MODERNITY AND CONSUMER SOCIETY

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This course has two wings. On the one side lays modernity and on the other side consumerism. As you know well, the age we are living is called modern times in general. Though some calls it as post-modern, meaning the era after modernity, which leaves modern times behind it, some others calls it also as late modern. Post or late, anyway, one thing is certain and that is we are experiencing everyday the consequences of certain historical and social transformations in the late 5 to 10 centuries which in the end let to the formation of today. And this process corresponds to the formation of modernity, to summarize it under one title.

We are all experiencing different aspect of modernity in our daily lives. We face with both opportunities and also problems which arise as a consequence of modern life style. So, for some of us, modernity, the fruits of modernity may seem as a great opportunity to experience a good life, in both material and moral meaning. But some of us may evaluate modernity as a great catastrophe, a great threat to humanity, again both in material and also moral meaning.

We are not making for now any comment on those two evaluations, but we have to accept that while experiencing fortunes and misfortunes of modernity, we constantly define it even if non academically or scientifically. So, even in a non-academic or non-scientific way, we have some sort of definitions about modernity. On a level of impression, we have an individual conception of modernity, which may be constructed in accordance to values of our own society. For example, most of us would refer to individuality, or reason, or secularity when the question of modernity comes forth. Or we equate the modern life totally with modernity, although this is not true to some extent. Even though we live in times which are products of modernity, we still continue to experience also counter-processes to modernity like tradition for example. So, the life we are living is actually a synthesis of modernity and some other counter-processes on some differing levels. So, our course aims to give some insights about those mentioned points.

Our course has two wings: modernity and consumerism. It is important here to make a differentiation between consumerism and consumption. When we will talk about consumption, we will see that it was a phenomenon which was to be seen over all the different periods of humanity. Humans were consuming during the early ages of humanity but also we are consuming today exceedingly, too. And even, we should say that consumption is not a peculiar, distinctive, exclusive feature of human beings. May we say that also animals or plants consumes? The answer will be yes. Animals consume too. They use resources in order to survive. Plants or trees consume resources to grow etc. Here we use consumption solely as an act of using certain resources in order to live and progress further, to hold on to the life.

By this first meaning of consumption, the focus is life itself, not the consuming subject. The thing that makes consumption a necessity is the focus. But if we talk about consumerism, we do not talk about a mandatory act for surviving, but we talk now about voluntarily and arbitrary acts of subjects which find their meanings through consumption. The focus is no more life itself but the focus is the act of consumption and the subject now. Consumption in order to consume, would be the oversimplified definition for consumerism.

So we come to the question: when did this change happen? When we turned into consumerism. When has the meaning of consumption changed? This is why we must deal with modernity. This is why we talk here about a course under the name of modernity and consumer society.

We do not talk about “modern consumer society”. No. If we would have said modern consumer society, then we would have implied that there was also a premodern consumer society. In such a case we would examine only the evolution of premodern consumerism into modern one. But no. When we say that modernity AND consumer society, than we imply that consumer society or consumerism to a degree was also a consequence of modernity. We do not say that this was intended or not. Bu in some point of the process of modernity, at some points of the outcomes of modernity, this process created a daily habit of human beings, which can be defined as consumerism.

Lets summarize what we have examined so far in three sentences:

* We live in the age of modernity, which is to be sensed with its all discrepancies, unconformities and compulsions in our every daily habits.
* Consuming is an universal act which can be observed throughout history with a focal point on mainly survival or maintain and sustain the “life” itself.
* Consumerism differs from consumption in that it turns the focal point of action to the consuming subject.

In order to define and then explain modernity and consumerism in a concrete way, we should speak on a concrete ground, too. Actually, we need a ground which will function both as a subject and also as an object of modernity and consumerism. I say subject, because this ground should first create modernity and consumerism, and I say object, because this ground should function as the room where modernity and consumerism could Show their full effectiveness. And what is this ground, what can it be? It should be a network of individuals which will have the capacity to produce cultural, social, political and economic forces and principals. This network of individuals is called in its broadest sens, SOCIETY.

So we came to the third crucial but the most basic Word or conception of the course title. SOCIETY. How should we define society? You know, actually society is the most core and general object of the social sciences, whether sociology or economics or politics. Those social sciences all try to understand society. Even when they focus on individual or just a bounded group of people, they treat that individual or group as a member of a more greater whole, which we call as society. But here comes again our question: How will we define it.

I have already said that previously, society is a network of individuals. “A network which has the capacity to produce cultural, social, political and economic forces and principals.” This is a basic definition, but we should look to ourselves. Do we live in a society? Do we belong to a society? Are we as individuals a minor part of a greater whole, which can be called a society? Yes. We live in Turkey, right, and in a most broad sense we say that we are living in Turkish society. So, from this fact we may conclude that: A meaningful amount of people, living on a soil enclosed with certain borders.

So, if we take into account this perception we should say that people living in a nation-state will equate also with a full sense of a society. Like german, french, japan or indian society, right. But what differs a society from another. With other words, which differentiation, which specification, which distinction justifies a separate existence of a society from the other.

It is actually the capacity to produce and reproduce distinctive exclusive social institutions, values etc. Especially culture is a very important component. Germans and French people do not differ one another in language, but they have also different political, economic institutions and traditions, which have e determining effect on daily habits on individuals living in that societies. To summarize: A group of people living on a soil within bounded borders with a capacity of exclusive cultural, political and economic production is what we call as society.

But to equate society with nation-state has two problems too. First of all: nation-state is also a historical artifact. Nation-state in a modern sense, has a history of almost 400 years. Second, countries like India or China. Or even Britain or USA can hardly be defined solely as a single society. Countries like India consists of various religious and cultural diversities which in the end causes the existence of more than one or two social groups. So when we talk about society, therefore, formal boundaries cannot be always a determining criterion. Of course, we may talk about some boundaries. Those boundaries were shaped within the course of history. But the essential component which creates the exclusive characteristics of a society is its capacity of self-production. How we develop a language. How we maintain our economic relationships. The production process cannot be abstracted absolutely from foreign groups but its inner force is the ultimate address for its characterization.

To summarize: there is two factors which determine an existence of a society: inner and outer. Outer factor is shaped in regard to other societies and also involuntary factors like geography etc. Outer factor determines the borders of a society. But the real characterization is shaped according to inner factor, which is the capacity of self-production.

So how can we relate this definition of society to consumerism. We should not forget that in all social phenomenon, the final determining component is always the individual human being. It is not possible to make a certain and concrete and also ultimate definition for individual. We cannot accept for all individuals that they behave with their own independent free will and reason. A baby is born and then raised according to innumerous factors which in the end cause that individuals be who they are.

But we can say that the interaction between individuals create the previously mentioned inner factor of the society. So there is individuals, there is society, they have reciprocal relationship with each other which in the end causes the renewal and reproduction of the society. But we should also take into account that individuals are always open to the new ways of interaction. Be it through trade, be it through religion, be it through politics or sport, individuals, spontaneously are open to accept new ways of interaction and communication. We must remember that modernity also meant the creation of new ways of interaction. From 17. Century on, through new developing printing techniques, transporting opportunities etc. people started to encounter mere frequently with strangers, which in the end started to create new formations of groups of people.

If we look at the communication opportunities of the 21. Century, we will say that the interaction opportunities of individuals have gone far beyond the imagination of previous decades. Now, thanks to internet or social media, we may be aware of all social, political, economic etc. developments around the world. We still carry the birth remark of our bounded groups, like nationality etc. but we can see also that this new age opens us new doors of socialization. So in an age of globalization, where individuals are eager to reproduce themselves, reproduce their identities through consumption, we may speak of a new social identification which may pass over our traditional or conventional definition of society. So now, we can speak of a consumer society whose inner determinant is the capacity of reproducing new consumers.

# 2. MODERNITY

In the previous session, I told you that our course will have two wings. One is modernity. And the other is consumer, consumption or consumerism. And these two wings were settled on a basis which is called society.

Actually what we mean by modernity is the totality of conditions, relationships, contradictions, promises, manners and institutions of the social unity we are living in now.

We are trying to understand, how this totality, this social unity, this modern society or societies were formed. Firstly, we will deal with the “formation of modernity”. What do we understand from formation? Actually, our question is this: how did modernity appear?

