

DEMODERNIZATION



A Future in the Past

Edited by
Yakov Rabkin
Mikhail Minakov

ibidem

Yakov Rabkin, Mikhail Minakov (eds.)

Demodernization

A Future in the Past

“This book shows that progress is not linear and cumulative. Rethinking it is a crucial task to ensure a viable future.”

Enrique Barón Crespo, Former President of the European Parliament, Spain

“Kudos on your overall thesis of the cruelty of modern politics, including its militarism, disempowerment and rising inequality.”

Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs, Columbia University, USA

“This book raises an uncomfortable question that many of us ignore to our peril: are we being pushed back from modernity? This question is fundamental for our future.”

Professor Yuri G. Akimov, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia

“We are spellbound with the modernizing march of technology, barely noticing opposite tendencies, which challenge our societies. This volume fills this gap with a series of learned and stimulating essays. *Demodernization* is an indispensable guide to the world we inhabit and the future we desire.”

Professor Richard Falk, Princeton University, USA

“In the midst of an unprecedented global breakdown, this collaborative volume offers a polyphony of insights into the demodernization of our world.”

Professor Yuzo Itagaki, University of Tokyo, Japan

“Demodernization is a new concept—but is it a new reality? Is modernity given—or it is now at risk of reversal? This fresh and challenging book debates modernization and regress as critical tools for the understanding of the global world.”

Professor Alexander Etkind, European University Institute, Florence, Italy

“*Demodernization* is original and important. It sheds new light on obstacles on the road to a free, just and cohesive global world, which seemed very close not so long ago.”

Dr Denys Kiryukhin, Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, Kiev, Ukraine

“This book is fascinating and convincing. While every essay discusses a different issue, together they provide a coherent picture of risks of a major regression for humanity.”

Me Julius Grey, human rights lawyer, Montreal, Canada

Yakov Rabkin, Mikhail Minakov (eds.)

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Editors' Foreword

Medical doctors driving taxis, architects selling beer on street corners, scientific institutes closed down amid rusting carcasses of industrial plants, prisoners beheaded in front of cameras—these images have become all too common since the turn of the twenty-first century. Functioning states such as Iraq, Lybia, and Syria were destroyed and set back by decades, if not centuries, in their development. Prostitution serving wealthy foreigners came to be considered a desirable career choice for women in Yeltsin's Russia, where 60 percent of high school girls were reported ready to exchange sex for foreign currency (Avgerinos 2006). In other countries, longtime neighbors killed each other, apparently motivated by the newly discovered incompatibilities of religion, language, or origin. Civic nationalism gave way to tribal, ethnic, and confessional identities in Europe, not only in the East, where nationalism is congenitally ethnic, but also in countries like the Netherlands and Finland, hitherto considered paragons of tolerance and civility. Nativism came back in Canada and the United States. Rational arguments of a geopolitical nature were replaced by claims of self-righteousness and moral superiority (e.g., “Axis of Evil”). Fake news became ubiquitous, spreading instantly around the world by the most modern means of communication. Language came to spell magic rather than inform, and mass media became “a tool of obscurantism,” undermining rational thinking (Kapa-Mypsa 2017, 350).

These snapshots are not random: They are all manifestations of **demodernization**, a phenomenon that can be observed from the banks of the Neva to the valleys of the Euphrates and over to the shores of the Cape of Good Hope and from the deserts of Central Asia to the Spanish countryside, all the way to the city of Detroit. It brings together seemingly disparate trends and helps us form a picture that shows what continues to affect everyday life in the context of neoliberal globalization, whose slogan could well be a parody on Marx: “Capitalists of the world, unite!”

A globalized market without a globalized political structure to regulate and circumscribe it concentrates wealth and resources, reduces prospects of social justice, and provokes chaos, violence, and criminality (Attali 2006). The specter of demodernization is at the core of the current efforts deployed by several countries at the United Nations to regulate the obligations of business enterprises, including transnational corporations, with respect to human

rights, an attempt to limit what is today commonly referred to as “corporate power” (UNHRC 2017). The ascendance of “apolitical technocrats,” and the weakening of elected governments, is not a harbinger of globalized political structures; rather, it reflects the dominance of economic interest to the exclusion of other aspects of human experience. Curiously, this tendency has often been taken for an attribute and a consequence of modernity rather than of demodernization.

The promise of modernity brought us into a complex situation. Intellectuals of modernity—Newton, Leibniz, the Founding Fathers of the United States, *les philosophes* in France, or Russian Marxists—all dreamed that light would chase away darkness and oppression and bring freedom and order to chaos. This dream, however, turned into a source of chaos, adversely influencing human lives. Human reason came to be simultaneously a source of anticipated liberty and of omnipresent control, of unlimited human creativity and of unprecedented violence. This reversal of modernity’s achievements is a phenomenon that has historical precedents, some of which are analyzed in this volume.

