal modern civilization" belongs not to a society in particular or to a group of societies, rather represents the functioning norm of the modern civilization, which, in the words of S. N. Eisenstadt, "challenged the symbolic and institutional premises of those societies that were incorporated into it, calling for responses from within them, opening up new options and possibilities" (Eisenstadt 1987: 1-12; 5).

Tradition and Defensive Modernization in the Ottoman Empire

One of the most important issues, which will become a central focus of our study, revolves around the question of how did a process of modernization that started roughly two centuries ago, end up in producing such inconclusive and varied results. Indeed it is not only the multiple nature of the result that is outstanding but rather, at times, the contemporary complete rejection of established European patterns of modernization (and results). By using the plural form of the term it is quite obvious that we recognize the absence of a clear and perfectly delineated European experience of transition from traditional-agrarian social arrangements to the modern-industrial society. Barrington Moore's seminal book *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, established these processes as involving three ideologically and economically charged pathways ranging from bourgeois democracy [as a result of bourgeois revolution], to reactionary fascism [traditional landed elites revolution] and finally

communism [peasant revolution] (see Moore 1974). At various times, during most of the 20th century, ideologically and to a large extent economically, all three paths have been adopted and implemented by the Middle Eastern post-colonial nations. In most cases, as the Arab Spring social upheaval testifies, the social impact of these policies has been hardly the expected one.

It was exactly these residual traces left by failed attempts at implementing Western models of modernization which concentrated the traditionalist attack on the cultural facets of modernity, or what came to be known as 'occidentalization'⁴. For example, the wide range of political and spiritual manifestations known as political or fundamentalist Islam usually operates a clear distinction between the technological and indeed desirable side of modernization, and its 'insidious' Western cultural baggage. Orientalist historian Bernard Lewis believes that this rejection engulfs the entire Western civilization, demonizing "not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are indeed seen as innately evil, and those who promote or accept them as the 'enemies of God'" (Lewis 2001: 18). A few decades ago, when the discourse of modernization was hardly polluted by multiple contesting versions, Daniel Lerner claimed that the basic choice the Muslim civilization had to make was between 'Mecca or mechanization' (Lerner 1958: 405). Though he was in a sense anticipating Lewis, which supposedly witnessed the complete rejection of Western modernity, Lerner writes at a time when a simpler choice still seemed possible. As we have observed, it might be that values, ideas and principles, in a word occidentalization are off the table, but Mecca and mechanization are still very much in focus. Current trends do not make a distinction between the two, rather choose them both, in a fashion that is a direct descendent of the first attempts at modernization. Unknowingly, Islamists are coming very close in sharing a perspective that Muslim elites developed two centuries ago when they were first faced with this challenge.

⁴ Regardless of its current traumatic nature, the issue of 'occidentalization' use to find in the work of a number of scholars a less conflicting, approach than that of the contemporary culturalist supporters from both sides. Albert Hourani describes the complexity of this process, in an extremely close manner to our assessment of the selective nature of Islamic modernity, when he claims that: "It could not simply be a transfer of ideas and institutions; the civilization receiving the 'impact' could to some extent determine what it should accept, and adapt it to its own purposes, although in the process it might lose its own purposes and have to rediscover them" (Hourani 1981:xiii).

Even while recognizing this, it can be argued that such binary evaluation of modernity, in which the technological facets of modernization are separated from the culture and values that were instrumental in their creation and development, is in fact a very modern attitude. And that is because it actually builds on the same processes of selection/interpretation and accommodation/exclusion that are very specific to the manner in which the very dynamics of modernity are activated inside a modernizing society. It is possible to argue that the main role in assigning value and assimilation potential to a specific cluster of values, ideas, institutions and practices that are foreign to the cultural and spiritual tenets of Islam resides in the transformative powers of tradition. In this vein Armando Salvatore proposes a retheoretisation of the fundamental concept of tradition as well as its convergence with the multiple modernities strategy of interpreting modernity. His very convincing approach divorces the concept of tradition from notions of stagnation or total submission to authority, and in doing so changes tradition from being “an almost inertial terrain of human action”. The consequence of this is that old antithetical projections of tradition versus modernity as distinct “modes of social being” and “social formations”, are surpassed by a perspective that stresses their organic connectivity. The duality in which traditions or what Salvatore calls “bundled templates of social practice” operate, involving both elites and lower strata of practitioners, makes them relevant in pre-modern as well as modern social settings. Their most important contribution is manifested when they are considered “as resources within processes of social and political change that help prevent the spread of individual anomie, collective de-acculturation, and their related, multiple backlash afflicting various levels of social and political life”(Salvatore 2010: 5-6). When we contrast this innovative approach of Islamic tradition impacting the unfolding of the modernization patterns, the contemporary conflicted nature of Islamic modernity loses its obscuring ambiguities.