But we must be careful as we are dealing with this question? Can we accept modernity as a concrete phenomenon , a process or epoch upon which all the academicians or modern people agree. Or is modernity a controversial issue. So controversial that it is hard even to describe it in a comprehensive and coherent sense?

Before answering these questions, let’s begin with some definitions. At least we can try to make some definitions on modernity.

## 2.1. Definition of modernity

There are several ways of definition. Each can bring us a different aspect of the notion we are dealing with. For example, we can try to understand the notion of modernity from an etymological point of view.

In this sense, the meaning of modernity is given in dictionary as following: “quality or state or condition of being modern” or “a modern way of thinking.”

Then what is “modern”. Modern is, like modernity, a commonsense word which we use and define in our daily life constantly.

The word is driven actually from modernus, a Late Latin word meaning “just now”. Modernus was in fact a derivation of Latin word of “modo” which actually corresponded to “measure or manner”.

So, we may to some extent comment that with the formation of the word “modern”, the current time people were living in begin to become the measure of judgement, too.

What does that mean? With the appearance of “modern”, people started to say that what we have today, is better and more right than what we had in the past. What today is prevailing is better than what was before. So, it was indicating to the power of today.

People tried to separate their selves from those ones living in the past. So this was controversy between today and past.

People tried to make a differentiation between, for example, antique Greek and Roman empire. Later between pagans and early Christians. Later, during the 15th century for example, they tried to make a distinction between classical epochs of Greek and Roman empire and themselves.

So, from this point of view, what we call today as premodern was actually the modern of their age. For example, today we condemn the scholastic understanding of the church in the middle ages. But for people of this era, what their ways of conceiving the world including scholasticism was modern too, but not in the “modern” sense, of course.

So, they were all implying by using the word modern in a positive way, that they were facing a change and this change had a positive meaning in comparison to the standards of the past.

So, through “modern”, through emphasizing the “just now” as a criterion for value judgement, people of different eras developed a manner towards their opponents. It was a claim of value judgement, it arise as a process of project, it was the reflection of a cognitive status. So, it is therefore hard to equate modernity with concrete institutions, structures etc. But we can indicate to a process in which the project of modernity was constructed.

Concept of modernity, modernity as an epoch 🡪 history and sociology

So, when talk about modernity, we talk about a concept rather than a single word then. It is different to deal with a concept rather than a word.

A concept is an abstraction of a certain idea or phenomenon. So, to a certain extent, a concept is a fiction based on certain facts. We take facts, bring them together to build an idea about them.

So, in order to understand the concept of modernity, then, we should look into history and check that facts.

When we say modernity, then, we signify a certain epoch or process. An epoch of humanity, which have started in a certain or uncertain phase or age of history, gained distinctive characteristics.

And those characteristics were so important that it had to be a distinction between this modernity epoch and others.

Let’s look at an encyclopedic definition of modernity:

According to Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, modernity is: *A term describing the particular attributes of modern societies, based on the assumption of a sharp divide between pre-modern and modern societies; distinguished on economic, political, social and cultural grounds. According to these, modern societies typically have industrial, capitalist economies, democratic political organization and a social structure founded on a division into social classes. Etc.*

Another one from Cambridge dictionary of Sociology: *Modernity is a civilizational epoch, though originated in western Europe and North America over two centuries ago, today it extends to cosmopolitan centers around the globe and its consequences affect all but the most isolated communities in every country on earth.*

The first definition, determines certain elements to define modernity; the second one, signifies the geographical and temporal wideness to which modernity can be attributed.

Regarding to this wideness, it should be said that, the definition of modernity, or at least the effects of modernity should differ from time to time.

Not all modern societies have or had democratic political organizations, not all of them had or have capitalist economies. The perception of modernity would be different in Turkey, in England and in China, for example.

In this situation, the main thing to do remains to look to the historical course of modernity and try to determine some common characteristics which will be useful to define it.

## 2.2. Historical phases of modernity

When does modernity begin:

Let’s look at the historical phases of modernity, shortly. When does modernity begin?

This is a hard question to answer, because as we will see when we talk about modernity, we mean different spheres of life. We observe some changes in economic life, some changes in political life, some changes in social life.

All the changes in those different areas has its own historical course.

For example, if we are talking politics in modern societies, we should point out to the formation of modern state in the 19. society.

One writer points out that the first modern state was the united Germany under Bismarck in 1870, but we know that the first seeds of the nation state appeared in 1648 with the treaty of Westphalia.

Even before that, Machiavelli wrote some pieces which contributed to the modern way of politics. The first pillars of liberalism appeared in the late 17. and 18th century thanks to Hobbes and Locke. The French revolution was a great point in the history of European political life.

The French revolution was also a great historical point regarding the transformation from feudalism towards capitalism but all know that 1789 was only a crystallization of a long term change which started much earlier in the 16. century and maybe even earlier than that.

Actually, modernity has not a single starting point, but it is more like sum of multitude of starting points. Therefore when we deal with modernity, we will indicate to these multitude of stages.

So, rather than to fix a certain beginning for modernity, we should say that at least, modernity was the outcome of certain historical changes in Europe which started in approximately 16. century and reached to a more determined stage in the 19. century.

## 2.3. Historical stages of modernity

Let’s see first the stages we can determine which step by step led to the formation of modernity, or modern society at all.

The decline and abolishment of feudal society (15.-19. century): Feudal society was the political, economic and social totality, in which the premodern European societies were running. From the 5.-6. to 15.-16. centuries, a strict hierarchy between social classes was visible. Most of the population was living in a strictly limited region, bound to the land which they were not allowed to leave, in severe life conditions. Mobility was restricted. The ideological base was grounded on mostly Catholic church. We can talk mostly about a decentralized structure, geographically and in every other terms. But with the rise of cities, trade, wealth etc. feudal society ceased to keep its dominance and after a long transformation it disappeared totally and this situation gave rise to new modes of economic, political and social relationships. The symbolic end for feudalism is the French revolution when the aristocracy was abolished.

Renaissance (15.-16. century): If we wanna talk about the individualism of modern societies we should start dealing with Renaissance firstly. It was an interim premodern -late medieval period in which the seeds of secularism or individualism were planted. Humanism which was developed during the Renaissance period, which means re-birth actually, gave rise to the idea that man is the center of his own universe and every individual has to try to reach his/her own cultural, educational achievements. It was a break in the scholasticism of the middle ages. Art was the main means to reach those achievements. Renaissance constructed the bridge to the ancient world, again.

Reformation (16.-17. Century): With reformation the predominance of Catholic church was shaken. With Protestantism, the intermediary institutions like church between god and individuals started to be taken into doubt. Although it was not the intention of the pioneers of protestant religious thinkers, Protestantism indirectly fed the idea of individualism. Protestantism had not only impacts on religious status of people, but it affected deeply the political relations in Europe as well, enabled the emancipation of minor states from the dominance of the Catholic Church and contributed to the formation of modern nation states. As we shall see later, Max Weber claimed that Protestantism and especially Calvinism was one of the constituting forces behind capitalism.

Rise of nation state (17.-19. Century): Nation-state is the main geographical and political ground on which all the modern relationship are maintaining. Nations-state guaranteed secure mobility within their borders which was important in terms of modern economic relationships. Mercantilism was developed under the reigns of modern kingdoms. Nation-state also enabled the formation of modern juridical system, bureaucracy which can be seen as the rationalization of formal relationships between individuals.

Discovery and colonization of the non-western world (16-19. century): Colonization was important in the first hand that it enabled the capital accumulation for the European people. Without capital accumulation the technological and industrial advancement of the European countries could not be achieved. Colonies served also as the potential markets of the European industries and enslaved people were used as labor force.

Increasing role of science and technology; innovation; decline of premodern beliefs; from tradition to reason (17.-20. century): In the process of formation of modern societies, the change in the ways of evaluating the social phenomena was a big step. People ceased to refer tradition or religion to explain the world, but know they were referring to reason and consequently scientific evidence. This cognitive change gave rise to the enthusiasm towards discovering the mechanism of the nature and inclination towards invention and innovation. Science was the main trigger behind the rise of newly arising technologies which had also immense economic important.