The destruction of traditional cultural frontiers was meant to create a global humanity. Protestant values, often presented as universal, profoundly transformed many societies, attempting to divide life into two spheres: public and private.¹ Both spheres identified their own specific interests and instruments. The public sphere was constructed as a domain of political freedom, rule of law, and legitimacy of government. The private sphere remained a realm of intimacy, family, and religion as well as traditional forms of community. This division, which excluded traditional knowledge from the public domain, remained alien to most societies outside the Protestant realm and was even qualified as “European schizophrenia” (Needham 1956, 287).

The public sphere was affected by instrumental rationality, that is, reason based on an assumed relationship between means and ends. It aimed to control nature through technology, while in the social world it sought to establish rational policies.² At the same time, instrumental rationality led to the erosion of human freedom, meaningful life, the lived experience, and social

¹ This structural transformation of human interactions was analyzed by Hanna Arendt (1958) and Jurgen Habermas (1991).

² Here we use this term within the methodological framework of the Frankfurt School, that is, as reason based on the effective relationship between means and ends (Habermas 1984; Horkheimer and Adorno 2007).

competence of ordinary people. Thus, policies of modernization paradoxically provoked demodernization in a number of countries and epochs. Demodernization reflects the hybrid, heterogeneous character of many societies, even those of Protestant provenance, and, *a fortiori*, those outside Protestant Europe and its offshoots in North America and elsewhere. Internal causes of demodernization are mainly connected with the weakness of the division between public and private spheres, a division that came to underlie modernization. Therefore, in many parts of the world, attempts to imitate Western democracy, rule of law, and economic development have led to systemic corruption, abuse of power, and pauperization of the vast majority of the population.

Modernization held a promise of a better life to humanity. This promise was particularly attractive in the wake of World War II, with the emergence of a balanced bipolar world and the crumbling of colonial empires. The Soviet Union and the United States each offered its model of modernization. While differing in the form of property relations—socialist and capitalist, respectively—the models had surprisingly many points in common, spelling out criteria of what it meant to become modern. We used these same criteria in order to explore demodernization. This was first done in the framework of a graduate seminar conducted by Rabkin at the Université de Montréal during the years 2012 to 2015. The seminar led, in turn, to an international conference he convened in 2016 at the Université de Nice and, finally, to this volume published in Stuttgart.

This book is not only multinational but also multidisciplinary, akin to pointillist paintings of the postimpressionist period. In his keynote chapter, **Yakov Rabkin**, initiator of this collective project, uses diverse empirical material to outline the contours of the phenomenon of demodernization, which challenges the common belief that modernization is irreversible. **Fabian Zuk**, historian of the late Roman and early Medieval periods, confronts the current transformational understanding of Late Antiquity, adopting manifestly anachronistic criteria to the classical world. **Phillipe Genequand**, historian at the Université de Montréal, looks at one aspect of modernization—state building in the Middle Ages—and uses it to focus on countervailing trends. **Francisco Rivera**, student of anthropology, uses the prism of archeology to examine the story of an abandoned mining town in Chile.

We devote four chapters to West Asia, which is often subjected to outside intervention. An interplay of interests from contemporary geopolitical centers led several countries to backwardness and reverse development. **Orit**

Bashkin, intellectual historian at the University of Chicago, examines the Iraqi state and society as affected by colonial and postcolonial interventions. **Detlev Quintern**, historian of science working in Germany and Turkey, also looks at Iraq, but from a broader historical perspective, identifying three periods, with the first delving as far back as the Mongol invasion. Afghanistan and Iran specialist **Hitoshi Suzuki** broadens the perspective by looking at different patterns of reconstruction in Iraq and Iran in the wake of the long and costly war of 1980–1988. The Israeli-British historian **Ilan Pappé** analyzes social and economic change in Palestine during two distinct periods: from 1930 to 1948 and from 2006 to the present.

The book then moves to broaden its geographic scope. The anthropologist **Guy Lanoue** shows how state-sponsored and patronage-fueled reforms in Abruzzo, Italy, provoked resentment among the population, leading to a reversal of the expected trends. The political philosopher **Mikhail Minakov** concentrates on post-Soviet developments while providing a background for the emergence of the concept of demodernization. **Richard Foltz**, historian of Iran and Central Asia, takes Tajikistan as a case of drastic recoil from Soviet modernization. **Marc Jeandesboz**, graduate student of history, tackles the theme of this book focusing on post-Soviet literary works, while **Olivier Bauer**, Swiss theologian and pastor, looks at Protestantism, often linked to the very emergence of modernity in Europe, and probes the limits of applicability of that notion to Protestant streams of Christianity. Finally, the South African political scientist **Jo-Ansie van Wyk** brings to light the demodernizing effects of traditional leaders in postapartheid South Africa.

