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The De-Modernization Current: An Approach to Understand Ethical and Political Challenges of Post-Soviet Societies

Contemporary humanity lives in a brave new world created by a schism from humankind's traditional past. The temptation of being an autonomous individuality has led the generation of men and women into a new cultural situation where time and space have changed their shapes and contents. This chronotope was re-modelled by the application of human rationality with both planned and unforeseen results. By becoming a source of normativity, individuals entered the world of desired ends and unexpected achievements.

As temptation never leads to the desired, in the same way the promise of Modernity has brought us into an unexpectedly complex situation. As revolutionary scholars of the 16-18th centuries dreamed, the enlightenment of darkness and the ordering of chaos[1] have actually been conducted in quite a substantial way. However, enlightenment itself turned out to be a source of chaos, and rational order often casts an impenetrable shadow upon human lives. Man's reason turned out to be simultaneously a source of anticipated liberty and omnipresent control, of unlimited human creativity and yet of unprecedented violence. Rhizome of the cultural lifeworlds and human authenticity are under constantly growing risk. The era of modernity was too focused on *veritas*, which also meant it had a substantial deficit of *caritas*.

Modernity was primarily based on the idea of the universality of human interest and capacity. The U-turn of modern culture was made at the moment when novelty gained dominance over precedent. The metaphor of the 'Crystal of Tradition'[2] translates the logic of society that is being reproduced in time with the same monotonous structure that existed before. The past order, Tradition, was a source of legitimacy of the present order. Yet the liquid structure of modernity has washed away the limits of local traditions and substituted them with the idea of universal principles of human nature. Modernity's chronotope has loosened creative energy of humans to start new beginnings in all spheres of life, including politics and economy, family and religion, education and communal life.

Looking from the second decade of the 21st century at the history of modernity, it is clear that destruction of traditional frontiers enabled construction of a global humankind. Modern universal values have profoundly transformed all societies in the world by our time. This transformation has divided the whole of human interactions into two distinct spheres, public and private.[3] Both spheres identified their own specific interests and instruments. The public sphere was constructed as a domain of political freedom, legitimacy of government and communication regarding the common good. The private sphere was formed into a realm of intimate, family, and religious life, as well as into the circle of business and traditional forms of communion. The private-public differentiation is based on universal principles and values, a common structural feature of contemporary societies.

Even though the expected structuralization has actually become real, in addition to their desired practices, the public and private spheres became the scenes for unforeseen developments. The public sphere was affected by instrumental rationality[4] in a way that

it gave birth to a System, the agglomerate of unanimous forces created by the unintended consequences of rationalized collective human actions.[5] The private sphere was often turned into a ghetto for life-world rhizome. Moreover, the very dichotomy was put under question by the intervention of the System into matters of the Life-World, and vice versa. This 'colonization of the Life-World' occurs when an increasingly autonomous System intrudes into Life-World and undermines individual freedom, traditional forms of life, and bio-cultural conditions of human existence.[6] And finally, the history of modernity has not proven to be a linear progress or consequent transformation of public and private institutions. Although looking to be transparent and accountable, modernity is full of revelations in regard to the limits of reason and human capacities.

Vis-à-vis this general historiosophic context, I will discuss three interrelated issues. The first one is connected with the fact that, in spite of its universal aspirations, principles and norms, modernity has as many forms, as Tradition. In this concern, the global modernity is a common name for different local, sub- and super-regional 'projects'. *We deal* not with *a* modernity, but *with the multiple modernities having their own specific regional distinctions.*

If the first issue is connected with the special limits of modernity, the second issue reflects its temporal irregularity and lack of homogeneity. Different cultural areas launch their modern projects at different times. This provides regional modernities with different starting points and brings local projects into political and socio-economic competition with the already-modernized and/or yet-traditional societies. This spatial-temporal complexity of modernity is also reflected in the unevenness of regional transitions from one stage of contemporary history into another. Quite often, the competition of projects leads to de-modernization, a reverse devel-

opment of modernized societies and crystallization of new hybrid cultures with unpredictable results of mutual colonization of the Life-World by System and vice versa. *Complex modernity is diverse and multiple in temporal and local terms.*

My third thesis is derived from application of the two above issues to post-Soviet social reality. Post-Soviet societies, including Ukrainian, live through a highly contradictory historical period. In addition to those risks, opportunities and limitations to the meaningful life of a human being in the process of social, economic and political modernization, there is a growing de-modernization tendency. This *de-modernization has unleashed social forces that annihilate rational politics and destroy traditional values, as well as create a human condition where neither rationality nor tradition can imbue an individual with moral orientation.* To prevent tragic developments of de-modernizing societies, it is the responsibility of individuals living now to re-instate social orders with *veritas* and *caritas* co-operating and mutually supporting each other.