In any respect, tradition alone cannot account for the entire range of transformations that shaped the outcome of modernity in the Muslim civilization. Following the implementation of early 19th century modernization programs in the Islamic world, evolved a particular type of modernity which, up to its contemporary multiple and varied manifestations, can be called colonial. In order to understand the cultural rift that colonial modernity, in both its technological and cultural forms, has provoked in many Muslim countries, and especially those that have taken shape in the wake of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, it is of great use to focus on the initial impulse of this process. Without losing sight

of our purpose one solid parallel can be drawn with the way in which Marian Aguyar describes the colonial modernity imprinted by the British colonial authorities in India using the Indian Railway. In this instance after the creation of the British Raj, as a consequence of the violent revolt of 1857, technology became the central focus of colonial policies. The Indian Railway advance across the Subcontinent was in itself a widely available proof of the optimistic expression of progress and power and movement associated with the Victorian variant of modernity. This variant had taken shape through “the amalgamation of practices and institutional forms that had given it solidity in Victoria England”, and its lasting impact would make up both for the future strengths as well as weaknesses of Indian modernity. In this particular case, the advancement of colonial modernity with the help of the railway and its particularly distinct forms of movement was looking not only to change the archaic structure of Indian society and economy, but also to prove right the “universal certainties” laying at the core of European modernity. In the Indian Subcontinent, physical movement would soon translate into social movement, the caste social system into a tightly knit national identity, while the local population would easily integrate into a new modern capitalist mode of production. But there was also a darker side of this extremely energetic rhetoric of progress. Apart from the clear advantages that it brought, the train started to be associated with the colonial state and the huge amount of injustice that it projected on local populations. Even its construction and operation would not contribute to the industrialization of India, rather it would pauperize the local economy while making readily available the resources of the country to the metropolis (Aguyar 2011: 2-9).

Unlike the British India, where a colonial superpower imposed, supervised and administered in its own interest the entire program, in the larger part of the Islamic world initially, the whole nature of the modernization was locally managed. Though it was a natural necessity as a result of a widening technological gap that was becoming ever more apparent in the field results of an Empire (civilization) created and maintained through military expansion, social and cultural resistance legitimized by tradition was expected to force its abandonment. As a measure of precaution bent on preventing this, the main focus of the process had to be military and technological; this, at least in the beginning, was thought to be easily manageable and controlled. Indeed it was a mechanism that was devised and implemented by political and military elites and its advancement in the lower strata of Islamic society was at times extremely slow. This view is supported by Albert Hourani who considers that this “process of change

which took place in this period was one which, by and large, the population of the empire, and its dependent states – even the educated part of it – did not understand. It was change imposed from above, not yet accepted by most elements in the population, affecting the system of law and administration but not as yet the organization of society” (Hourani 1981: 38).

