

Chapter I

On Theories of Modernization

The vast literature pertaining to development and modernity discloses philosophical questions that instigate the controversies dividing the various theories of modernization. Of these philosophical issues, the most crucial and recurrent is the question of the prime factor or mover of modernization. The reason for the philosophical issue of primacy derives from the fact that modernization involves cultural as well as socioeconomic changes. Following the philosophical distinction between the spiritual and the material, the clash between the two basic schools of idealism and materialism frames the philosophical approach around the question of knowing whether the prime cause of modernization is cultural or material. Let us elaborate on this point further.

Philosophy of Modernization

Essential in culture changes associated with modernization is the appearance of new beliefs and values, and this fits into the philosophical school of idealism according to which beliefs and values play the primary role in the explanation of human actions and institutions. By contrast, materialism, best represented by Marxism, emphasizes the primary role of material conditions of life, arguing that beliefs and values are byproducts of the material basis of social life. Before reviewing the implications of the conflict over primacy, let us indicate in broad terms what is meant by modernization and culture.

Many, if not most, scholars would give their content to the following definition:

Modernization theories include an amalgam of views on economic growth, which contributes to increased productivity of goods and services; political development, which leads to stable governmental and administrative structures as well as to increased popular participation in the affairs of the state; secularization, which helps in the emancipation of individuals from traditional obligations to religion and extended kin; rationality in public decision-making as well as private pursuits of individual goals; and individualism, which contributes to the advancement of individual well-being through increased effort to each and all for personal gains and happiness.¹

So defined, modernization seems far removed from an explanation involving commitments to traditional beliefs and obligations. If the latter are still looming, it is as remnants and, as such, doomed to inevitable extinction. Doubtless, Marxism gave this view a most radical turn. In announcing the restoration of the naturalness of human beings, it has predicted the inevitable

triumph of materialistic values. The triumph will be all the more thorough the more the alienating effect of idealism will be forcefully exposed.

Though culture is diversely defined, most scholars agree in interpreting culture as a shared system of beliefs, values, and customs. Specifically, culture designates the full realm of beliefs and behaviors that are learned and shared through the socialization process. To quote Edward B. Taylor, it is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”² As a learned and transmitted phenomenon, culture delineates the members of one group and distinguishes it from other groups. Systemness is another important characteristic of culture in that it is composed of various interrelated elements realizing a unified, if not always coherent, whole. As a product of human learning, culture is not a static phenomenon, either. Changes can come from inside the culture or can be triggered by exogenous forces, such as environmental alterations or contacts with other cultures.

Given that most scholars reject the biological transmission of the contents of culture, both its diffusion and preservation derive from a deep sense of commitment of members sharing the culture. Parents consider the transmission of their values, beliefs, and habits as part of their parental duty. This sense of duty as the underlying form of cultural transmission seems to advise against a deterministic interpretation of culture. That is why scholars speak of rules, obligations, and prohibitions when they characterize the contents of culture. For example, identifying culture with society, Emile Durkheim defines the social as a source of obligations, as recognizable by the “power of external coercion which it exercises . . . over individuals.”³ The emphasis on obligation reveals the moral dimension of culture and its connection with modernity. The fact that culture allows and prohibits is crucial to modernity, since modernization occurs as a result of changes that necessarily prompt their appraisal in terms of what the culture permits or forbids.

The philosophical question is not whether culture changes in the modernization process, but whether the change precedes the material, structural change of society. According to the idealist approach, to say that altered beliefs and values primarily explain modernization is to emphasize the crucial role of motivation in understanding human actions and achievements. The motivation naturally arises from people wanting to change the conditions of their life in accordance with their new beliefs and values. Accordingly, the spur of modernization should be primarily assigned to culture change, which then explains the corresponding socioeconomic alterations. Norman Long underlines the influence of philosophical idealism when he asserts that modernization theory “believes that attitudinal and value changes or re-interpretations of ideology are essential prerequisites to creating a modern society and economy.”⁴ The impacts of the Renaissance and Reformation, which are mostly philosophical, religious, and scientific events, on the modernization of Europe provide a powerful argument in favor of the idealist approach. Indeed, many scholars situate the beginning of European modernity in the cultural changes arising from the Renaissance and Reformation. In so doing, they contend that culture changes came first and laid the ground for the industrialization of Europe.

For Marxist materialism, before having religious beliefs, political ideas, or philosophical convictions, humans must produce in order to survive. As life is unthinkable without production, anything important or significant must, directly or indirectly, be referred to the fundamental activity of the production of material life. In the words of Karl Marx, “the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.”⁵ Consequently, a theory of modernization is definitely

on the wrong track if it places the drive to change in the mind, in the beliefs and values of individuals. People do not change their mode of life because they have new ideas; they have new ideas because their material mode of life has changed or is in need of change. Thus, Europe owes its modernization to the rise of the bourgeoisie, which is itself the product of the changes that terminated the medieval age. Insofar as these changes “gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry an impulse never before known, they rendered the feudal system obsolete.”⁶

The philosophical antagonism between idealist and materialist approaches leads to different practical consequences. For the idealist explanation, if you want to modernize a country, you must first change the thinking of the people, especially of leading groups. Nothing activates the modernization of a country better than the rise and spread of progressivist ideas and values. Once the mind is changed, people develop the conviction that the material environment must also change in accordance with their new beliefs. For materialism, the idealist approach is based on the false philosophical premise of the autonomy and sovereign power of human will. People do not change their mode of life because they simply want to change it, but because the acquisition of new material means enables them to solve the contradictions obstructing their actual socioeconomic conditions of life. When beliefs change, it means that the old ones have become obsolete and irrelevant as a result of changed material conditions and that new and relevant ones are emerging from the new conditions. Only when humans are in possession of new material powers, for instance, a novel technological capability, itself arising from material needs, do they generate new and corresponding ideas and beliefs.