Enlightenment (18. century): Enlightenment constituted the main ideological base and promise of modernity. Ideas like individualism, secularism, progressivism, scientism were all developed and propagated during Enlightenment era. Enlightenment became the symbol for the emancipation of the human mind from all of the restraining powers like church or tradition.

French revolution (1789): The most important concrete date which symbolically signifies to the end of old order and salutes the new one. It was seen mainly as a political revolution but it had also economic importance in that it symbolized the end of the feudalism and indicated the rise of a newly enriching class, which is bourgeoisie. The ideas like republicanism, nationalism would affect all of the European societies and rest of the world in the coming centuries.

Rise of the consumer society (18.-20. century): This will be examined of course in our coming sessions in a more detailed way but we may shortly say that with the 18. century new techniques of sales appeared and the vantage point of the economic relationship started to shift slowly from production to consumption.

Mobility and individual freedom (18.-20.century): With the decline of feudalism, the rise of population and the hopes of getting a new life in the cities people started to move in the other parts of the region they are living in. people get emancipated rom their bounds to lords and land. They gained their full freedom and the price of this freedom was their loss of security and immense poverty in the cities. Mobility was not only valid for individuals but also commodities started to move from place to place through trade. Later, especially after French revolution, as a side effect of the wars etc. ideas started to move also.

Population growth and urbanization (18.-19. century): Population growth was the one of the main compelling pressures behind the social change. The population of Europe doubled and people were forced to go to the cities which caused the immense growth of urban life. People moved to cities which had no adequate infrastructure. Throughout the 19. century, urban life became more and more important in parallel to the rise of industrialism. We must remember that early sociologists of 19. Century all tried to examine and figure out the basic problems of urbanization, in economic or cultural ways.

Appearance of Civil society (19. century): Another big development. From the one siede a sphere of economic relationships independent from politics appeared. This sphere of economic relationship constituted a new compelling power against politics. On the other hand, the emancipation of people from their bounds of lord and land and their movement into the cities created masses. Their size created a potential power of them against political power elites. Thanks to the civil society and also the appearance of “social” as an independent sphere, the ordinary people started to be seen as a compelling factor.

From agrarian society to mercantilism, the rise of capitalism and Industrial Revolution (19. Century): Feudal relationships were totally bound to the alnd and agrarian relationships. But with the rise of the trade, a new economic mentality started to prevail in Europe. Through trade and mercantilism supported with the newly arising kingdoms and nation states, people and states could find the chance of accumulating more and more capital. Capital accumulation constituted the foundation of industrial investment. Capitalism and industrialization presented the main ground for all economic relationships in modern society. Also the division of labor as a result of the new economic relationships helped to the formation of new classes.

Rise of communication (mass media, literacy) and transportation technologies (19. Century and continuing): Actually started much earlier, with invention of new printing techniques. As Benedict Anderson claimed, thanks to newspapers imagined communities could emerge where two distant individual by reading same passages could feel them as the member of a same social unity. The rise of literacy through compulsory education helped to the formation of imagined communities also. Later the transportation novelties like train helped to the formation of new modern societies. Distances became close. Formerly inevitable social, political and economic ties were constructed. This process of communicational and transportational advancement is still continuing as you can observe easily.

Globalization (Late 19. Century and continuing): One of the distinctive features of modernity is that it was spread almost to the whole world. It started as a function of trade in the 19th century but today we talk about cultural globalization also. the rise of communicational and transportational technologies enabled the rise of globalization too.

Modernism and after (20. century): With modernism we talk about a movement which transformed old styles in art, architecture, social organizations etc. and reorganized cultural accumulation of society on a new base.

World Wars and the disillusionment of modernity (20. Century): Modernity had a huge promise in that it presented a peaceful, equalitarian and prosperous future which it could not fulfill. The two world war become the watershed for this failure and disillusionment of modernity.

Postmodernism (late 20. Century): Actually late-modernism according to some thinkers rather than a post one.

We look here to the stages which directly contributes to the formation of modern societies. We determined here 18 different stages from 15. Century till today.

As we have seen those stages, we may add a comment of Marshal Berman here. Berman, in his book “All That Is Solid Melts Into Air”, divides history of modernity into three phases.

This was a phrase taken from Communist Manifest of Marx and Engels, while pointing out to the great socio-economic transformation in Europe. According to Marx and Engels, every structural institution of European society was dissolving itself. Europe was driving into a great turmoil. Every base, every foundation people are resting on; every institution people were depending on, every institution which provides security to people are dissolving itself. Religion, home, family, job… Everything people were resting on was losing their meaning.

So, according to Berman, there was three steps towards modernity:

First phase: Start of the 16. Century to the end of 18.th century: In this phase “people are just beginning to experience the modern life, they hardly know what has hit them.” There was the first traces of transformation, a certain amount of people were facing with these new traces of transformation, they were understanding that the usual life they are having was changing, but it was still early to “name” it.

Second phase: End of 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century. This is what we call the long 19th century between 1789 and 1914, between the French Revolution and the First World War. “A great modern public abruptly and dramatically comes to life. This public shares the feeling of living in a revolutionary age.” And they “can remember what it is likely to live in worlds that are not modern at all.” So, we are talking about a stage in which people aware and conscious of the consequences of the transformation they had experienced but they have also the chance of ability to compare the pros and cons of the old and new days.

And lastly: 20th century as the last phase. Triumph but also complexities of modernity. People are experiencing the fruits of modernity deeply but they know now that its promises has its price too.

So we can see here that modernity is never felt the same in different stages of modern life. Actually, the appearance of modernity may differ from time to time and also from one geography to an other. Modernity cannot be perceived as a coherent, consistent process. Indeed, it has its own controversies, discrepancies, paradoxes. We cannot claim also that the above mentioned stages could form a universal path for all the different societies but we try to sketch out the historical development line of modernity at its birth place, which is the Western Europe.

## 2.3. Spheres of modernity

Late 18. Century and 19. century is also corresponds to the era, when different spheres of life appeared. What do we mean by that?

In the premodern era, all the social decisions were taken, social debates were maintained and belonged to the court of the ruling people. Social, economic and political aspects of the society were determined in one single area which was the court of the ruling people. The social, economic and political decision-making processes as we would call today were in the hands, in the monopoly of the ruling people. The address for the final justification of all decisions was this court. We cannot think of an independent development line of economic activities from the political ones or vice versa.

The formation of social classes, for example,

the status of the people,

the relationship between different institutions were signifying both political and also social and economic spheres as a whole.

Economic activities of people,

social relationships of people did not constitute a compelling pressure on political elites, because they were not autonomous or independent from the ruling class. So, the people were passive in respect to these decision-makers. They had not much choice to accept what was offered to them.

But in the process of the appearance of modernity as a new era, those three era, political, economic and social spheres started to rip off their ties and they became independent. So, the single headed society became a three headed one. There appeared three spheres of society in which different aspects of society were debated and determined. With modernity, ruling people or power elites of the society had still their affective impact on those three stages. But through the developments which were triggered by the historical stages of the modernity, they were no more monopoly for them. Instead, ordinary people or different strata of the society had also found the chance to realize their wishes and choices. So the elites of the society, let them be the politicians, let them be rich people etc. could not impose a one sided decision on politics, economy or society. Though we cannot stil speak about a proportional division of power, the decision making processes in the society were now dispersed.

In short, with modernity, social relationships, economic relationships and political relationships became independent compelling pressure sources.

The appearance of the three modern social sciences, economics, sociology and also political science was the reflection of this divide.

Social scientist started to examine these three spheres independently by knowing that those three spheres had their own distinctive mechanisms.

### 2.3.1.Social

Let’s look at these spheres of society independently.

With the abolishment of feudalism, people became free of their ties from the ruling elites. Actually it was a contradictory situation. The ruling elites gave up from their predominance over peasant by giving them their freedom. But this situation meant also that the peasants were losing their patronage. The ruling elites had to guarantee to the peasant home and work. This guarantee was not too much, the peasant were living in survival level. But it was still a guarantee. With the legal freedom, peasant had to leave the lands they were living in too, because these lands belonged to the ruling elites. So legal freedom meant economic and social insecurity.