The last part is more theoretical in nature. **Meir Amor**, professor of sociology at Concordia University in Canada, focuses on the relationship between the nation-state and human rights of refugees, suggesting that the basis of rationality is in fact irrational. In a more programmatic mode, the French philosopher **Jean-Luc Gautero** also questions rationalist pretenses of modernity, proposing to give up abstract rationalism and abstract universalism in favor of a true universalization. **Marc Goetzmann**, who studies philosophy of law in Nice, France, looks at the interaction between customary law and the formal law of the state, suggesting that the former is actually more effective and more modern. The political philosopher **Bertrand Cochard** argues that the degrowth movement is an attempt to resolve some of the crises produced by “the myth of modernity.”

Modernization used to be a universal right each country could take for granted. It later became a privilege reserved for a few countries, while others, deemed “rogue” or otherwise reluctant to follow American policies, could face political and economic pressure or military attack leading to their demodernization. But even countries allowed to pursue technological and military modernization, such as Israel, show signs of demodernization in terms of social and economic indicators. According to the Israeli historian Shlomo Sand,

the crisis of secular ideologies in the face of capitalistic globalism created an inviting atmosphere for the rise of “premodern” identities, mainly ethno-religious but also ethno-biological. And even if these identities have yet to achieve total victory throughout the Western world, in other corners of the planet—from Eastern Europe to the Third World—they have nonetheless chalked up considerable achievements. In Israel, due to the previous ethnocentric background, new-old identities have become very popular, making way for a winning symbiosis of religion and strong ethno-nationalism. (Sand 2017, n.p.)

Indeed, Israel, one of the few states to derive its legitimacy from a resolution of the United Nations, not only disregarded dozens of other U.N. resolutions, but also firmly planted biblical references in the discourse of international relations. The irony of this is that the Bible was put to political use by overtly irreligious leaders whose argument was well summed up by another Israeli scholar: “God does not exist and he promised us this land.”

This book attempts to distinguish between short-term degradation, common during wars that ravaged entire countries throughout history, and the enduring—rather than ephemeral—consequences of demodernization. It also tries to conceptualize various historical trends through the lens of the phenomenon of demodernization. Like most concepts in the social sciences and the humanities, it is neither precise nor exhaustive, but offers a novel perspective on diverse processes that share certain features. This book uses rich and varied empirical data to understand demodernization.

The concept of demodernization can be used to explain societal changes in different times, and in many more countries than those where it initially manifested itself most graphically, such as the former Soviet republics. This concept improves our understanding of the contemporary world that is experiencing rising inequality and a massive transfer of wealth from the public domain to private ownership. Demodernization provokes protests, uprisings, and insurrections. It leads to random violence but is yet to bring to life a coherent political alternative to capitalist globalization. This reflects

rampant depoliticization resulting from the emphasis on consumption and entertainment, the contemporary variant of *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses).

Millennia ago, it was said in Hebrew that “A wise man is strong” (Proverbs 24:5). This later inspired Muhammad’s cousin Ali to utter “Knowledge is the ruler” in Arabic, and, a few centuries after him, Ferdowsi in the *Shahnameh* to articulate the same truth in Persian. Finally, this idea made its way to Europe, producing the popular dictum “Knowledge is power.” Knowledge is, indeed, needed by those citizens who dare resist their forced conversion into mere consumers roaming the market. Knowledge can create or destroy ideologies, can establish or subvert dominance of a class. This is why our book should be of use to those who seek social justice and want to restore dignity to humans regardless of their faith, provenance, or wealth.

Yakov M. Rabkin and Mikhail Minakov, March 2018

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Undoing Years of Progress¹

Yakov M. Rabkin

Chaos, violence, and radical changes have been in the news for nearly three decades: from Afghanistan to Serbia and from South Africa to Libya. This happens at the same time as several recent treatises try to prove that humans are becoming more rational and therefore less violent (Goldstein 2011; Mueller 1989; Pinker 2012). Many aspects of modernity, from physical infrastructure to collective identity, from research institutes to factories, have been either destroyed or severely damaged. The clock appears to be turned back. Other countries experienced more gradual but similar transformations under the impact of neoliberal globalization. After examining approaches to modernization developed in the context of the Cold War, this chapter focuses on subsequent events that happen in a unipolar world. It tries to understand these changes as experienced in the former USSR, the United States, as well as in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, positing that they are part of a global phenomenon called demodernization.

Demodernization means regression on the scale of modernity. While demodernization is yet to find its theoreticians, theories of modernization proliferated, particularly in the wake of decolonization in the 1950s–1960s (Tipps 1973, 199–226). Theoretical work on modernization has continued unabated, but the theories developed in those years attract particular attention because they reflect a degree of consensus between American and Soviet models of development and provide easily applicable criteria of modernization, which can be applied just as well to demodernization.