On the other hand, the nature of the Islamic society, prior to its modernization, enjoyed a considerable degree of flexibility resulting from the patrimonial nature of its politics. At a provincial level, a number of institutions and notables competed for power and economic advantages, in conjuncture or independently with the central government. Some of the most important local institutions were the awqaf (waqf), or pious religious endowments, which being established and protected under religious law for the welfare of the community, were relatively safe from the intrusion or confiscation by secular rulers. The wealth and income that they produce was among the prime avenues of patronage and influence inside cities. Apart from awqaf and mosques, the crown judicial institution of the shaykh al-islam and its designated provincial qadis (judges) followed by a vast cohort of lower ranking officials, played also an important role in sharing power at a local/provincial level. Sufi lodges and shrines and also the ashraf, a religious rank formed from descendants of the Prophet endowed with economic and political rights, were also influential in the day to day politics of the city or province. The deep nature of provincial/town politics was revolving around various types of dependency ties in which different groups competed to amounting a larger share of the regional income. Even if the governor (Pasha or Vali) appointed from Istanbul, thus representing the authority of the Sultan, was in theory the almost absolute ruler of a province or town his position was usually a matter of negotiation with local notables groups or upper classes (ʿaskar). On the one part, he would have to coexist with the military power of local garrisons or households of Sipahis, Janissaries corps or Mamluks. Socially, local patrician families of notables and their leaders (a`yan, aḡas, amirs), merchants or landowners which usually provided higher members of ulama (muftis, naibs, na`ibs) apart from the qadi who was appointed from Istanbul, would have expected him to count them as intermediaries with lower strata of society (ra`aya). Villages from the hinterland, guilds, religious minorities confined to their quarters, tribesmen, and Mamluk households were usually all integrated in the local notables system of tutelage or informal service (Zubaida 2010: 57-63; Hourani 1981: 36-49). This loose structure of the Islamic society at the beginning of the

modernization process, which as we have seen was implemented from above, could pose a serious threat to its overall evolution. One relevant example is the Tunisian revolt that concluded the reform program introduced by the Beylik of Tunis starting with 1857. Though his measures involved a new system of taxation, a centralized bureaucracy and a new European inspired legal code, all crowned by the Constitution of 1861, the main response of the Tunisian society coagulated into full-out tribal rebellion against the reforms(Kedourie 1980: 21-22).

At the beginning of the 19th century, following the French invasion of Egypt, social discontent and adversity to change was the least concern of independent Muslim rulers. In the North African possessions of the Ottoman Empire, up to Napoleon's expedition in the Middle East, it is extremely difficult to talk of a period decline. During the last decades of the 18th century Egypt could loosely be counted as an Ottoman province. The Ottoman governor (with the title of Pasha) in Cairo was mostly a prisoner of the real rulers of the country, Mamluk chieftains and their impressive military households. The French Directory's military expedition in the country, under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte was certainly prompted by a perception of weakness on the part of the Ottomans, but it clearly served strategic as well as symbolic purposes in the larger conflict with the British. On the 1st of July 1798, after it just destroyed another living symbol of the Medieval Age, the Maltese Knights Saint John, Napoleon landed in Alexandria at the command of a 30.000 strong army, romantically named L'Armée d'Orient. Through his actions, the future Emperor would forever change the history of the Middle East. In less than a month, in what came to be known as "The Battle of the Pyramids" Napoleon's modern forces obliterated Murad Bey's Mamluk cavalry and with it a military symbol of the Muslim world. For all their current decadence the Mamluks had an impressive fighting record. In 1250 under the Ayyubids they defeated the crusader force of French King Louis IX, taking him and his host in captivity. Just a decade later at Ain Jalut they managed to stop the formidable advance of the Mongols, and in 1291 to expel the Crusaders from Accra the last major stronghold in the Holy Land. Despite this, their antiquated fighting tactics could hardly withstand the modern technique and strategy of the French Revolutionary army. Apart from the large degree of surprise that it produced on the traditional Egyptian society and its long-lasting imprint on European culture, science and art, the French expedition revealed to the Muslim world a new modern Europe. It was a modern Europe that could conquer the lands of Islam using only a small expeditionary force. It was a modern Europe that did

not justified its expansion, as in past centuries, in religious terms, but rather employing a rhetoric that resorted to rational, secular and economic arguments. An the third issue, one that will become a central challenge for the Ottoman diplomacy during the 19th century, an invading European power could be defeated only by another European power, as was the case with *L'Armée d'Orient* (Pagden 2008: 364-400).