So the peasants came to the cities, became workers of newly developing industries, but their living conditions were severe. They had to organize themselves and become a compelling source of pressure in order to affect the political decision makers and create some guarantees for themselves. This is the process how social movements started to emerge.

Also, newly appearing bourgeoisie and free thinkers of society like philosophers, artists, poets etc. composed, created spaces for open discussion in which new ideas could be developed and spread to the rest of the society.

Newly developing communications opportunities, mainly newspapers and books, supported this process as a whole.

These newly appearing relationships, new channels of interaction between ordinary people constituted what we call today the public sphere. A new sphere, in which ordinary individuals could build and organize an atmosphere, that could work as a compelling pressure over decision makers.

### 2.3.2. Economic

In medieval era, feudal society was itself a political and economic organization. Strict institutions embedded in the society were determining the economic activities of individuals.

But by 14. century and on, new economic relationships and groups of people started to appear. Trade gain an importance which it did not have formerly.

Towards the end of 18. Century newly appearing economic groups, mostly tradesmen, gained influence over political decision making processes. This was to a certain extent a result to this fact: the now centralized state apparatus noticed that it was dependent on economic actors in the society.

And also, some thinkers like Adam Smith pointed out that the economic activity had its own laws. It has to function on its own rules, nobody has to touch it. İt is like the economy is a parallel universe which is not to be determined by other forces than the economic relationships.

Philosophers like Hegel defined a civil society in which economic activities were developed in relation to but autonomous from the politics.

Karl Marx claimed that the economic base is the ultimate determinant of all social relationships.

So, economy has been always important throughout the history of humanity, but its role in the society could not be differentiated form the political functions. But now, it became an independent area of examination.

### 2.3.3. Political:

Finally, the political sphere.

There were also crucial transformations visible in the political sphere.

In accordance with the developments in the social and economic spheres, politics ceased to be the monopoly of aristocracy or some noble ruling elites. Different social groups demanded their share from politics. They demanded seats on the decision making table. Among them, the working class and bourgeoisie were to be found. The American Revolution in the 1770s and later the French Revolution were two crucial moments when non-noble people gained political ground against aristocracy. In America, the American colonies defeated the British Empire, crushed their claims over American soils and founded a democracy which became an example for other social strata in Europe. But the real political transformation of Europe was a result of the social tensions in the 19th century. The poverty and severe life conditions of the century made poor people to became more and more politicized. Also, capitalist bourgeoisie demanded its share on the political decision making process by observing its rising importance and impact in the society. But politics was not only a class issue, by the beginning of the 20th century women become also politicized against the exclusionary character of the traditional politics. In regard to full suffrage of the whole strata, people had to struggle till the beginning of the 20th century.

## 2.4. Motives of modernity

so we have seen the basic transformation and the most crucial stages through which modernity had passed.

The three spheres of we have examined here presented the ground on which the characteristics of modernity could be fulfilled.

now we can turn to these characteristics.

It is important to point out that the history we are sketching out here belongs mainly and exclusively to the prominent European societies which are Britain, France and later Germany. Actually, the first among those countries which is seen as the core of the modernity is England and later France actually. On the other hand, for example, belatedness towards modernity, like it is in Turkey, was a prominent issue in Germany, too. Britain was seen the core country of modernity and capitalism, so Germans were arguing that they had to catch up Britons by developing their own path of modernity. So, we see even for the European countries that the process of modernity did not appear all over them at the same moment.

So, the history of modernity is exclusively western. When we start to deal with certain characteristics of modernity, we will see that those characteristics of modernity belong to the western countries primarily.

but we will see that in various degrees their reflections have affected those countries who have followed in later years the path of modernity. For example, scientism. We can count scientism as one of the main characteristics of modernity.

Early French sociologists believed that through science the mankind can reach the ultimate truth about humanity and society. So, science could present the righteous path of social reorganization.

While this was the case in France, other followers of modernity in other countries like Turkey, tried to adopt or discuss similar views. So, the characteristics of modernity will give us the main roadmap in the path of understanding modernity.

### 2.4.1 Change

Change and / or the will the change was one of the most prominent motives of modernity.

Of course, modernity meant leaving the old social formations of humanity. By old social formations, we mean cultural, political and economic traditions or affiliations or institutions. If we have to speak in a more concrete way, leaving feudal relationships mainly, affiliation to Catholic church etc.

Modernity meant, on the other hand, accepting new cultural, political and economic traditions or affiliations or institutions. Among those were scientific, political and industrial revolutions. Secularism. Urban life. Etc.

We should not forget that, if “change” is our concern, we must point out that even some centuries before, humanity had left other social formations and accepted what modernity was opposing now.

But the important issue here is that modernity has brought some novelty to the perception of change.

Changing the new with the old ones was not crucial alone. The crucial thing was to accept constant changing or the will to change.

The former epochs were also a result of certain transformations of afore social formations but in feudal society and others, stability was praised.

But in modernity, the will to change rather than stability was praised.

“Modernity is the most unstable epoch humanity has ever known” according to the Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology.

Praising change become a source of value judgement in modernity.

Are you pro-tradition or are you pro-progress? Do you accept established social institutions as sufficient or do you favor development of those social institutions whatever the cost will be?

As we have seen before, the importance of change was visible most clearly in the phraise of Marx and Engels “All that is solid melts into air” by which they were pointing out that everything that was accepted as unshakable was losing their grounds.

So, humans were facing with a new stage of humanity in which the illusions of established past was fading away.

### 2.4.2. Capturing future

Another motive to modernity was the will to capture, to seize the future.

As we know, by the 17. Century and later, there have been a scientific revolution in Europe.

Old justification systems based on religion, and especially and specifically based on the Catholic Church, started to be refused.

Instead, people started to think that, the individual by him/or herself can grasp the ultimate truth with scientific endeavors.

Science became the new moral of modern societies. Science constitute the new judgement system. Following this, people started to perceive human relationships and society, as if they were materials or things or organisms like human body or animals.

If physics could show us the true nature of things, if biology could show us the mysteries of human body, then social physics or sociology or social sciences could show us the mysteries or what we are calling as mystery in social life.

Just like physics or biology was working on causal determinism, there should be also a causal deterministic relationship is social life of human beings which had to be discovered through social sciences.

Social sciences and especially sociology had to discover the laws of society or economics or politics etc.

So, if we could sketch out the causality in the society, then this would enable us to reorganize the society from the start and also this would enable us to predict the future of humanity, just like positive sciences could predict the possible transformations in things or organisms.

This was actually what all the 19. Century thinkers and philosophers did.

Firstly, the enlightenment philosophers tried to sketch out the history of humanity based on historical or civilizational stages, on which all the societies in a direction of being civilized had to pass.

In 19. century thinkers or philosophers like Hegel, Comte or Karl Marx and some others, all tried to define the development path of humanity in regard to causal determinism.

Auguste Comte, who is accepted as the founding father of sociology, invented even a religion based on his scientism which would replace the existing religions in the society.

Marx predicted the downfall of the capitalist society and coming of the communism a the ultimate result of the class conflicts between workers and capitalists.

This inclination towards capturing the future continued even in the 20. century by which some liberal thinkers tried to sketch out the history of humanity, in which liberalism would present an ideal end to human history.

So, if we look more carefully, we will notice that, the motivation to capture the future was in fact an inclination to define a worldly heaven for human beings. For some people, the worldly heaven would be created under liberal, for some others under communist principles.

On the other had, it could be also noticed that the will to create worldly heavens were mostly in contradiction with the big events of the 20. Century, which like the two world wars created great disillusionments towards modernity.

### 2.4.3. Individualism

Another big motive of modernity is individualism.

As we have seen before, first in the epoch of Renaissance, later in the Enlightenment era, the belief in the individual, the uniqueness of the individual have risen immensely.

This was to some extent closely related to the fall of the old justification systems and social transformations people were facing.

The monopoly of Catholic Church was challenged by Protestantism in the 16. Century., by which the protestants were refusing the monopoly of the Church over the faiths of individuals.

The church was refuted that it cannot grant salvation to the believers.

Individuals needed no mediatory or intermediary person or institution in their relationship with God.

This religious turn was later reinforced with a worldly insight. The Enlightenment philosophers proclaimed the existential being of the individual as the ultimate value measure of all things.