I. Spatial polymorphism of modernity

Modernity is a common name for a situation in which human societies turned out to be under the impact of on-going cultural rationalization. The impact of reason on cultures led to disintegration of traditional world-views where truth, good and beauty were the same. The history of human societies under the dominance of rational structures is thus called modernization (a becoming of modernity). The theories of modernization developed in the 20th century (under the impact of ideas of Max Weber) have viewed modernization as mutually reinforcing processes of change in spheres of values, human identities, politics, economy etc. Each of them included the following processes:

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- values: secularization of values and norms, use of argumentative justification for experience of truth, love and beauty;
- human identity: conceptualization and practical application of the idea of rights, invention of individuality as political and economic player, institutionalization of formal education as 'industry of individuals', urban life as the dominant form of life;
- politics: formation of nations, development of centralized government with separation of branches of power;
- economy: accumulation of capital, development of production, increasing productivity of labour.

Summing up these theories, Jürgen Habermas described the process of 'becoming-modern' in the following terms:

> "In so far as world-views have disintegrated and their traditional problems have been separated off under the perspectives of truth, normative rightness and authenticity or beauty, and can now be treated in each case as questions of knowledge, justice or taste respectively, there arises in the modern period a differentiation of the value spheres of science and knowledge, of morality and of art. Thus scientific discourse, moral and legal enquiry, artistic production and critical practice are now institutionalized within the corresponding cultural systems as the concern of experts."[7]

In human history, the melting of the crystalized tradition[8] or dissociation of traditional world-view was an extremely long process. Reinhart Koselleck,[9] Jürgen Habermas and many later historians studied how Western rationalism commenced with almost simultaneous events of finding the New World, destruc-

tion of Western religious unity and scientific revolution. These simultaneously destructive (for traditional forms of life in Europe and Americas) and creative (for new – modern – forms of life) events have started a long process of preparatory modernization that only in the 19th century became a dominant discourse in most of Europe and North America, and in the 20th century became a global reality. From its outset until today, the image of modernity coincided with a holistic understanding of humanity as a universal historical subject and the universal meaning of reason as a source for both the whole of human history and for an autonomous human subject.

In the process of modernization, the principles, practices, models and patterns of Western modernity were stimulating the same rationalization processes in other parts of the world. The vision of the whole of humanity was fuelling modernization, but nonetheless the diffusion of traditional world-views and creation of structural transformation of modernity, as institutionalization of the public and private spheres, took place in a different way, with its own speed and in specific correlation with other regional modernities.

Today, global modernity is depicted by the World Values Survey as a map with geographically and culturally diverse provinces that have different level of impact of rational non-secular and individualist self-expression values on individual and collective lives. This survey shows that – in pursuit of emancipation and disseminating interest in democracy – we still have different local responses to modernity's values and practices.[10] It also shows how modern values make different impacts upon societies at different stages of their modernization.[11]

Yes, modern rationality has profoundly changed the world we live in. However, while modernity has common universal ends and a common geohistorical beginning in Western Europe, yet it has

different modernization patterns vis-à-vis human historically-lasting collectives. Understanding of the cultural complexity of modernity has let Shmuel Eisenstadt coin the definition of specific relations between Western and other modernities: "Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence."[12]

Today's world represents many emerging, developing and declining local projects of modernity. These include:

1) the calamitous 16th century in Western Europe with cultures surviving a new understanding of religious, scholarly, information, political, and economic life and organization,

2) the absolutist past of the Amero-European 16-18th centuries,

3) cultural realms of great revolutions in the second half of the 18th century,

4) global empires intervening into traditional societies of the entire world in the 19-20th centuries,

5) the totalitarian modernities of USSR, China and far Eastern Marxist projects,

6) Latin-American modernities in the 20th century,

7) the new global cleavage of Northern and Southern modernities of the second half of the 20th - early 21st centuries and many other local projects.

These local differences took place in different time-spans and were produced by two major factors:

• the modern projects that were developing in the worlds created by different cultures and/or civilizations; this situation predisposed different style, speed and depth of impact of modernization on the forms of human lives;

- competition of the modern projects was and is making a profound impact on the speed and results of transition in different contemporary societies.