For the Ottomans, the 18th century, at the end of which we record the first attempts of modernization, is difficult to catalogue as one of decline. On the other hand, historian Stanley Lane-Poole, writing in 1893, could full heartedly state that in the last part of this riotous historical period: "the Ottoman Empire ceased to hold the position of a dangerous military power: its armies were never again a menace to Christendom. Its prestige was gone; instead of perpetually threatening its neighbors on the north, it had to exert its utmost strength and diplomatic ingenuity to restrain the aggrandizing policy of Austria and Russia. Turkey was now to become important only from a diplomatic point of view. Other Powers would fight for her, and the business of the Porte would be less to fight itself, though she can still do it well, than to secure allies whose interests compelled them to do battle for it" (Lane-Poole 1893: 242). It is probably safer to assume that decline started much earlier and was usually concealed by temporary moments of military or diplomatic success, that were either the result of competent Sultans or of their, at times, extraordinary Viziers. In search of a scholarly consensus some authors have pointed out to the huge disaster that the Ottoman military power had suffered in 1683 when it failed to conquer Vienne. True enough this has been a cataclysmic event not so much in terms of material or territorial loses, rather at a more profound psychological level. A once confident and undefeated civilization, which for centuries treated the whole conquest of Europe as a mere question of time, found itself on the defensive. In a negative sense the military disaster outside the walls of the Hapsburg capital has been the crowning event of a dark and agitated century. For the first time in the history of the Ottoman Empire, a sultan was deposed and executed by his slave troops, the Janissaries. In 1622, these once elite fire-armed infantry contingents ended a program of military and social reform by killing its architect, Sultan Osman II (1618-1622). His execution came only one year later after his troops were defeated by Poland, mostly as a result of the Janissaries lack of discipline and training. The program of reform that the Sultan intended to implement was aiming at changing the focus of the recruitment system (*devshirme*) for Janissaries, as well as curbing their economic influence. While these reforms were designed to have mostly a military effect, still they touched

the financial interests of the ulama which sealed the Sultan fate (Mantran 2001: 194-199). Despite such tragic events the 17th century is also known for the rise of an almost dynastic family of Viziers which managed to introduce the Empire to a much needed period of reforms and stability. Beginning in 1656 with the ascension of Mehmed Köprülü to the position of Grand Vizier and coming to an end in 1683 with the execution of dishonored Kara Mustafa Pasha, this period is synonymous with the rule of Viziers coming from the Köprülü family. The Köprülü Epoch as it is sometimes called is one of extraordinary reforms which managed to put an end to both debilitating fiscal and financial deficits as well as continuous military and social revolts (Mantran 2001: 206-209). Other scholars aiming at identifying a temporal starting point of decline have focused either on the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt, or brought into consideration the 1774 Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca signed with the Romanovs, which would effectively lead in 1783 to the loss of Tatar Crimea. The treaty was a huge diplomatic accomplishment for Russia, Empress Catherine the II describing it as a triumph 'the like of which Russia has never had before.' Though territorial gains were not to be discarded the Russian managed to extract from the Ottomans via their diplomatic ingenuity the right of intervention in the affairs of the Empire when the interest of orthodox Christians were being threatened (Lewis 2000: 278-281). This concession fuelled the desires of other European powers to become protectors of religious minorities in the Empire, thus effectively giving them a valid and easily justifiable reason for intervention.

The challenge was at this point as much economical as it was military, mostly a result of the fact that the Empire was becoming more and more embroiled in the international markets of trade. While Western Europe was benefiting from the immense wealth that the American colonies were channeling towards the old continent, the Ottoman Empire was struggling with severe price inflation and precious metal hemorrhage. Adding to this, environmental changes and growing demographic pressures brought new challenges to all agrarian empires during the 16th and 17th centuries. Unable to find enough financial resources to finance the rising deficit, Ottoman Sultans were forced to accept a disastrous compromise with the military establishment, especially the Sipahis (feudal landed cavalry) and the Janissaries. While in the provinces the cavalry was unable to finance their equipment from the usufruct of the individual timar (farm land), the Janissaries, though in theory still personal slaves of the sultan, were allowed to find other lucrative means to make day's end. Their involvement and assimilation in society would impair their military

capacity, and also put an end to a very successful system of preventing factional and patrimonial challenges to the central government (Fukuyama 2012: 214-225).