The individual, the uniqueness of the individual, reached almost to a sacred level.

Individual became the new moral criteria as it was presented in the works of Enlightenment thinkers.

On a different level, spatial displacement of the populations had a big impact on the perception of the individual.

In premodern era, people were living mostly in a closed environment, with close kinship ties.

The communication or transportation opportunities were restricted, limited.

Even voyages from one village or town to a neighbor village or town was not secure in the medieval Europe.

In this enclosed environment of the people, the community rather than the individual was the focal point.

The individual was only fulfilling his predestined role in an area of close ties.

This was a limited, sometimes economically insecure but morally guaranteed, secure environment.

When the population of Europe started to double in 18. Century and the noble elites of England and in the other regions of Europe who were owning the land on which the peasants were depending decided to set free peasants from their feudal ties and enclosed their lands, people lost their poor but secure environment.

Now they were free of their legal duties towards nobles, but they were alone, too. They had to face alone with their destiny in a strange environment.

They were in a more crowded place, namely they were living now in cities with huge populations, but unlike to their old environments, all those population was alien to them.

This situation disabled them to find a moral security in other individuals.

Even in further steps of industrial city life, even in later phases of urbanization when the conditions of workers were developed in comparison to early periods, individuals were still away from their old morally guaranteed ties.

So, we may conclude that, modernity had in two ways created or promoted individualism: firstly, in an ideational way through Renaissance, Reformation and then Enlightenment;

And also in a social transformative way through industrialization and urbanization.

### 2.4.4. Materialism

A fourth motive of modernity is materialism.

Materialism should be examined with the loss of spiritualty and secularism, together.

A third factor affecting materialism was rationalization.

As I mentioned before, Europe faced a deep religious turn starting with the 16. Century. This religious turn resulted in great conflicts like 30 years wars with severe casualties, which in the end brought Europe to the eve of big social and political transformations.

In the course of history, this religious turn ended with a more worldly outlook. People become more on more dependent on material life in which they tried to explain everything with science and causal determinism.

Step by step, the formal rationality started to govern all the social life.

This is what Max Weber calls “the disenchantment of the world.”

Religion lost its determinant role in the social life or public sphere.

Economic or politics were no more determined according to the pillars of religion or any other spirituality or uncertainty. Religion became a private sphere issue. All the areas of social life started to be reorganized according to the exact calculations of rationality.

On the other hand, people or individuals whose ties with religion or old justification systems like religion weakened or changed tried to fulfill their worldly being with material life.

On the one side, the material wellbeing of the continent was rising. People were reaching to a better life. The goods around them were enriching. So a new relationship between individual and the goods started. The goods were not being produced in accordance to the necessity of human beings, but individuals started to consume according to the production levels. This is what we call the rise of consumer society too.

On the other side, the catastrophic urban life pushed individuals to an inclination towards materialism in which the relationship to material life became more crucial than the relationship to spiritual life.

From one side, Weber claimed that, according to Protestant Calvinist asceticism the real sign of salvation was worldly achievement or efforts.

So, people tried to reach a prosperous material life as a sign of their spiritual salvation.

On the other hand, the material wellbeing became the sole goal for the individuals who lost their ties to religion or spiritual world, so to speak.

So, the spirituality of social life was lost in modern life, argued thinkers like Weber or Freud.

### 2.4.5. Globalization

One final motive of modernity is its inclination towards globalization.

As we mentioned repeatedly, modernity was born in Europe. What is called modernity was actually a European process, a European phenomenon.

But in time, it crossed over its natural borders, and became a global issue. It was spread to the other parts of the world, almost to the entire societies around the world.

This situation of globalization of modernity was achieved both by coercion and also by consent.

Although modernity promised prosperity and peace for Europeans, European states did not act according to these principals. Which means that, in their relation to other societies, they did not act in order to create prosperity and peace in other regions of the world.

Instead, in order to sustain their well-being and widen their spheres of influence, they used colonialism and imperialism.

Those acts of Europeans had huge impacts on non-western societies. This relationship is defined by Stuart Hall as “The West and the Rest”.

First of all, they redefined the non-western societies. Those were, in respect to the West, savage and non-developed or uncivilized societies.

The west, as the representative of a “universal” civilization, a civilization which was assumed to be universal, civilization as a line of history along which all societies have to travel in order to achieve a more developed stage of humanity.

So according to this mentality of Europeans, the west, as the representative of this civilizational outlook, had all the rights to implement upon the rest of the world.

But with the 19. Century, a reverse movement started.

Lots of societies or states like Ottoman Empire or Japan or China or Iran came to the conclusion that, in order to compete with great powers of Europe, they had to modernize themselves.

Europe, in time, became the symbol of measure not only in technological but also moral terms. Everything from industry to legal systems had to be reorganized according to European styles.

So, a trend of modernization started to appear by consent mostly, in parallel to the coercion exercised by European countries. Coercion of colonialism and imperialism.

This consent-based acceptance of modernity by non-westerners served in the end to the universal acceptance of the pillars of modernity.

Modernity gained a meaning of universal justification. It was accepted as the final universal pathway of humanity.

Modernity meant civilization and societies outside modernity, non-modern-societies, so to speak, would be destined to remain uncivilized.

This trends by coercion and consent was reinforced with a third globalization wave, which is the globalization of trade.

By the end of the 19. Century, as a result of the industrial development of European countries, trade activities among world societies reached to its peak point.

European countries demanded raw materials from non-industrialized countries.

In return, they would sell them final products produced in their home industries.

So, the non-industrialized countries became both the source of raw materials and also natural market for European industries.

This uneven relationship created a world wide web (www) of trade, and thanks to the developments in the transportation technologies, the trade globalization was achieved and it reached its peak point just before the First World War.

Actually, the world war of 1914 and 1939 was the natural result of the competition between European (including USA) forces in regard this economic globalization.

Today, actually this process started decades ago, we are witnessing a new phase of globalization in which primarily internet technologies and especially social media like twitter, facebook etc. are linking individuals around the world to each other.

## 2.5. Paradoxes of modernity

So far we tried to define modernity. then we tried to sketch out the historical stages of modernity. Then we tried to determine the main motives of modernity.

And lastly we will try to point out to the paradoxes o modernity.

What do we mean with paradoxes? Actually, from a retrospective outlook, we can say that modernity itself was a promise to European people.

What promised modernity?

Firstly: modernity said that “individual” would be the final, ultimate determinant of all the processes of social life.

Secondly: The well-being of the individual would be the determinant factor or value.

Thirdly: Modernity promised a reorganization of society which would bring peace, prosperity and equality among its members.

Finally: modernity promised a home for the individual. Society, as the natural social unity of individuals, as the natural result of rational mind of individuals, would constitute a coherent and comprehensive social being. The individual would rest on its institutions. Those institutions would bring peace and prosperity in return.

The critical question here is that: Did modernity fulfill its promises?

Actually, modernity created a two-headed social structure: On the one side was laying the promises of modernity, on the other side was laying the discrepancies, uncertainties and unconformities to these promises.

This is what we call as the paradoxes of modernity.

### 2.5.1. Individual vs state

The first paradox lies in the controversy between individual and state.

Individual represents the atomistic component of the society. Actually, as we will refer to Enlightenment philosophies, individual would be also the final goal of society. The rational individual is the founding actor, and in return, the focal point, the most prominent goal of the society.

On the other hand, state is the natural formation of rationality of individual. So, theoretically, state would serve as the most possible, rational, practical and also appropriate apparatus which would create the most suitable social atmosphere for the individuals.

Modernity started with a focus and emphasis on individual, on the will of individual and also on the rationality of individual.

Modernity has promised also a full freedom of individual.

Actually, by crushing most of the ties the individual was bound to, modernity kept this promise to some extent.

People were no more vassals of the overlords, they were free in their attitudes towards religion, they were free in their wish to move to other places etc. And they had a voice in political decision-making process, too.

But the rational will of the mankind created the modern state apparatus.

Nation-state, which was one of the distinctive products of modernity was the ground on which political, economic and social expectations of the individual could be fulfilled.

And bureaucracy, the most visible crystallization of collective rationality of individuals, was one of the main motors which was running the state apparatus.