In spite of their important differences, Marxist materialism and idealism share the belief attributing the rise of modernity to a change that breaks with the past, whether the change is primarily cultural or material. For both of them, the formula “modernity versus tradition” encapsulates the problematics of modernization. According to Everett Hagen, “a society is traditional if ways of behavior in it continue with little change from generation to generation,” if it “tends to be custom-bound, hierarchical, ascriptive, and unproductive.”⁷ In effect, is not the term “traditional” often used to describe a society that refuses to change its social organization and system of production as well as its thinking and beliefs because it considers the preservation of the past as its solemn duty? The opposition between tradition and modernity implies, therefore, that innovation or creativity demarcates the two notions. A society can be defined as “modern” if its features show a propensity to change whenever the need to do so arises. Otherwise stated, the difference between the two notions boils down to the strength of the power of authority, and this means that the process of modernization begins when the authority of the past is noticeably on the wane. Without a decrease in the hold of authority and authority figures, thinking and behavior cannot dissent from customary norms of thinking and doing. While for Marxism, contradictions in the mode of production activate dissent, for idealism, contradictions, whatever they are, are not enough: for change to occur, the mind must first modify its traditional beliefs and values.

Modernity versus Tradition

Let us see how the opposition between modernity and tradition plays out in various theories and how traditionalism gives way to change. One influential example that jumps to mind is G. W. F. Hegel’s philosophy of history. Hegel bases his understanding of the rise and nature of modernity on the power of enlightenment to change the world. For him, history is not a mere collection of disparate events; it has a direction, and a goal, which is the realization of freedom. He writes, “Universal history . . . shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom. . . . This

development implies a graduation—a series of increasingly adequate expressions or manifestations of Freedom.”⁸ Moving stage by stage, history realizes the idea of freedom: it increases the consciousness of individual rights and autonomy, implements corresponding social and political changes, and enhances human productive capacities to achieve greater control of natural resources. The gradual replacement of resistant backward beliefs and values with enlightened ones is thus the manner the antagonism between tradition and modernity plays out.

So long as traditional ideas dominate the minds of people, superstitions, irrational and dogmatic beliefs, and static views of the social order command their thinking. Above all, their mind being totally focused on otherworldliness, they devalue worldly pursuits. The power of knowledge dissipates ignorance, and in so doing turns the focus of the mind on secularism, worldliness, and advancements of human desires and abilities. When people become more and more aware of their freedom, they value their inner dignity, and so become more determined to defend their rights and liberties. They thus feel the urge to change their conditions of life so as to make them conformable to the new perception of themselves. Speaking of the force of the awareness of freedom, Hegel says, “When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength.”⁹ For him, the French Revolution was a crucial moment in the realization of freedom. Under the influence of the thinkers of the Enlightenment, the revolution made the people aware that what they want most is freedom. The social and cultural upheavals that the revolution caused demonstrate the power of the awareness of freedom.

It must not be made to seem that the dissipation of traditionalism is synonymous with its complete eradication. For Hegel, negation is not destruction: history would not be a continuous and progressive course if each negation started from zero instead of building on the past. Accordingly, the function of negation is to purify, enhance, and further develop tradition. What is realized at a given time is just a stoppage in a forward-going movement, and so must be negated to liberate the forward movement. The movement yields development if it continues the past by purifying and enhancing it. Just as what is implicit in the seed becomes explicit in the various stages of the development of the plant, so too the seed of freedom, implicit in the first phases of history, is increasingly rendered explicit through various stages of realization until it reaches its final phase, namely, modernity. “Progress,” says Hegel, “merely renders explicit what is implicit in a notion.”¹⁰ However, one must keep in mind that the transition from the implicit to the explicit is not a spontaneous and straightforward occurrence; it involves negation by which what is already realized is overcome by a higher stage that preserves it as its moment.

Another version of the notion of historical change as negation and continuity is found in Max Weber’s theory on the relationship between Protestantism and the emergence of the spirit of capitalism. Relying on the comparative study of religions, Weber draws the idealist conviction that ideas, especially religious ones, exercise an independent influence on a society’s economic activity. His study convinces him that towns and regions mostly populated by followers of Protestantism were economically more active than those dominated by Catholics or followers of Orthodox Christianity. He attributes this higher economic interest to the Protestant idea of predestination, which he says has been instrumental in developing a rational attitude, as opposed to ritualistic worldviews. Arguably, if the question of salvation is already settled in the sense that the afterlife of each individual is predetermined, recourse to rituals, confessions, intercessions, etc., is pointless. By contrast, what comes to the forefront is the question of knowing whether one is among the elect or the damned. Accordingly, the belief that God has already decided the fate of

each individual and that the individual cannot change his/her destiny sets off an intense anxiety over the question of one's eternal fate.