Elaborated during the Cold War, these theories include the affirmation of a national identity at the expense of tribal or religious ones, an increase in life expectancy and a decrease in the incidence of infectious diseases, a narrowing of socioeconomic gaps and a reduction in the number of people subsisting below the poverty line, a drop in unemployment and underemployment, the emergence of professionalization and relevant job opportunities,

¹ This chapter is partly based on an earlier article (Rabilotta et al. 2013). The author also acknowledges generous advice offered by Régine Perron and Miriam Rabkin.

enhanced social mobility and the democratization of culture, the reinforcement of social institutions such as trade unions that ensure a more balanced relationship between employers and employees leading to social stability, the development of science- and technology-intensive industries as well as growth of GDP, and, finally, although these received prominence in the early twenty-first century (*Inglehart and Welzel 2005*), a focus on individual emancipation and greater possibilities for self-expression. Thus the concept of modernity was enlarged to include individualism, secularism, and commitment to progress and growth. One may, of course, argue that progress does not always improve individual welfare. The quality of life of hunter-gatherers was generally higher than that of peasants and that of peasants higher than the fate of the industrial workers allegedly benefiting from the fruits of the industrial revolution (Harari 2015, 79). While the concept of multiple modernities was introduced soon after the wave of decolonization was over (Eisenstadt 1964), there remains the widely held belief that modernization is a single, common cultural program manifesting itself with slight local variations around the globe.

Modernization in the Shadow of Socialism

The aforementioned list of normative changes summarizes the content of Western theories of modernization, many of them developed not only in competition with, but also in imitation of, the Soviet model of modernization, which was rooted in programmatic documents, beginning with the Communist Manifesto of 1848. The resulting socialist movement did much to modernize industrialized countries, such as Germany and France, and of course, the Soviet Union and China (Fourastié 1979).

The current policy, based on “self-regulating markets,” brings to mind the *laissez-faire* of early industrialization in the nineteenth century. During the first period of globalization (the Gilded Age in the United States, 1870–1914), gigantic companies and financial concerns were founded. In Europe and the Americas, concentration of wealth led to the pauperization of tens of millions of people, many cast into poverty during the Long Depression (1873–1896). In this context, social protests led to intensified class struggle as demands of social justice came to be widely shared by the population.

In Germany of the 1870s, Otto von Bismarck tried but failed to eliminate socialist ideas and organizations through repression. However, he succeeded in drawing the working class away from socialism by borrowing from

the socialists' program. In 1883, he passed a series of measures that initiated state intervention in the economy for the defense of industrial capital and hired labor. This prompted Pope Leo XIII to publish the encyclical "Rerum Novarum" (1891), which affirmed the "social doctrine of the Church" or the "common good" based on the defense of labor under industrial capitalism.

Reaction emerged after World War I namely, with the rise of fascism to power in Italy in 1922. In several European countries, fascist corporatism was considered a good solution to the problems of liberal capitalism, and it is in this context that Germany opted for Nazism in 1933. Germans were aware of two waves of demodernization, between 1921 and 1924 and 1929 and 1932, when unemployment affected half of the population, while national income dropped proportionately, forcing millions of people to revert to more primitive forms of existence. This demodernization brought about by the 1929 financial crisis was felt in most capitalist countries. In the United States, where the crisis originated, the urban population began to return to the countryside, pockets of subsistence agriculture emerged, and a drastic decline in income led to mass pauperization. President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the first New Deal policies, which alleviated some effects of the Great Depression, the cause of severe demodernization spreading across the United States in the 1930s. Despite these measures, it was only World War II that pulled the United States out of demodernization.

Western approaches to modernization were not couched in Marxist concepts and they downplayed public forms of property. Both Western and Soviet theories reserved an important role for the state. The U.S. government played an active role in fomenting such theories, inviting scholars to take part in their design and implementation. Walt Rostow, Talcott Parsons, and Edward Shils, all of them closely connected with intelligence and other government agencies, were among the intellectual leaders of American scholarship on modernization. The Alliance for Progress, the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam, and the Peace Corps were examples of cooperation between government agencies and universities (Latham 2000).

Modernization became a crucial political issue in the context of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. Asia accounted for 80 percent of the world economy in 1775. (Mark 2002, 81) It then gradually lost its predominance as Western colonial expansion, industrial revolution, and unbridled capitalist growth drastically reduced the share of non-Western actors in the world economy. At the end of World War II, much of the non-Western world was still under colonial or mandatory rule, but that world was becoming restive

while competition between the two superpowers accelerated the end of colonialism. Nationalist movements were emboldened by consistent Soviet support and the defeat or manifest weakness of colonial powers during the war. Moreover, the progressive current generated in the course of World War II exposed a fundamental internal contradiction: How could the colonial powers assert freedom and national self-determination against Nazism in Europe and refuse to apply these very principles to their overseas possessions? Decolonization acquired momentum; to oppose it would appear anachronistic and backward. Newly independent countries were in search of proven methods of rapid modernization. Some of them found inspiration: a strong state, central economic planning, nationalization, free education and medical care, land reform, and industrialization. Indeed, modernization has usually taken place in a strong state capable of mobilizing and directing vast resources, regardless of whether it was democratic or authoritarian, capitalist or socialist.

Theories of modernization reflected the context of decolonization of the 1940s–1960s, to which American administrations offered only cautious support since the colonial powers, Britain, France, and Portugal, were major NATO allies of the United States. The Soviet Union’s resolute and long-standing support for decolonization made it imperative for the other superpower to support it in order not “to lose Africa to the Russians.” The same logic prevailed later with respect to the apartheid regime in South Africa, which the Reagan administration reluctantly put under pressure.