But in a controversial way, the nation-state and bureaucracy soon started to play a dominant, pressuring role over individual. The needs of the state and the freedom of the individual started to conflict.

So, individual had to confront with the state or the pressure of the structure above him/her which was in fact the natural product or result of his/her rationality.

Actually, the society as a whole, with its all institutions and values and boundaries started to be a new prison for individual.

This is what we call the first among paradoxes of modernity.

### 2.5.2. Secular vs religious

A second paradox lies on the relationship between secularist inclinations of modernity and religious or spiritual quest or affiliations of the individual.

The more modernity tried to secularize and materialize the social life, the more people lost their tools of fulfilling their spiritual needs. Individual were perceiving themselves as emancipated from the chains of the religion from one side, but from other side, it meant the loss of the more security to them.

In order to feel secure ontologically, individuals need a moral ground on which they can rest. but the loss of the religion, would mean the loss of this secure ground for the emancipated modern individual.

Lack of belief, lack of faith became one of the crucial problems of the modern individual.

Modernity in turn tried to create secular rituals: For example, symbols of nationalism, obedience to the flag or motherland can be counted as of the answers to this gap of spirituality by creating a sense of collective belongingness.

On the other hand, because of the disillusionment of the modernity, some people tried to find comfort in different types of religiosity: religious fundamentalism or some other religious cults and sects.

So, we may say that, modernity failed to produce a satisfactory answer to the problems which appeared with secular turn.

### 2.5.3. Equality vs inequality

One of the great promises of modernity was equality for all of the people.

Actually, in most of the spheres of social life, modernity fulfilled this promise by creating a legal equality before laws.

All individuals are accepted to born free and equal.

People in time gained suffrage, which meant a political equality.

But looking at the practice, mostly in economic level, there are still huge inequalities between certain social classes, between individuals of different social classes or strata.

Political and legal equality of individuals could not be completed with an economic one.

Political movements like socialism or communism which tried to create the economic equality were responded with suspicion.

The liberal democratic nation-states tried to fix this problem by creating social policies towards citizens, but degrees on which those social policies would be implemented were differing from time to time.

So, the paradox on equality still continues today.

### 2.5.4. Alienation vs identification

The last paradox is about the social stance of individuals among crowds.

As we have mentioned in previous lectures, when people as masses came to the cities and faced the industrial urban life, they were ripped off their old traditional ties which were guaranteeing them a moral security.

Individual was in an alienated position in the city.

On the other hand, individual started to lose their distinctive, exclusive features which were bringing in their personality. The monotonous, standardized, automatized city life with its education system, bureaucracies, and mechanisms for work contributed to the creation of the undifferentiated individual.

So, with the industrial urban life, we encountered with the uniformization or identification of socially distant individuals.

This was the “mass issue” on which thinkers of late 19. early 20. century worked.

Although, people have similar characteristics, they live in their socially enclosed environment with limited social contacts.

We take buses, for example, where we encounter with lots of individuals with whom we do not speak a word or hesitate to have an eye contact.

We stay in an alienated position to them. But indeed, we share the uniformity with them, we have no distinctive or exclusive features in comparison to them.

This was and still is one of the most crucial paradoxes of modernity epoch.

Even today, for example, through social media we are trying to show our most exclusive features to other people.

But indeed our pictures in Instagram, our jokes or reactions in twitter or our ideas in facebook are mostly reproduction of the pictures, jokes, reactions and ideas of millions of other people.

# 3. Stuart, Hall: Formations of Modernity, Introduction.

Hall’s piece is, as you have seen, is the introductory section of an edited book by him, namely formations of society. Although, it is an introduction and its primary role is to point out the content of the book, it signifies still to some distinctive points about to the phenomenon of modernity.

Hall points out that by modernity we mean actually the process in which modern societies are emerged. This process is described mostly as a rupture from traditional society as a result of extensive social and economic developments with the decline of the feudalism in western Europe.

Actually, modernity is the outcome of a series of major historical events.

But the crucial point, Hall focuses on, is that modernity was not the outcome of a single process, but we have to speak of different processes and of their interactions to each other.

So there is not a mono-causal explanation for modernity but a series of processes, factors, and causal patterns.

According to Hall, there is four main processes, which in interaction to eachother established modernity. Those are:

Political: modern nation-state, political power apart from spiritual powers as a worldly, secular formation, within territorial boundaries, with a complex structure.

Economic: monetarized exchange economy, based on large scale production and consumption, ownership of pricate property, accumulation of capital.

Social: Decline of traditional order: fall down of social hierarchies, appearance of a more dynamic society, new sexual division of labor, class structure.

1. And also cultural: Decline of religious world, rise of secular and materialist culture, individualistic, rationalist impulses.

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2. Also cultural: new ways of producing and classifying knowledge.

3. Also cultural: construction of identities 🡪 imagined communities and new types of belongingness.

So, according to Hall, modernity was the outcome of these four main processes. By processes Hall means a set of practices which worked on a long time-span.

Not only practices, but practices which were created and evolved in a long time.

This processes did not create solely a society by which we mean only a set of collective activities; but they created social formations which means “a society with definite structure and well-defined set of social relations.”

Interaction was what Hall was emphasizing.

And, society as a social formation was constituted of processes and structures. By process he indicates the appearance of society in a certain time-span; and by structure he indicates the established sets of relationship and institutions.

So, as far as, modernity is concerned; as far as, we are trying to discover the characteristics of modernity, Hall suggests that we should ask two questions: Firstly, how and more importantly why modernity appeared.

But while answering these questions, Hall implies that, certain points has to be taken into consideration:

“Formation of modernity operated across several centuries and in a slow, uneven way, with an unclear starting point.”

So, we talk here first about the evolution of the old regime into the new one. There is no rupture point. Some symbolic dates can be determined, but in fact, social processes are widened to a long time-span.

There are continuities and also discontinuities of certain institutions. These two has to be differentiated from each other. So, modernity is constituted of certain institutions, some of which have roots in premodern society and some are. This condition creates an ambiguity. For example, the economy started to evolve in the 15. Century if not earlier. But modern political system based on general suffrage appeared firstly in the midst of 19. Century. So, it can hard to draw strict line.

Each process has a different time-scale. The development, progress, fulfillment of evolution of every process has its own velocity, its own distinctive starting era and also maturation point. So the modernity-making in respect to different processes looks like

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So, there is no universal history of modernity.

This is a crucial point, because many approaches to modernity shares actually a mono-causal universality.

Orthodox Marxism tries to explain it through class conflict, in which history is actually from the ages of primitive communism to the expected communism the history of class conflicts.

For modernization theories of 1950s, the only possible example of modernization was the Western style and all societies had one day pass the universal Wester path to achieve progress and development.

But according to Hall, “modern societies display no singular logic of development.” There is varied paths of development. According to Hall, development is actually a controversial issue. So, by defining modernity, it is important to not to fall in the trap to equate modernity, or some roots of modernity with values implying universality such as progress or development.

Hall indicates lastly that there have been a discursive turn in the 1970s to 1980s in which the importance of the meaning, the production of meaning through language became important. This implies that the meaning of modernity is also produced through discourses or usage of language, which will in turn mean that the meaning of modernity would differ according the numbers of users or members of discourses.

“Meaning is contextual – dependent upon specific historical contexts, rather than valid for all time.”

Hall adds that culture or symbolic process has also a “constitutive role in the formation of modernity.”

Culture also produces meaning of modernity. The authenticity of things appears not through themselves, but in order to grant them meaning, they have to pass through the lenses of culture.

Hall gives us the example of modern market economy in which he says that “modern market economy requires new conceptions of economic life, a new economic discourse, as well as new organizational forms.”

According to Hall, so, economic, political and social processes do not operate outside of cultural and ideological conditions.

# 4. Peter Wagner, Modes of Narrating Modernity

Wagners’ piece is also an introductionary section to his book A Scoiology of Modernity and it can be read also as a complementary text to Hall’s one.

Wagner basically deals with the perception of modernity. He starts actually with a basic question: Yes, we talk about major social transformations when we talk about modernity, but is there really, meaning in reality, major transitions which have been experienced by populations of those societies which are thought to had passed to the modernity? Is there such social transformations really?