Another unfortunate and profound evolution for the Ottoman ruling system took place during the 17th and the 18th centuries, and involved the once formidable institution of Sultan. Starting with Mehmet II(1444/6;1451/81), and his immense political capital resulting from the momentous conquest of Constantinople, the Sultans have been centralizing power by systematically stripping local notables, frontier lords (beys or pashas) of their independent attributes. When this power fell to decrepitude, the institution of the Sultan became mostly decorative used to legitimize a ruling system based on the intricate and dangerous politics of the court. Though in earlier stages the main challenge came from the Sultan's own household, when prominent figures of the imperial Harem, usually the Valide Sultan (mother of the acting Sultan), or overzealous and ambitious Viziers effectively ruled the Empire, later on, political power was seized by powerful Pasha's households from outside the Palace or even the capital. This trajectory of Ottoman decentralization was at odds with the policies that contemporary European monarchs were employing in order to centralize and strengthen their rule (Quataert 2005: 32-44).

Following this argument, it becomes more and more apparent that it was not just the territorial and economic pressures that the European powers were exerting on the Ottoman Empire and its semi-autonomous political dependencies that prompted attempts at modernization. Clearly, at the beginning of the 19th century Ottoman leaders, and we have in mind both the sultan as well as powerful local notables, faced huge challenges both externally as well as internally. In order to comprehend the nature of the modernizing actions implemented by Muslim rulers, it is beneficial to make use of a concept discussed by Crawford Young, which enhances the defensive traits of this process. As theorized by Young, defensive modernization describes one of the main patterns in which a number of Afro-Asian Islamic polities internalized the [Enlightened] European idea of social and technological progress, thus managing to stave off de facto Western colonial incorporation during most of the 19th century. In its raw form it was a process of adaptation and survival that imposed, apart from learning the intricacies of the European diplomatic and practice and discourse, the selective identification and acquisition of the material sources of Western progress. Borrowing from a more advanced material civilization which was beginning to measure its progress in terms of

science, technology, industrial production and economic growth did not present the only obvious challenge of maintaining or at least preserving many of the cultural imperatives of the native society. It was also the question of accommodating the alien idea of progress into a religious tradition which regarded history as a continuous reiteration of periods of religious decline followed by those characterized by spiritual fervor and compliance to religious prescriptions (Young 1982: 83-92).

Defensive modernization implied technological imports, which, as the Indian Railway suggests, were hardly 'innocent' in themselves and in a short time provoked many other unforeseen and profound changes. Their immediate application might have been military or directed towards mitigating the effects of military defeat, but the costs and needs that were associated with operating them had to be absorbed by a society, largely unchanged for centuries. Though initially these programs accomplished less than expected, still managed to induce a spirit of novelty and change which will come to full force in the following decades. The major side effect of this reform stage was that for the first time, a civilization that embodied both earthly success and divine favor was now being afflicted by doubt. It was painfully clear for established social classes that these reforms did not emerge out of the Ottoman military tradition or practice, but were imported from Europe in the form of military advisors, technicians and teachers. In order to elude such insurmountable odds, these modernizing rulers needed to take effective control of the societies that they ruled, and implicitly, to destroy any major social, political or military institutions that would stand in their way. Financially, the backbone of this policy would mean either curbing the fiscal, economic or commercial advantages that a number of established classes were enjoying, or continuing the very old Middle Eastern government tradition of confiscating personal properties or increasing levels of taxation. When this amounted to less than expected, currency debasement proved a functional but risky financial game for some Sultans and their Viziers.