The starting points of modernization processes took place in different times in different cultures/civilizations. Both factors of modernizations created lasting institutions and practices. These institutions and practices pre-describe the correlation of the public and private spheres, strengthen the instrumental reason and impact of the System, damage the Life-World during the industrial period of modernization etc. Basically, these institutions and practices were/are the limiting factors for humanity to become one undivided realm of modernity that would be just one cohesive point on the table of the 'Cultural map of the world.'

II. Temporal irregularity of modernity

The claim of universality in the age of modernity leads to a new situation in human history. It is now structured globally in terms of institutional set-up of the private and public spheres, removal of tradition's leftovers into the private sphere, and co-existence of human societies with the System being a superstructure to public institutions. This common structural set-up of modern societies provided some optimistic expectations that there would be a common global political order with shared rules and norms. This optimism is vested, for example, in methodological grounds for such bold projects as the World Values Survey, global measurement of the Human Development by the UN and/or the Freedoms in the World index by Freedom House. The structural similarity of modern societies gave birth to a hope of sameness of societies in many other regards.

If there is any lesson learned from the history of transitions, it should be formulated this way: structural similarity does not necessarily mean commonality of development. This dissimilarity of complex modernity is connected not only with the specificities of those traditions from which these modern projects started. Each modernizing society has gone through modernity with its own losses and gains, with its own specific features of the periods common for most modern societies. Today's complex modernity is a result of both cultural diversity of traditions and transitional diversity of modernities.

The framework of global modernization describes the development of post-traditional societies as a permanent change. Zygmund Baumann proposed a summary of the transformative nature of modernity in terms of transition from a 'crystallized tradition' to the state of 'liquidity of producing Modernity' and then to 'hyper-liquidity of late Modernity of consumers'.[13] These stages provide us with a possibility to depict complex modernity in temporal terms as different river streams (to follow the Baumann's metaphor) towards the same ocean. Yet each stream has its own unique channel.

Baumann's structural evolution of modernity correlates with the model of historical development of modernizing societies connected with the source of legitimacy. It was proposed by Alain Touraine in his book dedicated to modernity.[14] The departure from the traditional situation is connected with the principle that Hegel depicted as the individual becoming a source of legitimacy. This model follows the same logic as Baumann's: rationality is a permanent factor in changes of society. So instead of an aggregate state, this periodization uses the idea of an ever changing form that rationality gains in a modernizing society: from an external principle of legitimacy to an internal one. Accordingly, the history of complex modernity has the following stages:

- periods of external principles of legitimacy:

- religious (confessional identities),
- political (imperial absolutism, nationalism),
- socio-economic (socialism and capitalism),
- period of internal principle of legitimacy: information society identities.[15]

Whichever modernizing society one studies, whenever it started its departure from its traditional state, it is expected that it goes through periods of rationalized rule, rationalized economic behaviour, and network society. Rationalized rule constructed confessional, imperial and nationalist collective identities that legitimized the rule of a minority through application of institutionalized government, bureaucracy, codified and unified laws, police, army and educational infrastructures. Here regimes were abusing religious, ethnic or other collective principles mixing them with the instrumental rationality embodied into effective institutions like bureaucracy or army. By doing this, reason was destroying traditional differences in local communal and tribal lives establishing the same rules for all. A modernized bureaucracy and army were those 'social lifts' that provided 'rank-and-file members of society' with opportunities to become part of the ruling class.

Rationalized economy has deepened the influence of rationality through the logic of capital. Money as major means of communication and industrialization created a new vocabulary of understanding and developing societies. Social engineering has improved the institutions and undermined the nature of public rationality with instrumental rationality. The dark side of modern reason has shown itself in these periods as one of the biggest dangers for humankind. Totalitarian projects, global wars, ecological catastrophes witnessed that instrumental reason reached an unprecedented autonomy in some modernizing societies. The pessimism of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno was mainly connected with the assessment

of modernity in this period. But it was their pessimist assessment that fuelled therapeutic self-criticism of the modern mind and a quest for "communicative rationality."

Finally, transition from industrial societies to information ones embodies a vision of development of modernity to a more participative, democratic and ecological order. With hierarchies simplified, diversity respected and participation enhanced, modernities may lose their homicidal inclinations.

Unlike Marxist historiosophy, with its rigid periodization, the above model supplies us with an approach able to respect regional specificities of the transition path. But both of them share one optimistic belief: irreversibility of transition.