According to Weber, this anxiety fostered the need to look for an indication of election and led to the belief that good works, done systematically, are "indispensable as a sign of election. They are the technical means, not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation."¹¹ What could better serve as a sign of election than a successful productive life? Economic success depends on hard work, continuous investment, and the use of rational and efficient methods. It also requires that economic activity be divorced from the mere satisfaction of needs and the indulgence in sensual pleasures. Its overriding goal is the uninterrupted growth of profit, by which success is also objectively appraised. As could be expected, this protestant ethic, that is, a life devoted to productive work, releases such a systematic and frenetic pursuit of economic success that "man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life."¹² As a test of election, the accumulation of wealth for the sake of accumulation explains the shift of Christianity to growing secularism and worldliness. Poverty, monastic detachment, and withdrawal from worldly activity cease to be the marks of a holy life. Instead, the systematic and rational conquest of the world becomes the expression of deeper spirituality. In addition to condemning all unscrupulous methods of making money, Protestantism changed what used to be seen as greed into a religious accreditation.

The point is that the new religion did not reject Christian beliefs and values; it altered them in the direction of worldliness and rationalism by purifying and strengthening them. Because the change was done in the name of authentic Christianity, it enhanced the power of religion, even as it went against such established beliefs as the power of absolution granted to priests or the view that sees good works as a means to salvation. The belief that individuals are saved if they do more good than bad and, most of all, if they ask for forgiveness through confession, diminishes the power of faith and allows the conduct of a life that stands in the way of a rigorous moral life. Protestantism removes the obstacle by the advocacy of a life systematically committed to hard work and productiveness, which precisely diverts from the path of sins. As Weber puts it, "The Reformation meant not the elimination of the Church's control over everyday life, but rather the substitution of a new form of control for the previous one. It meant the repudiation of a control which was very lax."¹³ Clearly, as with Hegel, negation means the correction and upgrading of tradition. In purifying the Christian tradition, Protestantism achieved an upgraded, developed form of Christianity. In doing so, it exalted a life committed to productive work, and this gave birth to the modern spirit of capitalism. The theory confirms the primacy of culture change, since it attributes the change of values and beliefs to a purifying motive of a religious commitment, the consequence of which was the birth of capitalism and associated transformations.

Weber's idea of establishing a causal link between Protestantism and capitalism could not but raise objections, mainly because such a link cannot explain the industrialization of non-Protestant and non-Western nations. Hagen easily brandished the argument of "economic growth effectively led by Roman Catholics, Shintoists, Buddhists, adherents to the Orthodox Christian faith . . . and avowed atheists."¹⁴ For him, as stated previously, the key concept that explains modernity is creativity, innovation. Understanding how and why creativity is released is, therefore, grasping the inner force that brings about modernity. So conceived, the question of modernization sums up to knowing why individuals in a given social group are no longer attached to the traditional ways of doing things.

For Hagen, the loss of attachment happens as a result of a psychological change induced by what he calls "withdrawal of status respect."¹⁵ The phenomenon occurs when, well-placed

families in a given society lose their original hegemonic status consequent to external invasions or internal uprisings. This loss, Hagen believes, has a definite impact on the family as it ushers in the weakening of parental authority, especially that of the father, who understandably suffers from the loss and is prone to a depressive state of mind. The retreatism of the father means that he is no longer keen on molding his offspring in the traditional way, and this compels the mother to step in and take up the full responsibility of raising children. However, since the mother cannot become a model to her sons, she instead inculcates in them the value of self-reliance, which grows later into a creative personality. The sequence of change is as follows: “authoritarianism, withdrawal of status respect, retreatism, creativity.”¹⁶ In short, the cause of modernity is to be found in the change of child-rearing methods, which is a cultural episode.

Hagen vindicates his thesis by the study of the historical processes that led to the industrialization of England, Japan, and other countries. The important thing is to understand that, when people are under the pressure of withdrawal of status respect, they choose economic success rather than any other outlet. The reason for the choice is obvious enough: because activities associated with trade, finance, and production are despised in a traditional society, they are the only pursuits that remain open to them. Moreover, given their situation, economic success appears to them as the best way to regain respect and status. Being a personal achievement as well as a source of social power, wealth removes humiliation and reinstates the lost social rank. The case of dethroned classes brings us back to the same rule that governs positive culture changes, namely, the infringement of tradition but for the purpose of recovering it in an upgraded form. The process reiterates the function of negation as a necessary means to achieve a change in modernizing tradition.

This short review of selected representative theories of modernization raises the question of knowing whether the Marxist conception of modernity exhibits a similar understanding of social change, given its divergent materialist principles. Without a doubt, the Marxist denial of any deterministic impact to beliefs and values is at the antipode of theories that give primacy to culture change. Yet, there is another side to the issue, which is that Marxism shares an understanding of negation and of history’s stage-producing-stage march that is close to that of Hegel. Consequently, just as in Hegel, for Marx too, development proceeds through a series of negations enabling the implicit to become explicit. Here is an example from Marx himself:

The capitalist mode of appropriation . . . produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labor of its proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. It is the negation of the negation. This does not re-establish private property for the producer, but gives him individual property based on the acquisitions of the capitalist era: i.e., on co-operation and the possession in common of the land and of the means of production.¹⁷

In growing from private holding to a socialized one, not only does property fit the industrialized form of production, but it also puts an end to all exploitative relationships. The socialized stage is thus the previous stage developed; as such, it incorporates and synthesizes all the positive achievements of capitalism minus the outdated private ownership of the means of production. Moreover, as Marxism believes that all civilizations started with communal ownership, which had to be negated to move forward, the establishment of communism on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist system constitutes a reinstatement of the original communal ownership but in a

higher form. We find the same process of the implicit becoming explicit through a form of development involving a series of negations.