In a sense, just like the British colonial establishment, modernizing Muslim rulers had their own 'Railway', and that was the modern military army that they were painstakingly trying to build. Constant failure in face of modern European armies in Europe as well as in the Caucasus or the Middle East placed the guilt mostly on the Janissary, Sipahi or Mamluk corps. Their almost independent actions, both in the capital and in the provinces made them, an easy target for the provincial a`yan (rulers/warlords), who would include them in their own autonomous designs. This rather extremely

dangerous development was made worse by the way in which the entire society was connected to the redistribution of funds allocated for the standing army. Lack of constant pay made the Janissaries to leave their garrisons and establish themselves in the ottoman cities, becoming embroiled in local economic and social life. What esame (entitlement/ration tickets) they still received was openly traded on the open market, thus transforming the whole system into a wide social welfare scheme based on inflated muster rolls. When fiscal problems prevented them from receiving their benefits it wasn't only the Janissaries who would rebel, rather whole sections of society which benefited or traded using their entitlements (Aksan 2009: 119-120).

At the beginning of the 19th century Sultans, and from now on even rulers of the practically independent political Ottoman dependencies, were facing two policies. Both negotiate with the a`yan and achieve a level of power-sharing that would guarantee both the position of the Sultan and that of the provincial warlords, or force a direct conflict with them and the old military classes. Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) made this choice very urgent in light of his tragic end at the hands of the rebellious Janissaries. Though he tried to assert his authority, clearly following the policies of his predecessor, Abdul Hamid I(1774-89), he was eventually toppled by the converging interests of the rebellious Janissaries and provincial leaders. His most important military accomplishment, the new infantry corps known as nizam i-cedid (new order), drilled and trained by European officers, was at this point too weak to withstand the full force of a social/military rebellion. In the wake of this collapse, some of the provincial leaders, feeling the weight of foreign territorial advance, will transform themselves into supporters of the central government and will bring to the throne Mahmud II (1808-39), the Sultan whose name later became synonymous with Ottoman reform (Mantran 2001a: 358-370).

In the first year of his reign, Mahmud II was willing to reach a legal agreement with the great houses of notables and the a`yan of the Anatolian and European provinces (Rumelia). Believed by some as being a kind of Ottoman Magna Carta, the 1808 Deed of Agreement, is the result of an ambiguous political agreement in which both a`yan and the Sultan would offer mutual guarantees, thus recognizing the new political status quo (Aksan 2009: 125). The failure of this agreement would pave the way for the second policy which in the case of Mahmud II managed to reach a certain measure of success. In 1826 when the Sultan tries to establish a new modern fighting force the Janissaries would rebel again and asked that the

reformers be executed. Counting on loyal troops, the Sultan's Vizier will be able to force them back into their barracks where they will be massacred. To a certain extent this event can be linked to an earlier one which occurred in 1811, when Muhammad Ali the founder of the Egyptian Khedivial dynasty, will also massacre the chieftains of the remaining Mamluk households. In the same way like Mahmud II, Muhammad Ali will proceed to embark on wide range of reforms which will transform Egypt in a very distinct economic, political and not least cultural entity inside the Ottoman Empire. His success in reorganizing the army and the administration, in using foreign instructors and officers to train a well-equipped locally recruited military force will challenge in the fourth decade of the century even the might of its suzerain, the Ottoman Sultan. Overall due to the lack of opposition and to a large degree to the ruthless nature of his personality, Muhammad Ali will managed to transform and modernize Egypt with much more success than the Sultans had in their dominions. Still, he wasn't the only Muslim local ruler who employed modern tactics of warfare to prevent the Western colonial encroachment. Between 1833 and 1847, Abd al-Qadir will successfully oppose French attempts at conquering Algeria. His methods involved both using European inspired tactics to increase the fighting ability of his troops as well as a very compelling religious ideology which found its inspiration in the golden era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (Kedourie 1980: 4).

As the pace of military reform continued, and new technological innovations were being imported, the necessity of extending the scope of the modernization programs quickly arose. For example, in order to provide qualified personnel, students had to be sent to study abroad, a practice that subjected them to the ideas and cultural outlook of a different, and at that time a more successful civilization. When that proved insufficient, an entire educational system had to be built with the effect of extending the role of the state in areas where local religious communities use to administer themselves. In order to support all these improvements and the costly modern army, new ways of strengthening the state finances had to be found with a clear consequence on the medieval privileges of established social groups.