Western experts on modernization, including Alex Inkeles, a renowned Sovietologist, usually sidestepped the Soviet model. At the same time, “the spectre of communism” haunted them, a dread that was palpable in the subtitle of one of the most influential Western treatises on modernization: *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Rostow 1960). It was assumed that traditional attitudes and values such as solidarity must give way to modern, specifically Western values such as individualism (Inkeles and Smith 1974). This reflects the Protestant (some would say, Weberian) view of the state as an institution relegating religious and ethnic identities to the private domain. Western scholars tend to deemphasize structural dependencies contracted in the course of the colonial experience, focusing instead on transforming values and social structures.

Despite seemingly profound ideological differences between the Soviet Union and the United States, their approach to development showed striking similarities:

Marxist historicism, the view that the revolutionary communist movement had somehow unlocked the key to history and all that revolutionaries had to do was help events along, in the post-communist era was replaced by a powerful liberal historicism, in which the real subjects of change were represented as walk-on actors in a play written by others. This was indeed a type of “inverted Marxism” in which Francis Fukuyama and others practiced an “idealist version of historical materialism.” Instead of active subjects being engaged as agents in the making of their own history, historicism reduces a people and political agents into little more than subjects of a historical process whose inner workings are understood by no more than a select few. (Sakwa 2013, 73)

Both Soviet and Western theories viewed industrialization as a means of modernizing mind-sets and attitudes. Stalin’s forced industrialization aimed not only at building a new, robust economy capable of withstanding the attacks of capitalist powers, but also at educating the New Soviet Man. These goals were largely attained.

During the Cold War, some countries (e.g., Ghana and Algeria) opted for the Soviet-type modernization, while others (e.g., Pakistan and Senegal) chose to align with Western countries, including their former colonial powers. The Soviet experience was particularly attractive because prerevolutionary Russia had been mostly an agrarian rural country, like all the nations emerging from colonialism. Accelerated industrialization and urbanization propelled the USSR into the top tier of industrialized nations within a decade or two, leapfrogging several stages of development that Western nations had passed through. Soviet pioneering successes in space exploration and other facets of modernization impressed many in the Third World. The Soviet model promoted collectivism and emphasized industrialization as a means of consolidating national independence. It also fomented individual self-realization, eschewing capitalist individualism in favor of participation in the edification of socialism. This was happening in the absence of a consumer society typical of Western economies. In spite of a limited choice of consumer goods, the socialist system satisfied basic needs and ensured social justice. Cuba, which largely followed the Soviet model, surpassed most Latin American countries in terms of social justice, health care, and education, all the while suffering from periodic shortages of consumer goods. From 1960 to 1975, the Soviet Union increased eightfold its trade with the Third World and supplied hundreds of turnkey industrial plants to countries, such as Guinea and Angola, emerging from colonial rule (Pockney 1981). It also trained thousands of scientists and engineers from former Western colonies, most of whom returned home, unlike many of those who had studied in the United States and Europe and became part of the brain drain.

Both Soviets and most of their Western counterparts accepted the dichotomy between “traditional” and “modern,” and modernization was seen as displacement of the former with the latter. This dichotomy was, however, questioned by some prominent Western scholars. Edward Shils stated, “Tradition is not the dead hand of the past but rather the hand of the gardener, which nourishes and elicits tendencies of judgment which would otherwise not be strong enough to emerge on their own” (1958, 156). It was later argued that tradition, including religious tradition, could play an active part in modernization, particularly of non-European societies, where religion was never seen as a separate apolitical entity (Yadgar 2017). There were also influential scholars in the United States such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington (Brzezinski and Huntington 1965) and a few dissidents, such as the nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov (Gorelik and Bouis 2005, 277), who argued for a convergence between the Soviet and American models of modernity.

Post-Soviet experience suggests that rapid deindustrialization can lead to just as rapid demodernization. Soviet society disintegrated faster than new forms of social organization could appear to hold it together. While theoreticians of modernization (Smelser 1968, 125–146) posited a passage from family and tribal support system to that offered by the state and the national community at large, demodernization reverses the trend and makes family and ethnic solidarity replace institutionalized social service systems. Social demodernization often accompanies privatization and deregulation proper to neoliberalism, which enhances individualism at the expense of society. “There is no such thing as society” once affirmed Margaret Thatcher, an apostle of neoliberalism.

This trend emerged after capitalist growth began to slow down by the late 1960s. A new economic agenda, dubbed neoliberal, was first tried in the 1970s in a few South American countries run by military juntas. It was applied barely a decade later in Britain and the United States, and then was spread around the world.