Let us go further. Despite its materialist assumption, the communist vision of the ideal society is no stranger to values inherited from Christianity, as the profound meaning of the Christian message on human equality strongly suggests. Unfortunately, says Marxism, neither the established churches nor the so-called Christian states attempted to implement here on Earth the Christian ideal of equality. Instead, they reserved its implementation to life in the hereafter, thereby devaluing real life in favor of an illusory life. To correct this straying course, the belief in the illusory life must first be derived from the real distressing conditions of life. The derivation reveals that religion “is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and the *protest* against real distress.”¹⁸ So understood, the negation of religion means the elimination of the illusory component while retaining the protest to realize, in real life, the deferred Christian idea of equality.

The Ethos of Survival

The admission of some similarities between Marxism and modernization school must not blind us, to say it again, to the irreconcilable differences that separate the two schools. One such difference is the manner social change is implemented. Besides believing that a change in the value and belief systems causes modernization, the school of modernization maintains that the transformations do not necessitate revolutionary upheavals. Revolution implies deep social transformations such that, in addition to radical economic changes, it causes the removal, often in a violent way, of the ruling class. Precisely, according to modernization theory, these revolutionary events happen each time ruling elites fail or refuse to make the necessary changes in time. When elites take the initiative to reform their society before it is too late, they prevent revolutions.

Now, if we ask the reason why ruling classes are willing to implement changes, that is, to go against, at least partially, their own system of beliefs, the only answer that makes sense is to say that they do so to salvage their power and economic interests. For them, reforms preempt social revolution or defeat at the hands of an expansionist neighboring country, which means in both cases the end of their political and economic hegemony. Reforms are thus sacrifices necessary to save what is important, namely, the preservation of their political and economic standing. This insight asserts that change does not occur for the sake of mere change; change has a function in that it “restores the equilibrium” of a social system threatened by disruptive forces.¹⁹ W. W. Rostow is a leading theoretician of this interpretation: for him, the need to ward off external and/or internal threats explains the reason why ruling classes take the resolution to introduce changes. He writes: “Men holding effective authority or influence have been willing to uproot traditional societies not, primarily, to make more money but because the traditional society failed—or threatened to fail—to protect them from humiliation by foreigners.”²⁰

How does modernization protect ruling classes from humiliation? As we saw, modernization is a process of deep societal transformations by which a country changes from traditional, premodern to modern society. All the features of modernization, such as industrialization, urbanization, increased participation of citizens in the affairs of the state, secularization, and social mobility, go hand in hand with the adoption of new technologies and efficient methods of production. This, in turn, makes modern societies wealthier and more powerful nations, and thus more able to offer a higher standard of living to their citizens as well as to build a reliable and well-equipped military force. These social changes, to the extent that they bring about a more open society by weakening rigid social stratifications, ensure a better national integration, thereby fostering stable governmental and

administrative structures. In becoming wealthier, more powerful, and better integrated, modern societies provide a better defense against internal disruptions as well as foreign interventions. Evidently, the best way to counter external threats is to have a society that is not weakened by deep internal fractures and disturbances.

It follows that the failure to modernize must be attributed to a significant weakening of the defensive will of ruling classes, either because of insurmountable internal obstacles or conflicts inner to the classes or simply because of sheer heedlessness of impending dangers. Be it noted that the defensive will does not directly tie modernization to the goal of providing better conditions of life and happiness to society. Nor does it imply that economic prosperity stems from a sudden burst of hedonic pursuits following the removal of existing restrictions. True, both hedonic motivations and the goal of social welfare have some impact, but they presuppose an underlying drive, which is the survival will of ruling elites. Even though the will is self-serving, it mobilizes social forces because ruling elites identify their own survival with the defense of national sovereignty and integrity. According to Rostow, defensive nationalism or, better said, “reactive nationalism”—a term that Rostow uses to distinguish it from aggressive nationalism of the fascistic type—reacts “against intrusion from more advanced nations” and “has been a most important and powerful motive force in the transition from traditional to modern societies, at least as important as the profit motive.”²¹ Some such approach coins modernization in terms of duty, obligation to traditionality, to the inherited legacy of national identity and culture. The focus being more on building the ability to counter militarily threats, the betterment of the conditions of life is a fallout rather than a direct goal. For societies under external or internal threats, the deep motivation for modernization is the defense of national sovereignty under the leadership of a ruling elite that is willing to make reforms, even if these reforms curtail some of its traditional privileges. When modernization is viewed as a means to protect national freedom and sovereignty, the motivation moves from the level of desires, such as greed or comfort, to the austere and exacting level of duty accomplishment.