Taking note of these challenges the Sultans following Mahmud II will continue his legacy, considering the adoption of European institutions and policies as the only viable option by which the Empire could be saved. Beginning with 1839 and abruptly coming to an end with the autocratic rule of Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909), an extraordinary period of reforms will completely transform the old Ottoman Empire. Known as the Tanzimât

(Reorganization) period, the reforms will amount to 46 imperial edicts which will enforce the 1839 programmatic Hatt-i Şerif of Gülhane (Imperial Edict). These reforms ought to be considered the next logical step succeeding initial military defensive modernization programs. Because of their vast scope that will involve not only establishing a modern functional bureaucratic apparatus but also many of the modern political, judicial and financial institutions that were becoming the norm across the European political landscape, the impact on the cosmopolitan population of the Empire will be extensive. While solving many of the problems that were chronically impairing the central administration, these changes will give rise to new threats. National agitations and rebellions will sprung up on the ruins of the old confessional based pluralist social system (millet). On the other hand the cost of these modernization policies will introduce the Empire and its North African political dependencies to a cycle of internationally funded debt that ultimately would sacrifice their independence (see Mehmed 1976: 302-332).

Conclusion: The Nature of Colonial Modernity

Attempting to accommodate the concept of colonial modernity to the study of the multifaceted realities that the modernizing Ottoman world was experiencing once this process was started at the end of 18th century, is not without its challenges. Torn between modernizing impulses and the ever present shadow of established patterns of social, cultural and religious traditions, the evolution of these societies is extremely difficult to integrate in a linear historicist pattern of change. As it has been observed, eventually, conservative or reactionist upheavals will completely destroy or delay the modern measures adopted by the Muslim political elites. To a certain extent, the variable success of these traditional movements is a direct consequence of the elitist nature characteristic to the process of defensive modernization. In contrast to many Muslim political leaders, the upper social classes which now witnessed their old privileges withering were much more influential among the lower strata of society. This meant that it was in their grasp to easily channel or control social discontent in order to force abandonment of such policies, and reinstate their privileges via more lenient political leaders. Colonial modernity came into existence and evolved into a conflicting and turbulent historical period, something which will define both its existence and its contemporary legacy. Still, as in the East Asian context, in the territory ascribed to the former Ottoman Empire, colonial modernity is an integral part of the cultural reservoir of a distinct contemporary form of modernity.

Connections with the colonial modernity that took shape in the Indian Subcontinent, and later in East Asia, can be established and are extremely important, though in the case of Islamic Ottoman Middle East the picture is far more complex. It was inside this cycle of military defeat of Western colonial and economic pressures, of financial and fiscal frailty engaged by desperate defensive modernization programs that colonial modernity came into being in the Ottoman world. Here as well as in other regions of the world it fundamentally challenged and changed traditional political order, religious certainties, cultural assumptions and social mobility patterns. The main difference is that unlike other regions of the globe, in the case of the Ottoman Empire and its political dependencies, direct colonial domination was achieved by the European powers for only a limited amount of time mostly at the end of the 19th century. Thus, colonial modernity here was not a result of direct domination but rather a consequence of the complex interaction between external, European influences and endogenous intellectual, religious and political responses.

Another important trait of this type of colonial modernity was that in contrast to other regions of the world the process was, up to a point locally managed. Indigenous political elites which were responsible for its implementation in its raw form soon discovered that in order to build momentum the process had to gain support from other influential strata of society. The most important group that the Muslim leaders sought to attract and to involve in the whole process was that of the religious intelligentsia. Their involvement was becoming necessary because in order to have a viable process defensive modernization, the scope of the project had to be extended from military and technological imports to implementing and ever-growing range of social, cultural and political European innovations. Some of the most brilliant Muslim intellectuals of the age, dissatisfied with the degradation of traditional Islamic learning and keenly aware of the impending dangers that the Muslim world was facing were quickly drawn in. Their task was not only to prevent the rejection of modernization programs by largely traditional societies but also to ensure that the core of Islamic heritage will not vanish in the course of what historian André Miquel called the "great debate of Islam with modernity" (see Miquel 1968). While they would seek to develop intuitive new patterns by which foreign concepts and ideas could be extracted from their European filiation and validated in a traditional Islamic setting, it will become clear that they would suffer an unconscious drive towards self-orientalization. This meant that, reluctantly, they were forced to accept Western superiority, at least in its military and political form, and in the

