

Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770-1945)

Texts and Commentaries



Volume Three/1

Modernism –
The Creation
of
Nation-States



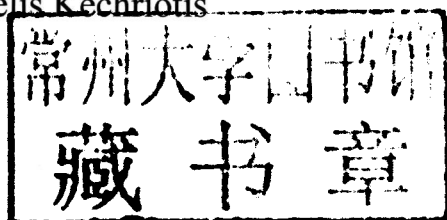
Edited by Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny
and Vangelis Kechriotis

MODERNISM

THE CREATION OF NATION-STATES

Edited by

Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and
Vangelis Kechriotis



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INTRODUCTION

The 'Identity Reader' Project

The present double volume is the third one of the series entitled *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945): Texts and Commentaries*. The history of this venture goes back to the meeting of a group of young scholars at the Balkan Summer University in Plovdiv in 1999. Step by step, a research project, hosted by the Center for Advanced Study Sofia, was formed with the intention of bringing together and making accessible basic texts of the respective national traditions. The ensuing 'Reader' was envisioned as a challenge to the self-centered and 'isolationist' historical narratives and educational canons prevalent in the region. On the whole, the 'Reader' is expected to fill in the lacunae concerning the knowledge of Central and Southeast Europe pertinent to the very core of the schooling process and academic socialization in these countries. It is hoped that our project will broaden the field of possible comparisons and make researchers look at the process of nation-building in Central and Southeast Europe from a comparative perspective.

The grouping of the texts follows neither the national provenience, nor *stricto sensu* chronological order. It is determined more by thematic similarities and resonances. The four 'meta-themes/periods,' around which the volumes are organized, are the following: Late Enlightenment (the emergence of the modern 'National Idea'); National Romanticism (the formation of national movements); Modernism (the full development of national movements and often the creation of national states along with the new formulations of national cultures); and Anti-Modernism (concentrating mainly on the radical ideologies of the inter-war period).

Within these thematic units the project analyzes various aspects of identity-formation, such as 'symbolic geography', the symbolic representation of the national community, images of the past and the production of cultural markers (i.e., national language or national character), as well as the images of the other and the 'construction' of identity in religious and socio-cultural contexts – domains that themselves exhibit revealing similarities.

This framework challenges the usual taxonomies through the *disaggregation* of a nominally unified past. In particular, this perspective questions the idea of a single point of departure that we are confronted with in nationalist histories. In fact, most of the texts selected consciously participate in many registers of identity-construction, seeking to turn the entire symbolic framework of identities into a more dynamic configuration.

In order to create a common basis for the analysis of the collected texts, each entry has a similar structure. The first section refers to the bibliographical data containing the language in which the text was written, its author and the publishing house; this data is complemented by short information about the author, such as his (her) place of birth and death, a concise biography, and main works. The second section contains a short 'contextualization' of the text, describing its political and social background and the intellectual environment in which it originated. Then, a textual analysis, a description of its ideological tendencies and historical influence and its function in the respective canon follow. In addition, the most important interpretations of the text are provided. All this is followed by the translated texts. If possible, we chose to publish them in their entirety, but in many cases their length exceeded the dimensions of the volume, and thus we strove to present the most characteristic excerpts.

*

During the years of intensive research and interaction, our group incurred a number of precious debts. First of all, we would like to thank Diana Mishkova who supported the project from the beginning and has helped us far beyond the scope commonly expected from the director of a hosting institution to bring these volumes to completion. We are also extremely grateful to the entire staff of the Center for Advanced Study Sofia who facilitated our work immensely during our numerous meetings and provided a pleasant working atmosphere in all regards.

No collaborative project of this sort is viable without substantial financial help making it possible for the participants to meet regularly. We are grateful to the Prince Bernhard Cultural Foundation (The Netherlands) for providing generous funding that made it possible for the group to meet on six occasions over the period of three years. When the first phase of the project was finished, the Foundation also offered a further grant to prepare the texts for publication. Without this generosity, it would have been impossible to share our findings with the broader public. Our special thanks goes to Wouter Hugen-

holtz (NIAS), who took upon himself the role of introducing the project to the Foundation and who followed with immense trust and sympathy our work throughout these years.