Ironically, neoliberal economic theories attracted the Soviet intellectual and political elites at a time when these ideas came to be criticized by prominent scholars and even officials of major financial institutions. Just as in many developing countries, Soviet leaders began to engage in mimicry of Western, particularly American, realities. For example, Mikhail Gorbachev chose the overtly foreign title of *prezident* of the Soviet Union, a title that had no precedent in Russian history, but which survived in all the 15 post-Soviet polities. This was part of a massive importation of American terms and concepts into

everyday usage, a wave that disoriented citizens already dazzled by the chaos under Yeltsin, making them particularly prone to manipulation (Капа-Мурза 2017, 85).

After the last decade of the twentieth century, which brought endemic turmoil, social decay, and mass pauperization to the former Soviet states, theories of modernization and “transitology” lost much of their attractiveness (Капустин 2001). Rather, the word demodernization came to the fore as a more precise way of denoting post-Soviet realities, the term apparently being used more often in Russian than in other major languages.

Deindustrialization and Demodernization

The post-Soviet transition was not the first case of demodernization, though it was certainly a significant one. The dismantlement of the USSR highlighted an important global phenomenon: a massive social, technological, and economic regression. While deindustrialization as a consequence of globalization was widely recognized (Bert and van der Linden 2002), it did not always lead to wholesale demodernization. Deindustrialized societies sometimes reinvent themselves and succeed in maintaining modern infrastructures and walks of life. An example of successful postindustrial development is the city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which was transformed from a metallurgical center into a major hub of medical and pharmaceutical research.

It is therefore essential to distinguish between deindustrialization and demodernization. The former is a process of social and economic change caused by the removal or drastic reduction of industrial activity and capacity. The latter implies lasting degradation of material, health, and cultural conditions in a formerly modernized society, a return to “premodern” forms of life and collective identities. Deindustrialization often causes demodernization. Contemporary Ukraine may be a case in point: a country once at the forefront of Soviet industrial development that has since undergone demodernization. To sweeten the pill, the U.S. ambassador to that country urged it to become an “agricultural superpower” (Radio Free Europe 2016).

Demodernization should also be distinguished from degrowth, an ideology and a movement that promote ecologically viable alternatives to current modes of development fixated on economic growth and overconsumption. This movement emphasizes nonconsumptive means to enhance human welfare, which should not be reduced to economic indicators (D’Alisa et al. 2014). Since 1972 Bhutan has been a world pioneer in the international arena

in promoting a variant of the ideology of degrowth, a concern with the Gross National Happiness (GNH), deemed more important than the GDP (UN News Centre 2015).

Demodernization can coexist not only with modernity but also with modernization. Modernization and demodernization need not be mutually exclusive; both processes may take place simultaneously, or even stimulate each other. Western blueprints for modernization have produced a wide variety of results. In other words, some societies tend to polarize between the modernizing and demodernizing, as if splitting into two parts, modern and premodern.

This was definitely the fate of Russia and the Soviet Union. Modernization under both Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin implied social reforms (e.g., expansion of serfdom to state factories in the eighteenth century and establishing advanced research and design institutes within prisons in the 20th) that could be defined as archaic and antithetical to modernization. In the same vein, the “reactionary modernism” of the Weimar Republic was transformed under Hitler into a “futuro-archaic” system (Herf 1984). Nazi Germany represented a particularly poignant case of technological sophistication in the service of a primitive tribal ideology, “a Genghis Khan with a telegraph” as Alexander Herzen, the Russian dissident, presciently put it in the mid-nineteenth century. Recent progress in surveillance techniques and collection of personal data makes this warning particularly relevant.

Israel is an instructive instance of technical and military modernity (“the start-up nation”) coupled with political and social demodernization. In the twenty-first century, supporters of Israel gradually “abandoned all talk of universalist morality, human rights, and equal human dignity” (Abdel-Nour 2013). Israeli public discourse, including foreign policy arguments, routinely makes references to an imagined continuity with a biblical past, which stand in stark contrast to the rational arguments of the Palestinians who demand justice for property and dignity lost just a few decades ago. The impact of the Zionist enterprise on Palestinian society can also be considered a case of demodernization accompanied by a concomitant marginalization of an entire society on the basis of ethnicity (Roy 2004). This, along with Israel’s habit of intervening militarily in neighboring countries, undermines international law, thus embodying a demodernizing tendency in international relations.

In the context of the economic crisis suffered by Western countries at the turn of the 1930s, the USSR, all the while intensifying political oppression,

embarked on major technological modernization and undertook massive imports of industrial goods, including entire turnkey factories. This happened at a time when, under the impact of the poverty rate of 60 percent and the unemployment rate of over 25 percent, Americans were moving from the city to the countryside, thus reversing urbanization, an important trend characteristic of modernization. Even though the United States would only recognize the USSR in 1933, the Soviet Union had by that time become its single largest foreign purchaser of agricultural and industrial equipment (Powalski 1997, 32–33). If only for purely business reasons, Western countries, whose rulers were usually bitter opponents of Bolshevism, greatly contributed to the success of the first two five-year plans. It is that forced modernization that allowed the USSR to stand up to the invasion by Nazi Germany and its allies from a dozen European countries in 1941–1945.