process of internalizing this assumption they uncovered the cultural facets of colonial modernity. Khair al-Din al-Tunisi (1820/2-1879) known for the high political offices that he held, both in Tunis and Constantinople, supported importing European institutions and practices because it was clear that all of them had a counterpart in Islamic history. Justification for emulating the elements that ensured European progress and prosperity like a constitutional government, the rule of law, individual and political freedom and a true separation of powers was thus found in the argument of reinstating Islamic tradition (Black 2011: 290-3). His line of thought will be continued by Egyptian Rifaat al-Tahtawi (1801-73), famous for translating into Arabic the text of the French Constitution and the works of Montesquieu and Rousseau, and Abdul-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1902) for whom the loss of the Islamic intrinsic idea of liberty was responsible for the current plight of Muslims (Sitaru 2009: 29-30; Bouazza 2008: 61-5; Lewis 1991: 110-111). The most important thinkers of the current we find Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-97) and his apprentice Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Both are representatives of the religious intelligentsia, while their modernizing views made available to the Muslim world through the medium of the nascent Muslim press assumed a paradigmatic status across Islam. al-Afghani represents the itinerant militant Muslim scholar par excellence. His mercurial personality brought him on multiple occasion on a collision course with Muslim rulers with whom he had continuous relations. Loyal to his credo of reestablishing the golden days of the Caliphate, he will become a prime exponent of Sultan Abdul-Hamid's II (1842-1918) pan-Islamic ideology. His conception recognize the state of decrepitude, political as well as religious, of the Muslim countries and societies and finds the cause of this in the traditions and moors that have crept inside Islam's spiritual fabric. Ardent supporter of scripturalism and religious orthodoxy, he will advocate the unity of Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in front of Western aggression. In the same vein as his predecessors al-Afghani believes that as long as Islam was detached from cultural and parochial innovations and reason, equality and rational argumentation will surpass blind imitation of tradition, and nothing could prevent Islam from attaining a universal status. Following his mentor teachings, M. Abduh desired change, but unlike him after the 1882 British defeat of Egyptian forces at Tell el-Kebir, he will consider social amelioration best attained through a process of gradual improvement and progress (Brown 2000: 95-6; also Wild: 2006: 273-90; also Adams 1968).

Through their work these scholars defined the cultural and intellectual nature of colonial modernity. Even if all strive towards achieving an Islam

returning to its fundamentals, cleansed of the innovations that appeared to have crept into its fabric across centuries, their interpretation and diagnosis of the process bears little resemblance to the intellectual heritage of past epochs. Transforming the spiritual and cultural outlook of the Islamic civilization involved a modern process of selection in which the very immobility and inertia of tradition is lost. Thus, by employing its legitimacy to accredit modern European political concepts and ideas, they also gave birth to a cultural tension between the variants of tradition which were legitimate and Islamic, and those that were simple cultural and social innovations. The former already contained and espoused everything that was giving the modern European civilization its impressive status, while the later was responsible for the current decadence and decrepitude. This process of vilification of certain traditional traits that construed parts of the Islamic cultural milieu is a clear characteristic of colonial modernity.

As a result of the advance of defensive modernization programs, colonial modernity came into being long before the actual incorporation of the Ottoman Middle Eastern provinces into a European colonial framework. To some extent, it can be argued that the whole process of negotiating technological and cultural imports, that became the defining feature of colonial modernity, actually facilitating colonial designs. Through colonial modernity, colonialism became a reality *avant le lettre* that is prior to their actual incorporation into a colonial system. Defensive modernization requirements insured that the stream of change would completely alter and destroy traditional social arrangements and allegiances, making these societies display an uneasy symbiosis between tradition and modernity. Eventually, the outdated medieval sultanates brought together by a loosely defined political and administrative structure, were transformed into political actors that displayed all major traits of statehood and institutionality recognizable by a European modern state. For a number of them this stage was to be the end of their provincial existence in the Ottoman structure.

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