The emphasis on the powerful motivation of nationalism does not entail the conclusion that it is the only and universal path to industrialization. We just saw with Weber that the motive could be religious as well. However, we also indicated that the religious change amounted to a purification of Christian beliefs, which purification obviously points to a reaction to a perceived threat to the integrity of Christianity. One thing is sure: reactive nationalism explains the motivation behind the modernization of countries that are latecomers, for instance, that of Japan or some East Asian countries. But does it also apply to firstcomers, to wit, the European countries? The answer is yes if one keeps in mind that history shows that war, whether aggressive or defensive, has motivated great technological inventions and deep reforms. Connect this historical evidence with the fact that Europe, more than any other continent, has been replete with conflicts over national sovereignty and territorial expansions, and it becomes clear that nationalism, with its intense demand for the mass manufacture of modern weapons, has been a major agent in the industrialization of European countries. The modernization of Germany and the long-drawn-out Franco-British rivalry are shining examples of the role of nationalism. True, serious theoreticians have linked the modernization of the continent to important cultural breakthroughs, like the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. But as we have tried to show, these cultural events were reinstatements of traditionality at a higher level. As was the case with the Reformation, the ideas of the Enlightenment presuppose a culture that had internalized the Christian ideal of human dignity and equality. Effective or successful culture change, whether it is inspired by nationalism or any other motive, like religion, exhibits, therefore, the same process of upgrading inherent potentialities to cope successfully with challenging situations.

Failure to Change

The condition for the occurrence of successful culture changes gives a hint as to why change fails. More often than not, failure is attributed to traditionalism, to the refusal to change, the extreme forms of which are religious fundamentalism, tribalism, and ultra-nationalism. What is wrong with traditionalism is not its eagerness to protect tradition, but its desire to do so without any change. Yet, the true commitment to tradition would have been the willingness to change so as to be able to counter challenges, obvious as it is that only modernization and economic growth can cope with internal and/or external threats in a world propelled by modern ideas and technological advancements. In avoiding change, traditionalism confirms the lack of a true salvational ethos and, consequently, the absence of an active sense of duty. It wrongly believes that rigidity, purism, and repression are enough to withstand challenges. Nothing could be more inefficient than to defend a belief system by a method that, in compensation for the refusal to change, has recourse to inflammatory ideological fervor when in reality modernization decides the fate of the battle. This demission authorizes us to say that underdevelopment, which results from the refusal to change, is a human failure, an abdication of the will.

In most cases, those who defend traditionalism maintain that it is possible to have it both ways, that is, to preserve tradition intact and develop economically. At first look, nothing seems more reasonable than this approach. It allows the preservation of traditional values while giving access to technology and modern production methods. In thus keeping apart tradition and modernity, one prevents the loss of identity without, however, hampering technological development. Unfortunately, the attempt to separate the cultural from the material is unlikely to yield the expected positive outcome, as demonstrated by countries advocating religious fundamentalism, among which we find, for instance, many Islamic countries. The actual result of compartmentalization is not separation, but the articulation of the traditional culture with modern elements, the consequence of which is that it hampers the furtherance of the modernization process. Where there is articulation, one component holds back the other necessary component owing to their incompatibility. Since keeping the two compartmentalized does not bring about a thrusting change, the only way out is for the cultural itself to change in the direction of providing the turn of mind and incentive to handle modern ideas and technology.

One detrimental consequence of compartmentalization is the dissociation of economic activities from the spiritual realm and ethical norms. A good illustration of this danger is the case of Hinduism: according to S. N. Eisenstadt, “[Modernity] was established first of all in terms of Western symbols and was to some extent disconnected from the great Indian cultural tradition.”²² This kind of dissociation is also observed in many countries advocating religious fundamentalism. As a result, activities related to material life were kept outside ethical and rational norms. When this happens, unscrupulous and irrational methods of wealth acquisition are likely to proliferate at the expense of efficiency, creativity, and productive investment. Convinced that the modernization of India was on the wrong track of unleashing greed and moral laxity, Gandhi sought salvation by connecting secular interests with traditional beliefs. He failed because his spiritual exhortations and ascetic teachings presented him as just a holy man who has authority in spiritual matters but not in matters related to business. All the more reason for people to think thus was that his emphasis on ascetic practices appeared to be on the opposite side of modernity.

Another case of articulation is found in Latin American countries. The case presents a paradox: whereas concerning Africa, Islam, and Hinduism, modernity amounted to the introduction of alien beliefs and values generating cultural incompatibilities, the same cannot be said about the

Christian culture of elites in Latin American countries. This may suggest that the underdevelopment of this part of the world should be ascribed to non-cultural factors. Far from it, as the shunning of culture change stands out more than anything else. In Latin America, says Hagen, “Europeans conquered the sparse indigenous populations, settled in considerable numbers, and lived their lives according to their own cultural patterns.”²³ In other words, the elites did not develop the achieving ethos of immigrants; they were just conquistadors who simply settled in a conquered territory. The contentment of these settlers with traditional means of wealth acquisition generated an agrarian economy whose characteristic form of surplus appropriation rested mainly on the subjugation of indigenous populations. Because methods of production were not revolutionized, articulation was inevitable, and with it underdevelopment.