My point is that – keeping a complex spatial-temporal modernity model in mind – modernizing societies do not necessarily evolve through their own specific forms of absolutism, nationalism, industrialism and/or post-industrialism. In some cases, transition is reversible: a society moves from a later period of its modernity to a preceding one. In my opinion, this de-modernization begins in those situations when modern institutions destroy the life-world's resources to such a level that the System needs to abuse even more the life-assuring force of traditional forms of life; this way, the System abuses institutions like church, kinship or local community by re-inventing them as pervert forms of 'archaic,' which uses the 'traditional names' for hybrid forms of organizations promoting instrumental rationality, loneliness of the individual and dominance of mass-politics.

III. The de-modernization processes

De-modernization creates hybrid societies with mutual colonization of the Life-World and the System. Even though these delib-

erations sound too metaphysical, the pragmatic ratio behind them –
in my opinion – is that theory of de-modernization may help un-
derstand challenges to human life in societies like the Ukrainian,
Chinese, Russian or Brazilian. Unlike optimistic modernization
theories, the concept of the austerity of hope may give us a better
understanding of the need and opportunity for current human be-
lieving in progress of freedom and having his/her personal experi-
ence of dependency and subjugation in societies that keep evolving
from one form of unfreedom to another. The gap between expected
freedoms and recurring servitude gives birth to unfruitful and hu-
miliating desperation. Today, in spite of several centuries of global
emancipation, Rousseau's paradox ("L'homme est né libre, et partout
il est dans les fers") is as true as in times of the Enlightenment.

Although models of modern societies tend to expect simi-
lar reactions to a similar set of political and/or socio-economic
events, there are examples from human history of recent centu-
ries that should make modernization models less optimistic and
more sober. Current developments in post-Soviet societies show
that within a twenty-year timespan these nations have emerged as
different socio-economic, political and cultural 'projects,' although
they started from approximately the same post-totalitarian posi-
tions back in 1991. United by the totalitarian Soviet Union with
its specific industrial modernity project, contemporary post-Soviet
Ukrainians, Russians, Kazakhs and Estonians live in societies that
in a very short historic time have become different societies with
different human development results.

Furthermore, these societies show how complex the transition
path can be: in many cases development towards more political and
economic liberties and towards societies with fewer survival col-
lective values was compromised with opposing tendencies. When
reverse tendencies in development were dominant, and when new

paradoxical post-modern tradition was merging modern public and private institutions into one 'crystal,' I call this form of development a de-modernization.

Post-Soviet de-modernization takes place in societies where Soviet industrial society was already ruined, but cultural, economic and political institutions of the globalizing information era did not evolve to a necessary level to define the social structure. Instead, one can witness a reverse development process: some Soviet and pre-Soviet forms of collective life are being restored. Among them:

- the 'vertical of power' in Belarus (since 1998), Russia (since 2003) and Ukraine (2010-2014);
- the quasi-feudal and neo-tribal governance techniques in Central Asian republics;
- hybrid regimes with a mixture of Western institutions with post-Soviet outcomes in Georgia and the Baltic countries.

Political creativity of the Bolsheviks with their variety of cultural, social and economic revolutionary projects in the 1920s was summed up and used by the totalitarian project of Joseph Jugashvili-Stalin in the early 1930s. This unexpectedly lasting totalitarian project[16] was based on the logic of industrial society. In spite of the Marxist metaphysics, the way Soviet society was structured resembles the radically industrial mind. Industrial logic unified the cultural rhizome of peoples living between Lviv and Vladivostok by the same forms of organization of collective life in cities and rural areas. The two global wars, democides, genocides, Soviet industrialization and collectivization, as well as political purges, have profoundly changed the human, collective and biological strata of the Life-World on these territories between 1922 and 1991. The public sphere was immensely oversized in Soviet

society; thus family, religion and business were either subordinated to public institutions or radically marginalized. Structural transformation of the Soviet public sphere made it a System unlimited, while the private sphere was diminished to a minimum. Soviet society was a radical case of industrial modernity with extreme forms of Life-World colonization.

The post-Soviet period started with profound social change led by the revolutionary aim of restoring a balanced public-private dichotomy, democratic politics and a free market economy. For Ukraine these revolutionary changes included both public and private revolutions. In the public sphere, it was a brave attempt to construct a democratic nation-state with responsible government. Ethnicity and civility were re-invented and used for state-building. Simultaneously, there were religious, business, and sexual revolutions that were changing the private sphere and everyday life of Ukrainians. Religious organizations obtained freedom and reinstated spiritual life of men and women in Ukraine. Business and entrepreneurship were de-criminalized; private initiative and property were legitimized. Intimate life has changed its traditional and Soviet forms; the number of marriages and level of births have decreased. Sexual behaviour has changed its rules and forms of articulation. Thus it is apparent that the post-Soviet world was constructed in the 1990s.