A natural focus of any comparative research in the region, the Central European University also gave us generous help to accomplish our venture. Most of all, we would like to thank László Kontler and Sorin Antohi who have been with us from the very beginning of the project, offering logistic help, sharing their advice with us and also contributing to the volumes with their insightful introductions. We are grateful to Halil Berktaş (Sabancı University, Istanbul) for his intellectual support throughout these years and also for hosting us for a workshop in 2001 where the project was first presented to a broader academic public.

In the process of preparing this third volume, we were able to obtain additional funding which enabled us to cover expenses for various purposes in different stages of our endeavour. We are grateful to the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) for sponsoring a meeting of the group at Boğaziçi University in November 2006, and the History Department there for providing logistical support. We are also grateful to Boğaziçi University for the generous grant it provided from its Research Fund, supporting the critical final stages in the preparation of the present volume. While preparing the manuscript for publication, the editor at CEU Press, Linda Kunos, provided us with important advice and took care of the burdensome institutional side of the publishing with exemplary commitment. Lastly, Benjamin Trigona-Harany, a junior colleague, took upon the burdensome task of editing the diverse body of texts linguistically.

There are cases where current political controversies and the fluidity of the international landscape in the region under consideration led the editors of the volume to make choices out of necessity and pragmatism. Two new states have appeared in the period after the editorial group had conceived and carried out this project. We decided, however, that we should not reconsider our entire agenda to trace intellectual traditions in Montenegro and Kosovo, since this is first and foremost the task of those who are involved in the state-building processes in these countries. After all, apart from the immense human tragedy it involved, the fragmentation that the war in Yugoslavia has left behind also deposited issues of bitter cultural contestation. Therefore, we had to respect the choice of the contributors who described as Croatian, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian or Bosnian, depending on national provenience, a language which, despite certain local differences, had functioned as a shared form of expression in the region for many decades.

Maria Todorova: Modernism

Like culture and civilization, imperialism and orientalism, or nations and nationalism, modernity and modernism are concepts that suffer from overuse. Some scholars despair about the impossibility to reach a consensus about their meaning and use, and call on entirely abandoning them. Yet, they are with us to stay, among others because they have long ago left specialized scholarly discussion (or entered it too late) to become part of the everyday speech of many competing discourses. This volume, the third in a series covering the cultures of the coveted, emerging, flourishing and humiliated nation-states of the region of Central and Southeast Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, boldly takes on the challenge.

Writing this introduction entails a double bind. On the one hand, I was asked and agreed to provide a preface to a volume I did not help conceive. In a way, the resulting introduction is not merely a comment on the material compiled by several younger scholars and respected colleagues; it is inevitably an exegesis of its conceptualization. On the other hand, given the voluminous and controversial literature around the concept of modernism and its derivatives, this preface tentatively tries to provide some similitude of order, if only for the easier orientation through the ensuing material. Several questions will be asked in the course of this chapter: What is the difference between modernity, modernism and modernization? When and where was/is modernity, and when and where was/is modernism? Is it modernity or modernities? What is the comparative value of scrutinizing a particular region?

Why, then, is this volume encompassed under the rubric of modernism and not of modernity? Modernism may be the least problematic term, even if slightly differing interpretations exist. Henri Lefebvre distinguishes between the two by positing that modernism is a sociological and ideological fact, the consciousness that epochs, periods, successive generations have of themselves; it consists of images and projections of the self. Modernity, on the other hand, is the attempt at knowledge, the beginning of reflexion. "Moder-

nity differs from modernism, as a concept formed about society differs from social phenomena, as reflexion differs from facts."¹ This is, arguably, one of the more sophisticated approaches to modernity and modernism, treating the two as different but intertwined takes on reality mediated by the human agent.