As alluded to earlier, under certain conditions, failure or delay to change can catapult a society into a revolutionary course, as in the cases of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions. Thus, speaking of the French Revolution, Barrington Moore writes, “commercial influences as they penetrated into the French countryside did not undermine and destroy the feudal framework.”²⁴ Consequently, unlike what happened in England, the failure to alter the feudal structure prevented the transformation of the French nobility into a capitalist class, and this obstructed condition made a revolutionary denouement inevitable. The same failure to introduce timely and relevant reforms accounts for the explosion of revolutionary upheavals in Russia, China, and elsewhere. All these cases confirm the absence of the salvational will, that is, of the will that is ready to effect the changes necessary to ward off disruptive threats. To repeat, ruling elites develop the will to reform when they perceive reforms as sacrifices necessary to salvage their socio-economic standings.

Revolutions are changes, but such that they empower fringe and extremist groups, usually harboring utopian visions and having, in some cases, dubious moral standards. The refusal of ruling elites to meet social demands with appropriate reforms often causes violent uprisings, which create favorable conditions for the rise of fringe and radical groups to leadership positions. When this happens, the probability is high for the implementation of a radical type of social revolution, which not only replaces the ruling class with a new revolutionary elite, but also deeply alters the socio-economic system and the cultural fabric, a change typical of Marxist-Leninist revolutions. As subsequent developments show, this kind of uprooting change plunges society into an uncertain, chaotic future, and this makes the recourse to dictatorial rule inevitable. The need to restore a semblance of social order is an important reason why social revolutions usher in dictatorial forms of government, frequently leading to one-man rule. This outcome, in turn, negatively impacts on the modernization project, with the consequence that another round of reforms becomes necessary to bring the society back into the normal, evolutionary type of change.

Modernization as Westernization

When we review the case of Black Africa, what jumps to mind is not so much the obstacle of traditionalism as the ravages of colonization and colonial ideology. The internalization of the racist discourse describing Africans as congenitally primitive, irrational, and good only for slavery brings along the tacit or unconscious acceptance of the superiority of the West. The acceptance, in turn, nurtures the belief that Western tutelage is the forced passage to modernization. Indeed, so disparaging was the colonial discourse that many Africans welcomed Westernization, believing that “a way of life which made it possible for [African] ancestors to be subjugated by a handful of Europeans cannot be described as totally glorious.”²⁵ To be sure, this welcoming trend was, shortly after, countered by attempts to recover and revalue African cultures, as shown by the intellectual

movements of Negritude, African socialism, the thesis of Black Egypt, etc. However, these defensive reactions were confined to academic circles, with little repercussions in African societies at large. Be that as it may, the internalization of the disparaging discourse of colonialism dissociates modernization from moral behaviors, for only the kind of change that aims at competitiveness and efficiency would be in need of moral rules. Unfortunately, the status of a tutee induced by the internalization little encourages the desire to become a matching counterpart to the West. The dissociation generates a “spiritual vacuum,” which unleashes irrational, inefficient, and greedy business practices, not to mention the inadequacy to establish democratic governments.²⁶ These features are all consequences of the dissociation, and it is this dissociation that prevents the reinvention of modernity in terms of African cultures and aspirations.

The more we dig deeper into the colonial ideology equating modernization with Westernization, the more we find that it accounts, more than traditionalism, for failed modernizations in third-world countries. The ideology of Westernization directly derives from the conflicts between tradition and modernity, as they manifested in Europe’s turbulent history. Yet, in total disregard for the different cultures and historical legacies of non-Western countries, the ideology proposes the European path as a universal panacea for modernization. Not only does the proposal mean that non-Western countries have to go through the same breaks, but also that the changes they undergo must be modeled on the West. Clearly, the assumption is that the “history of advanced or established industrial countries . . . traces out the road of development for the more backward countries.”²⁷ Accordingly, the cultural and social changes that preceded Western industrialization must be seen as prerequisites to the modernization of non-Western countries.

The great attraction of this approach flaws from one assumption: knowing how economic development came about in European countries is also knowing how it can be brought about elsewhere. The philosophical foundation of the theory equating modernization with Westernization originates from the historical scheme of a unilinear conception of history, in the manner of Hegel or Marx. As we saw, the conception speaks of world history, that is, places all countries in the same universal and historical process and ranks them as advanced or backward, according as they show characteristics that are close to or far from those of the West. This means that the conception assigns the same goal as the West to all countries and sees history as the progressive, stage-by-stage realization of the goal. For Hegel, as mentioned earlier, this goal is freedom so that freedom “is and has been the director of the events of the World’s History.”²⁸ Since Europe shows the most advanced manifestations of freedom, it represents the future of non-Western countries. Alas, owing to the ossification of their beliefs and institutions, these lagging countries need the close and forcible tutorship of European nations to resume the historical process. Hence, the design of the colonial project, which is nothing other than “a civilizing mission” with the sole purpose of removing inner obstacles so as to inject some evolutionary momentum into countries in a prolonged static state. According to his conception, otherwise known as Eurocentrism, Europe is in the driver’s seat of history and the ultimate significance of colonial subjugation is simply the European locomotive towing lagging countries into the progressive course of history.