He indicates that, when we say for example that in the late 18. and throughout 19. century there have been an economic revolution in Europe, ordinary people have experienced just a small or zero percentage of this revolution. Very little change have been experienced by most of the human beings.

We can talk about scientific revolution but for peasants in England at the scientific revolution age it meant nothing.

So, was modernity a social condition which did not appear in social life of 19. or early 20. century?

Wagner says that “revolutions were much less revolutionary than discourses about the revolutions”

They were actually revolutions of very small minorities. They were revolutions of proto-intellectuals or proto professionals.

Scientific revolution interested only people in the royal Academy. Enlightenment were actually important for philosophers, thinkers and people around them who could read or had access to them for listening. Etc.

Is this claim also valid for us, for the people of the 21th century. We have said in the previous lecture that modernity has been globalized since the 19th century and we are even today continuing to experience the globalization of it through different communication technologies.

We observe that the cultural, political, economic aspects of modernity has spread and apparent in different regions of the world.

But we can still talk about a divide between the claims of modernity and its degree of being experienced. Even in Turkey, the degree of internalization of modernity differ from one person to another. Some people praise the condition of modernity although they do not internalize all the consequences of it; and some people criticize or condemn modernity but they share the inevitable consequences of the modernity as well.

So, even today, we can talk about a divide about the claims and appearances of the modernity.

Regarding this point, Wagner concludes that, while dealing with modernity, we are dealing mostly with concepts rather than facts.

So the condition is twosided.

On the one side is the discourse of modernity or the project of modernity.

On the other side is the practices and relationship and institutions of modernity.

Discourse and facts.

Wagner deals in this reading with the discourse of modernity rather than facts or its appearances.

And according to him, the discourse of modernity is constituted by an imaginary signification (düşlenmiş/muhayyel/tahayyül edilmiş anlamlandırma): the idea of freedom and autonomy. Being modern means being free and autonomous.

But Wagner continues by looking at the answers to these conception of modernity with this imaginary signification.

How was this imaginary signification of modernity responded?

There is two opposed narratives about modernity:

Discourse of liberation

According to this narrative, freedom is the natural “unalienable, self-evident” human right. And also, freedom means the liberation of the mind. So we have the right to be free and we have the tools (reason, science, quest for truth, etc.) to liberate us from the chains of social life and also the nature. So, we can be liberated in all material and moral means.

The narrative of modernity on freedom indicates then that with the historical course of modernity, individuals were emancipated from their mental, moral and material chains. This can be evaluated as the elimination of feudal bonds, tradition, religion etc.

This idea of full freedom was actually the ultimate promise of modernity to every human being.

But this narrative is not exempted from critiques.

For example, by pointing out to the differentiation between base and superstructure, Marx says that ideology is the natural result of the economic relationship at the base and the superstructure, so the idea of freedom in this context, reproduces the unequal relationships between social classes.

So, for example, the workers have the legal freedom, they are not obliged to work in factories, but this is only an illusion and they are chained to the socio-economic life they are surrounded with.

Through the idea of freedom, individuals share only a false consciousness which led them to justify the uneven relationship between rich and poor.

So, legal freedom of people does not mean a cognitive or economic freedom of them.

Wagner adds that, apart from the Marxist theory and although major advancements were visible in the last century in terms of socio-economic inequalities, the contradiction between the discourse and practice of freedom still continues today.

Another critique came from Jürgen Habermas, who points out that the performance and functionality of modern institutions and technologies creates in the end liberty-constraining effects. The effects of technology, bureaucracy, modern economy simplify certain procedures in our life but they create also a predestined and constrained life-cycle for us. Everything seems rational now, for example, bureaucracy provides us effective and efficient ways through procedures. We face bureaucratic mind in every corner of our social world: education, work place, state institutions etc. But this rationality damages also the creativity or elasticity of human relationships. Or it creates uniformity among individuals. For example, through mass education, every individual in the society finds the opportunity to be educated and to achieve a chance to experience the benefits of education. But our educational systems are also criticized in that they are accused of creating uniform individuals for the consumer society.

Or the social media: Social media enables us to manifest, express, explain themselves almost to the whole world. But it also disables and distances us from face-to-face relationships and throw us into an ocean of anonymous users. And it also restrains our way of manifesting ourselves by creating certain sets of expression through social media trends. Or it also make easier for the state institutions or companies to reach us in order to manipulate us. We have to remember that one crucial aspect of the social media is that it enables an easier way of spreading misinformation.

Although there are critiques on the narrative of liberation, in the last decades, adds Wagner, that pluralization, disintegration and individualization have gained an immense importance. This will mean that individual in contrast to the society and constraints around herself/himself gains more tools to maintain and exercise her/his freedom.

So, the narrative of freedom has its positive and negative evaluations.

On the other side is the discourse of disciplinization.

According to this narrative on modernity, modernity is perceived through disciplinization of populations. Freedom was never perceived as it was presented in the discourse of freedom or liberal ideas. Actually this narrative can be examined in parallel to the critiques on the narrative of freedom as we have dealt just before.

Behind this argument lies some conditions. First of all, there is a continuity of state apparatus. The state has always been restrictive to the behavours and activities of individuals. Actually, for some thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, the main function of the state is to restrict harmful acts of every single individual in order to guarantee the safety of another. Actually with the appearance of the modern state, the role of the state had changed from a feudal, traditional to a rational one. In the modern era, the state was seen also as a legitimate tool of realizing the promises of the Enlightenment, for example. As we have said before, the state was expected to bring peace and also prosperity, and also it would provide the conditions in which the human mind would be emancipated and enlightened. But in fact, its nature was still “an effective and legitimate boundary to the potential infinity of possible autonomous social practices.” As we have seen before, for example, the mass education was used to create uniform individuals for the army, market or bureaucracy. Or while enabling security it restricts the freedom. the dichotomy between security and freedom is one of the most important dilemmas of the modern state.

This was in fact exact opposite role liberalism have foreseen for the state. According to liberalism, state should have only protect the rights of the individuals. It should not have a guiding role. But in fact the state form feudalism to the 20. century was in a contradictory position to the autonomy of individual.

As the second point, according to Wagner, “far from fulfilling the bourgeois-humanist promise, modern practices would transform human beings so that the very notion of realizing a self becomes untenable.” (savunulamaz)

Modernity was implying that individual would realize its potential through the fruits of modernity like reason, secularism etc. But in fact, the relationship between individual and things/goods or its environment lead the individual to such a position that individual starts to lose its ability to fulfill its capacity. Individual starts to take distance himself.

For example, according to Marx, individual are alienated from their work process. They cease to be the productive power for their own, the produced materials by their own working process do not belong them. So they became nothing but goods/commodities which are to be sold in the labour market. Or Max Weber claims that through the rationalization of the life, individuals achieve more effective and efficient and practical ways of experiencing life, for example they work on routines, but they are now soulless. They live now in the iron cage of modernity.

Thirdly, according to Wagner, the major catastrophic events in the 20. century, like the rise of fascism, the two World Wars and massive material transformations of modern societies created organized, administrated societies. Those events were results of the alliance of power and knowledge. So, actually, one of the most important fruits of modernity, which is science, rational thinking and knowledge, was used as tools of disciplinization.

Finally, the pluralization of the postmodern era, according to Wagner, meant also the disappearing of the self, it meant a fragmentation of selfhood, the vanishing of subject. Individuals lost their vantage point to construct a personality. Everything is possible for them. Every path is open for them, so that they cannot follow a decent one. They cannot differentiate between different paths based on a moral criterion. The trends like postmodernism, relativism etc. have destroyed the grand theories or belief systems. People do not necessarily on the power of religion, reason, science, etc. This big narratives are not replaced by new ones as well. So, modernity was actually a project to empower the individual subject but now this individual subject was dissolving itself. Modernity has actually attacking to itself.

Taking these two narratives of modernity into consideration, Wagner concludes that there is two portraits for modernity which are always coexisting.

This is the double nature of modernity. This is the ambiguity of modernity. Every notion of modernity is functioning also as a deconstructive tool against its liberating promises.

So, the liberating notion of modernity cannot live without its restricting “other criterion”.

“Modernity is about the possibility of an individual subject’s self-realization” but once this individual starts to face with the society, he or she starts understand that he or she has to live with certain social or intellectual restrictions.