Most other authors consider modernism as the cultural response to the challenges of the modern condition, defined loosely as the compendium of traits such as industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of a market-industrial economy; the growth of centralizing and unifying state institutions with the accompanying development of specialized occupations tied to them, i.e. bureaucratization; the development of the modern political party system with mass participation, the secularization of political and social authority and different models of popular rule. Modernism in this view, as expressed for example by Anthony Giddens, who insists on its difference from modernity, is often seen mostly in its aesthetic dimension, and applied to styles or trends in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music.²

In a broader handling, modernism is seen as the state of mind expressed in opposition to tradition, or as the culture of modernity. In a narrower sense, it is treated as the aesthetic and negative reaction to technological modernity (in this sense conflating modernity with modernization).³ An interesting twist in the thinking about modernism is offered by the view that while modernity was born in the West (even if authors differ on whether it is a universal or an entirely western phenomenon), modernism was the product of the periphery.

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction à la modernité* (Paris, 1962), p. 10, cited in Alexis Nouss, *La modernité* (Paris, 1991), p. 21.

² Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, The Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University, 1990; Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity" in Beiner, Ronald, ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (Albany NY, 1999); Eugene Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism: An Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno* (Berkeley, 1982); Jonathan Spencer, "Modernism, Modernity and Modernisation," in Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer ed. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London, 1996). It is symptomatic that, as a whole, "modernism" rarely finds a place in social sciences, which abound in theories about modernity and modernization, but its relatively prominent place in the humanities is assured. There is no entry on "modernism" in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*.

³ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham, 1987), actually speaks of "two distinct and bitterly conflicting modernities," one as a stage in the history of Western civilization (scientific and technological progress, industrial revolution, the sweeping economic and social changes of capitalism); the other, as an aesthetic concept opposed to the first (p. 41).

If “modernity” as a term seems to have been created by Chateaubriand in 1833, “modernism” was coined by a Nicaraguan poet in 1890: “the critique of European modernity, like so much of the modern itself, seems continually to have emerged from Europe’s borders.”⁴ Some authors even posit that modernism is not in the core, but always in the periphery, and they speak of the modernism of underdevelopment, where culture is one form through which one can belong if one is excluded from modernity. This certainly is very relevant to Eastern Europe, the first and closest periphery to the core of modernity.

In a way, the whole four-volume project is an illustration of the particular cultural and political responses—defined by the editors as enlightenment, romanticism, modernism and anti-modernism—to the social transformations that occurred with the advent of modernity. Of course, one could claim that modernism in a very broad sense encompasses all these responses: it is the general expression and style of the modern times, the state of mind expressed in opposition to tradition, or the culture of modernity. From this point of view, since the general consensus is that modernity starts with the Enlightenment and, despite all the theorizing about post-modernism, we still seem to be within its *longue durée*, it includes chronologically the whole period covered by the project. The editors have chosen to use it in a stricter sense, giving it a very definite place between romanticism and anti-modernism and an approximate chronological span from the 1860s until the decade following the First World War. For them the answer to the question “When was modernism?” is unambiguous. One could say that it coincides with the period of the powerful and unimpeded ascendancy of industrialism and the nation-state, and one can read in its expressions the unabashed triumphalism of the notion of progress. Indeed, practically all parts of this volume illustrate one or another aspect of the ambitious and optimistic construction and consolidation of the nation-state: the major ideologies that shaped this process, the projects and programs dealing with institution building and the challenges posed by imperial legacies and minority problems, and the reflexion of these processes in the sciences and the arts.

This poses the question whether modernity is synonymous with capitalism. It is a question overwhelmingly answered in the positive by theorists of modernity, from Karl Polanyi to Anthony Giddens. For Polanyi the defining

⁴ Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, London, 2000), p. 6. In this Mitchell follows Perry Anderson. See also B. Valade, “Modernity,” in Neil J. Smelser, Paul B. Baltes ed. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Amsterdam, New York, 2001), p. 9940.

characteristic of modern society is the self-regulating market, which as an institutional structure is typical only for our times. It is the extension of commodification to the three basic elements of industry—labor, land, and money—which was the inevitable consequence of the introduction of the factory system in a commercial society and which constituted the crucial difference from preceding economic systems. Giddens sees modernity as modes of organization of social life which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence. He thus defines modernity as inherently characterized by globalization, whose main traits are the international division of labor, the global capitalist economy, the system of nation-states, and the global military order,⁵ This stress on the economic aspects of modern society inevitably raises the question of modernization and its place in the overall theorizing of modernity.