In presenting Western countries as the model that third-world countries must imitate, the colonial version, besides sanctioning the ideology of the superiority of the West, expects that third-world countries internalize the superiority and get down to the task of importing Western values, institutions, and methods of work as faithfully as possible. It is worth noting that leaders in third-world countries who advocated radical revolutions did not escape from the stranglehold of the colonial ideology of Westernization, despite their noisy anti-Western rhetoric. They modelled their

thinking on Marxism, which echoes the Hegelian belief that all societies belong to the same progressive course of world history. For such leaders too, the history and features of the West displayed universal standards so that revolution was just an accelerated way of joining the path that the West followed.

The outcome of the colonial idea of modernization through the imposition of the Western model brought about neither economic advancement nor open societies. On the contrary, underdevelopment stepped in with its shanty towns amidst a stagnating, even deteriorating rural life. These disappointing results should not come as a surprise. An approach that puts down other legacies is little able to generate the conditions for a successful modernization. For one thing, it is unable to infuse the enthusiasm necessary to succeed in such a paramount and challenging task as modernization. Some theoreticians go even further by saying that underdevelopment is a refusal, a pathetic attempt to preserve one's cultural identity. Of course, the culprit here is Eurocentrism: as an "assassination of civilizations" it could do no more than sow underdevelopment, which is then tantamount to "a fearful resistance to development projects conceived in the West."²⁹ According to this view, underdevelopment is due neither to the unwanted persistence of traditional culture nor to the constant pauperization resulting from a dependent status. Rather, it is the "last impulse of self-preservation," taking shelter under passivity and retreatism.³⁰

The other point is that the colonial model of modernization rests on a major inner contradiction: it defines modernity by the liberation of creativity, and yet it comes out in favor of the imposition of an external model. To import everything from the West is not only to endorse the notion that colonized peoples are congenitally incapable of advancements on their own, but it is also to advocate actively the servile imitation of the West, and this can only inculcate an overall mental and material dependency. Given that the liberation of the innovative spirit defines modernity, the dependency resulting from the mimicking of the West places underdeveloped countries nowhere near to giving birth to a modernizing drive.

For many theoreticians, the strategy of forcing third-world countries to pass through the allegedly proven necessary and universal stages of development grossly misrepresents the complex, varied, and undetermined course of history. The whole idea rests on the questionable belief in the existence of historical determinism. As Norman Long warned, "we should guard against converting historical facts . . . into the status of logical prerequisites since this implies the untenable notion of historical necessity."³¹ Whether one likes it or not, modernization is a historical process and, as such, it deals with particularities and reproduces the ups and downs, the divergent and convergent ways, in a word the inventive character of history. This understanding alone is enough to discredit the idea that there is a universally applicable "science" of development.

Lastly, the theory of modernization as Westernization overlooks the extent to which developing countries found themselves in a totally different condition from that of Western societies when they started their march toward modernity. Some scholars, though belonging to the modernization school, have portrayed the advanced countries, no more as models, but as fetters to latecomers. Technological dependency, unfavorable division of labor, unequal competition, demographic explosion, etc., are some of the "handicaps" that advanced countries pass on to latecomers.³² Far from defining modernization as the process by which backward countries fashion themselves on advanced ones, some such understanding advocates the recovery of autonomy and the adoption of a confrontational strategy.

Diverse Roads to Modernization

The best way to prove that the colonial model of modernization induces underdevelopment rather than yielding successful culture changes is to examine the case of countries that mapped out their own path of development. I have in mind the modernization of some exceptional Asian countries, such as Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore. These cases have provided additional support to the school giving primacy to cultural factors. They have also forced some theoreticians of modernization theory to give up the simplistic identification of modernization with Westernization, as the mentioned countries, in addition to having cultural features and belonging to a historical region markedly distinct from those of the West, did not follow a process of transformation modeled on the West. Both the failures of the model of Westernization elsewhere and the reliance of the Asian countries on their own cultural assets to score successful results convinced theoreticians that there is no universal prototype for modernization. Instead, each country has to take the path that fits its particularity in terms of culture, history, natural resources, and geographical position. Unlike Westernization, the reliance on one's own assets and particularities turns modernization into self-development, in direct contradiction to the condition of self-denial that Westernization seems to require.

Most interesting in this regard is the remarkable modernization of Japan. As has been said by many scholars, the economic success of Japan cannot be attributed to an abundance of resources. It cannot be ascribed to the initiative of a merchant class, either. Likewise, while the industrialization of most European countries proceeded along the liberal line, that of Japan, as an offset to its backwardness, took a greater authoritarian and traditional fashion, with the state playing a leading role. Furthermore, the cultural change that promoted economic growth in Japan did not indulge in any form of individualism, thereby refuting theories of change that make modernity dependent on the decline of authority. Japanese achievement took the austere form of the accomplishment of duty vis-à-vis the nation, the emperor. As Szymon Chodak notes, "none of the theories explaining personality, behavior, or motives as individualistic ventures is applicable to Japan."³³