Unless individual lives by himself/herself apart from all social entities, it has to face with this double nature, this conflicting nature of modernity.

According to Wagner, this is why both Soviet Union and also USA can be perceived as a reflection of modernity. USA was the symbol of freedom and Soviet Union was the symbol of discipline. But in fact, those both societies and countries and states appeared actually as a result of the historical course in which modernity was constructed. Those two societies, which were enemies of each other, were actually based on the same ideals of enlightenment, like science, reason, secularism etc. But they were also reflecting two different sides of modernity. They to some degree reflect different aspects of this double nature of modernity.

This double nature of modernity is also directly reflected in the daily habits of consumer society as well as we shall see later.

# 5. Max Weber

Max Weber’s main concern was the emergence of modern capitalism. In his book the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism he was asking a basic question:

Why did capitalism in its full blown characteristics emerge in the Europe?

He was suggesting that the main seeds of capitalism were also seen in some other civilizations like China etc. Those civilizations have also developed some degrees of capitalism.

But capitalism as a whole, with its all characteristics, with a full force in way to reorganize the society only emerged in the West. Why was that?

Weber actually made a distinction between two types of capitalism.

Adventurer and bourgeois capitalism.

Adventurer capitalism had an irrational mentality. You get wealthier, you acquire wealth, you develop some trade relationship, you invade other countries and so you seize their wealth etc. but you never act in a rational calculated way. You do not accumulate or make calculations for your future wellbeing. So, the wealth you acquire come and go. This was because some inner compulsion, some moral motivation in these civilization were missing which could build a full blown system and structure for capitalist practices.

The bourgeois capitalism was but 1) based on rational action. 2) It favored a non-violent means of exploiting labor. So, it was peaceful mostly. At least on theory. The main notion was that violence was not a part of the wealth acquiring system. 3) It was result of a set of cultural values based on the notion of VOCATION, as a calling from God.

Actually, it was a result of mainly CHRISTIAN ASCETISCM which was developed by some Protestant Calvinist sects which was called the Protestant ethic. Actually Christian Calvinist asceticism was the missing moral motivation, inner compulsion in other societies.

So, although capitalism required materialistic set of values, it emerged as a result of religious acts.

So, there was irrational adventurer capitalism on the one side. And rational bourgeois capitalism with 1) accumulation 2) calculation 3) an organizing economic behavior. So, this was the rationalization of the economy life, in general.

Religious asceticism was the inner compulsion, moral motivation which was the regulatory force of the capitalist economic behavior.

What do we mean by that?

According to Calvinist faith, a person could not depend for salvation on his good deeds. The final decision would be made by God and actually it was predestined if you are saved or not. So, it seemed that there was an arbitrary decision of God, actually you could not be well aware of all criteria by which God would save you or not. So, there was a constant, permanent unsettledness, anxiety for people who were sharing this faith. The only thing you can do was “to live your life as spiritually as possible, watching your every action in the hope of salvation.” So, you could not depend on Church or other intermediation between individual and God, the only thing you have to do is to work constantly, to achieve worldly goods which could be maybe a sign of your salvation. So, if you get rich, if you work hard and get worldy good, they could be a sign for your salvation.

This was what Weber called: inner-worldly asceticism. This means that you are oriented towards the world, you work hard for the world but morally you are ascetic.

You seek mastery over nature, other people and self.

According to Weber, who makes differentiations on the level of characteristics of religions like, inner worldly, other worldly, ascetic or mystic, only this inner-worldly asceticism of Protestantism could create modern capitalism.

So, modern capitalism and also modern society was based on mainly on rationalism and also scientism. This inner compulsion of individual, the worldly aspiration through asceticism, inner discipline created a system of hard working based on rationality, calculation. Which had to depend in the end on scientific mentality.

It is worth to note that this ascetic motivation of Protestantism has been only founding force. By the time people who were living in modern capitalist societies and sharing modern capitalist mentality shifted more towards a secular understanding of this ascetic mentality which was strictly bound to rationalism and scientism.

According to Weber, science reached its peak level, its peak functionality level, its theoretically organized stage in Western society.

“Science in the western society come forward with the claim of representing the only possible form of a reasoned view of the world.”

It had, as we have seen in our previous sessions, an emancipatory, liberating promise.

But the predominance of science and rationality did not “lead to the emancipation of individual, which the enlightenment hoped for, but to a senseless hustle in the service of worthless, self contradictory, antagonistic ends.”

So, he was talking about a cultural crisis of late 19. century. The society was technologically advanced, but morally it become nihilistic. It failed to produce a moral core for everyone. Belief in religion was replaced by mainly with a belief in science and rationality, but this was not making the world meaningful, it was making the world functional only.

So, there was an erosion of meaning. There was an endless conflict of polytheistic values, because the core of the meaning was lost.

And there was also a threat of “iron cage” with Weber’s words, the threat of iron cage of bureaucracy or bureaucratic mentality.

So, the world was orderly and reliable but not meaningful. This was the result of rationalization.

More and more areas of life were being rationalized. This was valid actually not only for capitalism but also for socialism. Although they seemed to be oppositonary, they were actually only a binary opposition which was sharing the same modern basis. So capitalism and socialism was two sides of the same coin. Both seek for rationalization, bureaucracy and science.

Traditional societies were producing answers to the complex questions of humans. Modern societies were but secular, materialistic, instrumental rather than spiritual, and dominated by scientific and technological rationality.

Unlike Enlightenment thinkers, Weber argued that science failed to replace religion and produce meaning. And all areas of social life were rationalized, but only two areas were left:

AESTETIC and EROTIC.

Only these two area could not be rationalized fully and those were where human capacity could be fulfilled against the threat of iron cage. This areas became the escape zones, take-off zones of melancholy, hardness of modernity.

These two areas were resisting the rationalization, they were rejecting the borders that were shaped by science and rationalization.

So, they somehow replaced the role of religion in modern societies. They were not functioning in the same way as religion was functioning, but the role of religion to produce some spirituality and meaning were transferred now in the aesthetic and erotic.

This observation brings us actually into the realm of the theory of Durkheim, Durkheim’s distinction between sacred and profane.

Actually with profane he was pointing out our everyday life, our daily routine. Sacred, on the contrary had not necessarily a metaphysical meaning, it encompasses all practices which are set apart from daily life, rituals apart from the routines of the daily life.

So, sacred practices were reflection of social formation. Society operates on them, according to Durkheim. Society needs sacred practices because:

“Society cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is not in action unless the individuals who compose it are assembled together and act in common.”

So, if we combine Weber’s theory with Durkheim’s, we can conclude that: rationalization, rational actions of the society was constituting the daily principles of the modern society. Modern society is basically constructed on the principle of rationality.

But in order to understand the scope of influence of the modern society, we have to look non-daily principles. We have to look at its sacred principles. And those principles are embedded in the realm of aesthetics and erotic.

So, aesthetic and erotic became the new sacred which was setting aside individual from the daily routines (profane) of modern rational scientific life.

Indeed, these two different sacred and profane aspects of the modern life is important because based on this combination and also division of these principles, we can also understand and examine the notion of consumerism.

Consumerism or the consumer society is actually a consequence of the rational scientific principles of modernity. It is the consequence of rational economic activity. The routines of consuming are also based on rationalism. For example, if you visit a fast food restaurant, you will witness that every step of production, service and consumption is based on the principle of rationality.

But consumerism also reflects the non-rational principles of modern life. Through consumerism, for example, individual try to manifest their individuality. Consumerism became o tool of self-manifest. And in order to achieve this characteristics of consumerism, a certain level of aestheticism has to be reached. And also we witness that individual reflect a high level of hunger, appetence or desire towards consuming. And this characteristics of consumption can be indicated as the erotic, instinctual aspect consumerism.

So, we see again the double nature of modernity here. Modernity was based on the fading of the religion and also on the principle of rationalization of the society. But in the end, this time, secularized and non-rational activities emerged which can be evaluated as the new sacred of the modern world.

Ascetism of modernity in the end created aestheticism of modernity.

And as Durkheim would suggest, consumerism, this new sacred of the modern world can be examined as the reflection of the modern social formation. Todays society, in Durkheim’s words, operates on consumerism.