Current demodernization has not spared the United States, hitherto a shining example of modernity, affecting not only certain areas such as Detroit but also the country as a whole. At the turn of the twenty-first century, over 15 percent of Americans lived below the poverty line, including 1.5 million households with less than \$2 per person a day and 2.5 million children who were homeless (Shaefer and Edin 2012). This phenomenon engendered a growing insecurity spreading in American society in general, often far from pockets of poverty, and constituted an important manifestation of demodernization, namely, a growing income inequality.

Today, demodernization and ensuing inequality lead to *de facto* abdication of state services such as maintenance of law and order in several countries:

Jamaica's gangs—each a fluid but cohesive organization with a clearly demarcated territory—fund their activities partly through their participation in one of the industries in the vanguard of globalization: the transshipment of illegal drugs. Although at first glance the gangs seem to be at odds with the government, the local police frequently cooperate with the dons, whose ruthlessly efficient rule can make the cops' jobs easier. The result is a tenuous *quid pro quo*: if the dons keep order, the police turn a blind eye to the drug trade. Besides, direct assaults on the gangs are often futile. Even when the police capture dons or their gunmen, convictions are next to impossible to obtain because potential witnesses remain silent out of loyalty or fear. Just as the rise of the modern state generated conventional symbols of loyalty—flags, anthems, national heroes—so does gangland culture reflect the new power structure. (Rapley 2006, n.p.)

Some critics argue that post-Soviet Russia has developed a similar culture of law and order (Латкин 2017). This is another instance where technological modernization and socioeconomic demodernization not only can proceed at the same time but also appear organically linked with one another. Trappings

of technological modernity, such as smartphones, can be found in conditions of utter demodernization, for example, among Syrian refugees displaced by civil war and foreign intervention.

Post-Soviet Developments

It is common to hear in the United States that it “won the Cold War.” Yet this sentiment is at variance with what most citizens of the former Soviet Union (FSU) know and believe. In Russia in 2015, the Soviet system of government was considered preferable to any other (36 percent), and its popularity has steadily grown in the last two decades, in both technological and socioeconomic aspects (51 percent) (RBC 2016). Twenty years after the fact, the majority of Ukrainians and Hungarians did not approve the turn to democracy and capitalism (Pew 2009). The causes and circumstances of that major geopolitical transformation continue to be debated, but its consequences are reasonably well documented, understood, and evaluated (European 2016).

What happened after the dismantlement of the USSR was “the worst economic and social devastation suffered by a modern country in peacetime” (Cohen 2000, 162). “The nation’s economic and social disintegration has been so great that it has led to the unprecedented demodernization of a twentieth-century country.” It was a collapse of modern life that caused Russia “to drop out of the community of developed nations. A large twentieth-century middle class is being transformed into nineteenth-century subsistence farmers, who must grow on tiny garden plots what they need to survive but can no longer afford to buy” (Cohen 2000, 162). I saw a similar situation in the early 1990s in the scientific research town of Obolensk, near Moscow, and in Kiev where highly qualified scientists were reduced to growing cabbage and potatoes in the shadow of their hitherto advanced research institutes.

An American Peace Corps volunteer observed the immediate consequences of the dismemberment of the Soviet Union in a small town:

It is decaying and dying. ... There is no work at all. ... Some people are eating dogs, others are giving their last kopecks to buy a loaf of bread. ... There is no phone service in parts of the town because thieves stole the phone cables. ... There is no police force to stop them. Apartments have broken toilets, no gas, running water only in the kitchen, certainly no hot water ever. (Cohen 2000, 42)

The number of poor in the former USSR increased tenfold from 14 million in 1989 to 147 million in 1999 (Cohen 2000, 42). As of 2014, most former Soviet republics lagged behind developed countries. The ranking on the UN Human Development Index ranged from 30 for Estonia to 50 for Russia, to 129 for Tajikistan² (UNDP 2016). The UNDP estimated the human cost of this precipitous trend at 10 million premature deaths and unborn children due to inadequate public health facilities, malnutrition, stress, and alcoholism (Bacon 2014, 70–71). Social disintegration reached frightening proportions. Rapid deterioration was observed in several human development indicators—education, public health, life expectancy, research, and culture, areas in which the USSR used to rank high.

During the post-Soviet years the number of airports in Russia dropped precipitously from 1,450 to 282 as a result of privatization and pauperization (Forum 2016). The two protagonists in one of the most popular Soviet films *The Irony of Fate* did not think twice before taking planes (and one of them even attempted to tear a plane ticket), even as they had complained to each other about their low salaries. As a Soviet enterprise, Aeroflot, formerly the world's largest airline, flew exclusively Soviet-made planes. After the end of the USSR, production of civilian aircraft was drastically curtailed, as famed design and production facilities were privatized, sold to foreign companies for a pittance, and soon thereafter closed down. Today, Aeroflot flies mostly American- and European-made planes. The degree of self-inflicted damage was unprecedented:

Russians watched with astonishment as the wealth created by the combined efforts of the entire population was parceled out to well placed insiders on the strength of corrupt connections. The new owners proceeded to strip the assets of the factories and mines they acquired and the economy collapsed. In the period from 1992 to 1998, the Russian gross domestic product fell by half. This did not happen even under Nazi occupation. (Satter 2007, n.p)

A rapid rate of privatization and of social disengagement (destruction of trade unions) naturally harmed public health:

Between 1992 and 1994, the rise in the death rate in Russia was so dramatic that Western demographers did not believe the figures. The toll from murder, suicide, heart attacks, and accidents gave Russia the death rate of a country at war and Western and Russian demographers now agree that between 1992 and 2000, the number of “surplus deaths”

² For more details of demodernization in Tajikistan see chapter by Richard Foltz.

in Russia deaths that cannot be explained on the basis of previous trends was between five and six million persons. (Satter 2007, n.p)

By 2015, the number of hospital beds and hospitals was declining, approaching 1913 levels (Красная 2017). The patient-doctor ratio increased while remuneration of medical doctors in the state system was roughly equivalent to that of a McDonald's employee. This may explain why 80 percent of patients must pay for medical services that are in theory free (Красная 2016). The increased incidence of infectious diseases not seen in decades is another consequence of the changes that followed the dissolution of the USSR.

This happened in spite of the fact that health care remained relatively more available in Russia than in some other post-Soviet countries. Ten years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, over half of the citizens of Georgia who needed medical attention could not seek it because of lack of money (Balabanova et al. 2004). At the same time, in Belarus, where post-Soviet reforms were the least drastic, only 9 percent of sick citizens could not afford medical care. In terms of efficiency of health services, Belarus was also rated higher than Russia, which occupies the last spot in a Bloomberg list (Bloomberg 2010).

This view of Belarus contrasts with the commonly held one that it represents a case of demodernization. In resisting austerity measures that the IMF tried to impose, Belarus avoided massive social demodernization experienced in Russia and the Ukraine. Belarus appeared to reduce the gap between rich and poor, maintaining technology-intensive industries in operation and thus sustaining a demand for highly qualified manpower. In late 2017, the Lukashenko government published an ambitious program of stimulating the development of IT and other digital technologies. (Белта 2017) It was quite telling that Independence Day celebrations in Minsk in 2014, taking place in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, included a parade of tractors and trucks, which continue to be manufactured in Belarus and largely sold in Russia. President Lukashenko succeeded in stopping and reversing the initial crisis of the early 1990s, and Belarus has since showed better results than Russia, the Ukraine, and most other post-Soviet republics, as measured by the UN Human Development Index. The industrial sector ensures a high degree of differentiation of labor, an important criterion of modernity (Durkheim 1999). Conversely, the proliferation of menial service jobs (so-called McJobs) and massive export of laborers (such as is observed in the Ukraine or Tajikistan) are reliable tale-tellers of demodernization.

Belarus avoided the pitfall of exclusive ethnic nationalism, but it does appear demodernized in terms of its power structures and civil society. The development of civil society was hampered by the well-focused activities of Western, mainly American, NGOs that pursued Washington's foreign policy objectives. For example, the International Republican Institute, under the chairmanship of U.S. senator John McCain, trained political cadres in several countries. Some were involved in many a "color revolution," including the coup d'état in Kiev in February 2014. In response, several post-Soviet governments, led by Russia and Belarus, curtailed the activities of these kinds of organizations within their borders, often lumping innocents with the guilty, thereby strengthening these governments' image as authoritarian.

Many post-Soviet scholars seem to neglect what Marxists call "the base" in favor of the "superstructure," as if they continue to recoil from the officially imposed Marxism some of them used to enforce not so long ago. Now they embrace the idea that Western and Westernized societies are devoid of a single dominant ideology, in contradistinction to post-Soviet countries that continue to look for one. They seem to ignore the fact that formally articulated ideologies tend to be less effective than deeply internalized ones, such as the belief in the free market.

The crisis in the Ukraine can also be seen from the perspective of demodernization. The issue is not only the upsurge of identity politics and ethnic nationalism but also deindustrialization and a drastic economic decline after the violent overthrow of the government in February 2014 (Radio Free Europe 2015). This result is congruent with Western policies aiming at severing the Ukraine from Russia, a scenario comparable to a hypothetical severing of Canada from the United States, Canada's largest export market.

The population of the most industrialized regions of the Ukraine, the east and the south, was wary of a rapprochement with the European Union, which threatened access to their important markets in Russia and, hence, the very survival of their industries in the face of European competition. Russia's government, concerned with a flood of incoming merchandise from the EU, would have to abolish its preferential treatment of Ukrainian goods. The importance of this economic factor in the Ukrainian eastern borderlands can be seen in the fact that the rebels in these regions, usually referred to as "pro-Russian separatists," did not ask to join Russia for historical and ethnic reasons as the population of the Crimea had done. Rather, they requested to be admitted to the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. This request embodied an attempt to forestall further demodernization that