

**Turkey's Struggle With Modernism: Elite's Enforcement or Self-Westernization?**

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In the modern time, the gap between west and east is growing day by day Since western countries get behind the acquisition of the globalization process; majority of the eastern world is still struggling with the scary face of *radicalism* and poverty. On the other hand, it is not very easy to categorize countries into west and east classification Some countries, such as Turkey, carryon the characteristics of the both sides. Despite of the fact that most of the people believe that Turkey's modernization process has started with *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, in fact Turkey's struggle with modernism relies on the modernization experimentations of the Ottoman Empire beginning from the late of 18.Century. On both of Ottoman's and Turkey's modernization efforts, elite's role re-appear as a common dynamic. In other words, during the history of Turkey, the notion of modernization is always introduced to Turkish people as a *top-down movement* by the elites. This study seeks to introduce the Turkey's modernization process in terms of the balance between Turkey's Islamic identity and secular formation. The paper argues that a *top-down* modernization which has weak connections with the bottom of society is the major handicap in front of the Turkey's modernization efforts.

The last two centuries of Ottoman Empire record a very eager westernization efforts for modernization. Ironically, this process should be described as *westernization by means of west for reaching the west*. On the other hand, the late efforts of Ottomans were not enough to save the empire due to its major problems regarding the state system. Nevertheless, since the establishment of new republic in 1923, Turkey's definition on *modern civilization* had never changed and a very extensive westernization process continued under the leadership of *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*.<sup>1</sup> Despite of the fact that since the very beginning of 1950's Turkey's westernization concept headed towards USA from Europe due to particular conditions of *Cold War*; it can be argued that only the direction of westernization had changed for Turkey but the approach to modernism remained the same.

The most remarkable feature of Turkey's westernization relies on the implemented strategies. Namely, *American Revolution* and *French Revolution* which set the roots of today's western world emerged as a movement from bottom. In other words, in western world social dynamics designated the new political system. On the other hand, Turkish westernization process had emerged as an *elite's project*. Since the last centuries of Ottoman Empire, *Islam* had became the major element which sets the only connection between elites and public due to the huge gap between ruling and ruled classes..<sup>2</sup> In other words, as a result of elite's continual political references to religion, *conservatism* had became one of the strongest resistance point to *westernization* in the early years of Turkey. At the same time, the term of *secularism* which is one of the most important principle of *Kemalism*, should be considered as one of the essential founder dynamics of Turkey. Under these circumstances, Turkey's modernization process is squeezed between *secularism* and *conservatism*. Despite of the fact that *conservatism* can be considered as a resistance in front of *westernization*, the formation of *conservatism* in Turkey differs very much inside of it. In other words, a large scale of conservatives in Turkey are harmonious with *liberal* and *secular* values which feed the Turkish modernism. Basically *fundamentalism* should be considered the actual resistance against modernism in Turkey. In the final analyses, the distance of gap between public and political elite's of Turkey will be the most important decisive factor regarding the efforts of Turkey towards modernism.

<sup>1</sup> Arif Aytakin, "Osmanlı-Türk Modernleşmesinin Düşünsel, Ekonomik ve Bürokratik Kodları", *SDÜ Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, No:30, 2013, p.314.

<sup>2</sup> Figen Kanbir, "Türkiye'deki Seçkinlerin Toplumsal Yapıda Dönüşümü: Hegemonik Konumdaki Elitler", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, Cilt:7, No:34, 2014, p.680