According to many theoreticians, nationalism has been the main driving force of Japanese industrialization. Here is what a scholar wrote: "The great motive force in Japanese modernization was the threat of absorption or destruction by the West. . . . Because of it, an essentially conservative elite abandoned earlier theories and turned with great seriousness, if not total enthusiasm, to the task of modernizing the nation."³⁴ The same author adds: "Samurai and others were exhorted to enter industry and commerce 'to save the nation'."³⁵ A pertinent confirmation of this nationalist ethos is the pronounced military feature of the industrialization process. Japanese industrialization was first and foremost a means to build up military strength in order to counter the threat of Western imperialism and avoid the fate of China. The nationalist crusade, in turn, brought about the socio-cultural changes necessary to implement the goal of industrialization. Thus, the Samurai were exhorted to exchange their values of war for the values of business. Thanks to the Meiji Restoration, the emperor was reinstated, but did not exercise real power. He thus became the "center of loyalty" from which the nationalist calling emanated.³⁶ In addition, the conservative ruling class undertook the "defeudalization" of Japan: fiefdoms and all other feudal privileges were abolished.³⁷ Though at first the government developed its own enterprises, as soon as enough Japanese nationals had been trained to operate the new industrial enterprises, the government sold them off to private entrepreneurs at very low prices. Many scholars have also pinpointed the universalization of education, which opened the possibility of integrating the common person into the state's crusade for national salvation. Nothing could better show the realization of an efficient culture change through the updating of

traditionality—whose outcome is the conversion of a traditional class and its values into modernizing forces—than the case of Japan.

Equally supportive of the cultural argument is the success of East Asian countries. For one thing, the national cultures of such countries as Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore, also known as the “Asian Tigers,” are within the orbit of Sinitic civilization. For another, the absence, as in Japan, of rich natural resources and geographical opportunities significantly strengthens the explanation of their success by their common cultural heritages. Also, as in Japan, we find threats and the quest for salvation playing a major role in the modernization of East Asian countries. Indeed, all these countries faced serious threats subsequent to the spread of communism, especially from China and North Korea, at the time of their take-offs. The need to counter the communist danger and thus salvage the established values and system of power has been a powerful motive for modernization. It meant building a strong economy both to deter external threats and curtail the attractiveness of communism by improving domestic living conditions. The improvements prevented internal discontents and unrests, which are always a beacon for communist infiltrations. The same need to ward off the spread of communism persuaded U.S. policymakers to provide military and substantial economic assistance to these countries.

The case of East Asian countries reconfirms the conditions of positive culture changes: modernization becomes an assignment to counter threats, but by relying on and mobilizing the potentialities of a given socio-cultural legacy. The work of actualizing the potentialities in conformity with the needs of modernization is the updating process that leads to culture change. As regards East Asian countries, the role of Confucianism was most central. It provided that “great capacity for delayed gratification and discipline (especially on behalf of one’s family).”³⁸ Indeed, the cultural explanation underlines the role of “familism” in the industrialization of East Asian societies. Admittedly, traditional devotion to family values ensured the effectiveness of family business in East Asian countries. Familism, of which filial piety is the highest value, unrolls a series of obligations, among which are the duty to share resources, to fend for the family, and to establish a tight collaboration between the members of the family in the management of economic affairs. As Gordon Redding writes:

In a society where each family is dependent on its own resources for its survival, and where each individual is in turn dependent on family support for so much in life, the person who is not working as hard as he or she might for the common good will come under intense social pressure.³⁹

Now that we have gathered enough information about the causes of modernization and the failure to modernize, we have all that is needed to analyze the case of Ethiopia’s modernization. To be sure, the fact that Ethiopia has a long history of survival and has never been colonized tells us that we are dealing with a special case. The record of a long survival enables us to earmark advantages, but also invites us to pose the question of modernization in terms of botched opportunities in light of the multiplication of serious challenges to Ethiopia’s survival in the present and recent part of its history.

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² Edward B. Taylor, *The Origins of Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 1.

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- ³ Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 10.
- ⁴ Norman Long, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 59-60.
- ⁵ Karl Marx, "Excerpt from A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," *Basics Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. Lewis S. Feuer (New York: Anchor Books, 1959), 43.
- ⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *ibid.*, 8.
- ⁷ Everett E. Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change* (Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1962), 56.
- ⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), p. 63.
- ⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 261, Gutenberg eBook.
- ¹⁰ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), p. 140.
- ¹¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 18.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ¹⁴ Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change*, 17.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ¹⁷ Marx, "Excerpt from A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," 166-67.
- ¹⁸ Marx, "Excerpt from "Toward the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," *ibid.*, 263.
- ¹⁹ Wilbert E. Moore, *Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Halls, Inc., 1963), 10.
- ²⁰ W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26-27.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ²² S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Protestant Ethic and Modernization* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), 98.
- ²³ Hagen, *On the Theory of Social Change*, 23.
- ²⁴ Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 55.
- ²⁵ P. O. Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy," *African Philosophy* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 7.
- ²⁶ Messay Kebede, *Africa's Quest for a Philosophy of Decolonization* (New York: Rodopi, 2004), 26.
- ²⁷ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 6.
- ²⁸ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 8.
- ²⁹ Thierry G. Verhelst, *No Life Without Roots* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 1990), 19, 22.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ³¹ Long, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development*, 66.
- ³² Karl de Schweinitz, *Industrialization and Democracy* (London: Macmillan, 1964), 251.
- ³³ Szymon Chodak, *Societal Development*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 73.
- ³⁴ Robert A. Scalapino, "Ideology and Modernization: The Japanese Case," *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 97.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.
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- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 163.
- ³⁹ Gordon Redding, *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 69.