More recent theorizing emphasizes the Janus-like character of modernity in the west which is characterized by two intersecting visions of modernity: the Weberian societal/cultural modernity and the Baudelairian cultural/aesthetic modernity, where culture is the capricious and imperceptible “middle term.” In the Weberian vision, societal modernization fragments cultural meaning and unity. The Baudelairian vision, equally alert to the effects of modernization, seeks to redeem modern culture by aestheticizing it. Each has their bright and dark sides. Societal modernization was anticipated by Enlightenment philosophers as the improvement of material conditions, economic prosperity and political emancipation, technological mastery, and the general growth of specialized knowledge, but it also brought the existential experience of alienation and despair in a disenchanted world of deadening and meaningless routine. The bright side of the Baudelairian vision found aesthetic pleasure in the creative excitement of searching for a meaning, and portrayed modernization as a spectacle of speed, novelty, and effervescence. Its dark side stressed the absence of moral constraints where the aesthetic pursuit could deteriorate from disciplined Nietzschean self-assertion against an absurd world into self-absorption and hedonism.⁶

Modernity may not be explicitly addressed in this volume but it is implicitly present in its overall conception both as a sociological reality, i.e. the ensemble of traits defining the modern condition, as well as a discursive con-

⁵ Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1964) (first published in 1944), pp. 43–57, 68–75, 163.

⁶ Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “On Alternative Modernities,” in Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, 2001), pp. 8–9.

struct. There have been numerous attempts to define modernity, even though one of its analysts desists from treating it as a concept: “If it is true that a notion is intuitive knowledge, synthetic and inaccurate enough about one thing, then modernity belongs to this type of mental representation which, as opposed to concept, does not offer clearly defined contours of the abstract object to which it refers.”⁷ We know intuitively that modern is what appears, exists and belongs to the present era, and modernism expresses a preference against tradition. Even before the emergence of modernity as a category, the understanding about what was modern was based on a dichotomy between “ancients” and “moderns” (the famous *querelle des anciens et des modernes* at the end of the seventeenth century), between authority and progress, between tradition and innovation. Indeed, Bruno Latour argues that the division of tradition from modernity is the central characteristic of the modernist project, where division and classification entail the work of purification.⁸

Jon Mitchell goes as far as attributing this tendency to dichotomize to a common Euro-American epistemology which divides the world into ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’, or Western and non-Western, and ultimately into ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Following Niklas Luhmann, he shows that, rather than being a homogenizing process producing a unified social whole, modernity constantly creates otherness; it is not a fixed and stable, but has differentiation at its core. He also amply demonstrates that ambivalence is common to all manifestations of modernity. In particular, the hierarchizing axis of tradition and modernity can be reversible, so that each side can be valorized at different moments. This ambivalence and anxiety is especially acute at the edges of Europe, where the stakes are higher.⁹ Similarly, stressing the ambivalence between what is modern and what traditional, Diana Mishkova shows that the distinction between nineteenth-century modernizers in Serbia and Romania (the radicals and the liberals) and traditionalists (the conservatives) is not so sharp. In actuality, all used the modern legitimizing norms and rhetoric;

⁷ Valade, *op. cit.*, p. 9939.

⁸ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (London, 1993). Since division entails a prior assumption of unity—each proposition of difference must begin with an assumption of sameness—dividing the world into traditional and modern must begin with the assumption of a shared historical trajectory. This, in the end, makes Latour question the utility of the concept “modern.”

⁹ Jon P. Mitchell, *Ambivalent Europeans: Ritual, Memory and the Public Sphere in Malta*, (London and New York, 2002), pp. 12 and 241–242. For example, accession to EU in Malta is seen as both promise (security, affluence, democracy, modernity) and threat (to family, morality, community, tradition). See also Niklas Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, transl. W. Whobrey (Stanford CA, 1998).