These changes took place very fast, just within several years. In transition from late Soviet to post-Soviet societies, many people were loosing their orientation. In contrast with contradictory post-Soviet modernization, there was a growing reaction towards change in Ukraine. Winners in the private sector managed to take over the public sector as well. Systemic corruption and oligarchy created political and socio-economic conditions where human integrity and freedom was under attack once again.

In the post-industrial context, Ukrainian society was too slow in developing itself into a new information society. Huge labour migration, mystification of politics, loss of quality in secondary and higher education, sparks of radical ethno-nationalism and neo-sovietism, growth of patron-client networks were and are the disturbing symptoms of de-modernization. For the sake of its interests, political institutions attempted using religious organizations once again for political purposes.

In the de-modernization context, Ukrainian society was undergoing just another problematic structural transformation of the public sphere. Soviet institutions have survived the collapse of the USSR and in their hybrid forms (i.e. Ministry of Education, or oligarchy, or hierarchical power etc) were colonizing both the public and the private spheres, the System and the Life-World. This ongoing mutual colonization has its own huge risks for post-Soviet people. If in the Soviet context those remnants of Life-World were providing the second half of Orwell's doublethink and doublespeak: in addition to ideological 'truth' there always was the moral stance. Life in the situation of doublespeak was painful because it was ruining the individual's integrity: one knew right, but spoke (and acted) in the opposite way. But at least in the Soviet context a person knew what was good, although one had almost no choice to act accordingly because of fear of punishment or pervert desire of subjugation.

In the de-modernizing context, a person loses the reasons for pain. Once religious feelings or the sense of kinship are used for political purposes or for administrative subjugation, there is a huge risk that meanings and values represented by those Life-World guardians (church, family, and community) become as manipulative, as ideology itself. The doublethink is in place, but now both thoughts are misleading and alienating. The doublespeak remains

needed, but the words and the reference are equally deceiving. There is no certainty in what's right and genuine in this new double-situation.

In a way, de-modernization is based on an even greater exploitation of Life-World rhizome and unleashes social forces that annihilate rational politics, traditional values and the moral condition. To prevent tragic developments of de-modernizing societies, it is the responsibility of individuals living now to re-instate social order with *veritas* and *caritas* cooperating and mutually supporting each other.

Endnotes

1   These were the major metaphors common for intellectual groups around Newton, Leibnitz, and the French enlighteners; the same metaphors were used by the 'modernizers' in other cultures, including the Founding Fathers of the United States, the Bolsheviks, Mao Zedong, etc.

2   See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), pp. 1-3.

3   This structural transformation of all dimensions of human interactions was described by Hanna Arendt and Jürgen Habermas: Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied / Berlin: CHP, 1971).

4   Here I use this term within the methodological framework of the Frankfurt school, i.e. as reason based on the effective relations established between means and ends, thus it is directed at control of the natural world through application of technology; in the social world instrumental reason is used in administration and formation of policies. See: Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Frankfurt-am-Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002), pp. X-XXI; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalisation of Society*, pp. 143-272.

5 I use this term in the Habermasian way: the System is a sign of a 'bad society' based on significant erosion of human freedom, meaningful life, lived experience and social competence of ordinary people: Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 9.

6 The concept of Life-World colonization was developed by J. Habermas in both volumes of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalisation of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984); vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987). He continued the pessimistic assessment of modernity started by Max Weber and Max Horkheimer. This genesis prevented Habermas from seeing the opposite process of System's colonization by elements of the Life-World. The latter concept is critical for understanding many regional modernities, including the Eastern European one.

7 J. Habermas, "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" in M.P. d'Entreves and S. Benhabib, *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 38-59, esp. 45.

8 A term of Zygmunt Bauman, *Op. cit.*

9 Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988).

10 See Figure 2.4. "Cultural map of the world about 2000" in Ronald Ingelhart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 48ff.

11 Cf. Table 1.2. "Differences between the Impact of the Industrial and Postindustrial Phases of Modernization on Human Values" in *Ibid.*, p. 30.

12 Shmuel Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129:1 (2000), pp. 1-29, esp. 2-3.

13 Zygmunt Bauman, *In Search of Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), pp. 4-5.

14 Alain Touraine, *A New Paradigm for Understanding Today's World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 19ff.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 101ff.

16 The German and Italian totalitarianisms were quite short-lived; the Portuguese and Spanish totalitarian projects degenerated into authoritarian regimes quite fast. It was only Jugashvili's project that went on – with some periods of extinguishing and waves of re-birth – until 1986.