

---

## Late Modernity, Individualization and Socialism: An Associational Critique of Neoliberalism

---

By Matt Dawson

UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 232 pages, \$86.15, ISBN: 9781137003416.

---

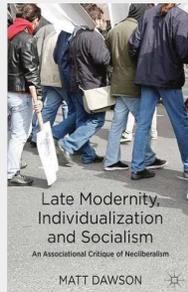
Reviewed by Nurbanu Dursun

---

*LATE MODERNITY, Individualization and Socialism* brings together three much discussed and seemingly incompatible concepts in its title. According to Dawson, this seeming incompatibility among late modernity, individualization, and socialism stems from a limited understanding of these concepts.

Therefore, the book aims to reconcile these concepts through a theoretical analysis that is based on an associational critique of neoliberalism. The retreat of the leftist politics in recent political history and a search for an alternative political model can be said to be the framework of this book. For Dawson, that alternative is libertarian socialism.

When explaining what late modernity is, Dawson makes use of three important sociological theorists that study late modernity. These names are Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, and Zygmunt Bauman. Analyzing these theorists' work regarding late modernity, Dawson emphasizes the need to view late modernity as an unfolding process that extends the quantitative effects of modernity while providing qualitative criticism of it. Dawson situates late modernity at the second half of the twentieth century. Its emergence can be dated back to the foundation of the welfare state system in the 1950s and 1960s; however, it became most visible in the 1980s in Western societies. Therefore, late modernity remains as a concept attributed to the West.



Individualization is viewed as a social organization and treated as late modernity's most visible effect. Dawson starts his analysis by arguing how the link between modernity and individualization is almost unquestioned. Individualization's centrality in late modernity is crucial for individuals to be able to choose

their own identities and take responsibilities for forming their own identities. Neoliberalism argues that individualization goes hand in hand with the characteristics of a neoliberal economy, such as the privatization of the economy and the systematic promotion of "rational" entrepreneurship. However, Dawson does not agree with this claim. Instead, he argues how late modern individualization does not necessarily need to be neoliberal individualism. Explaining individualization in terms of a neoliberal model is an example of neoliberalism's domination over political sociological thinking. Dawson is specifically interested in 'political individualization.' Political individualization is political organization that privatizes political decision-making, where political decision-making is simply reduced to the individual level. Therefore, 'political individualization's' effect is to look for "biographical" solutions to systematic problems.

Socialism is presented as a rather complex concept that is understood and defined differently by social theorists. For instance, Giddens writes how socialism has been tried and

those trials failed. Thus, for him, socialism is now equal to the welfare state system, which emphasizes his framework that politics is limited to government. Beck, on the other hand, simply argues that socialism is no longer relevant. He argues for an institutionalized idea of socialism. In Bauman's work, socialism is explained as a utopia, a counter-culture of capitalist modernity. Dawson makes use of these three views and advocates libertarian socialism as a new understanding of socialism in late modernity. Libertarian socialism no longer works with the idea of a strong state, rather politics through social movements and associations are emphasized. Political society is organized on the basis of self-government. The state almost appears as the liberal state in this scheme where its primary role is to implement laws so that associations can function in equality and justice in political society.

One of the problems with Dawson's use of the concept of late modernity is its geographical reach. As I have mentioned above, late modernity is situated in the second half of the twentieth century in Western countries; it is considered that even not all Western countries go through late modernity. Dawson never questions this claim and takes it for granted. However, I think it would be more meaningful to treat late modernity as a global project, rather than a regional one. Some societies' experience of late modernity could be harder than others, but it is not a reason to limit the scope of late modernity to Western societies. Also, recognizing that late modernity is a universal project could help us more when it comes to searching for political alternatives. Additionally, it is not clear how "Western societies" are defined by those theorists. Is it a definition based on institutions of economy and politics or is it a cultural definition? It may be the case that Dawson preferred not to go into detail of defining what "Western" means. However, if he uses late

modernity as a "Western social phenomena," then even a small paragraph would be nice, so that definitions and descriptions are clearer.

Another point to make when it comes to universality of late modernity is how individualization is treated as a universal phenomenon while late modernity remains as a concept specific to Western societies. When Dawson discusses individualization, he writes how Beck and Giddens view individualization as a universal phenomenon, while Bauman has some doubts regarding people's resources to realize the outcomes of individualization. However, Bauman does not necessarily oppose the idea that individualization is a universal concept. Rather, he questions the experience of individualization and argues it varies in different societies. Therefore, if individualism is viewed as a global concept and an inevitable part of late modernity, arguing that late modernity is a concept generic to Western societies can be refuted.

The book is very organized and has its priorities and purposes set straight. Dawson thinks late modernity, individualization, and socialism are not necessarily incompatible concepts and we can talk about socialism in late modernity in the form of libertarian socialism. Libertarian socialism makes use of an associational critique of neoliberalism and provides solutions to negative outcomes of individualization in political society. I think his most noteworthy contribution is how he challenges the claim that theoretical basis of neoliberalism is bound with the conditions of late modernity. This enables us to delimit our understanding of late modernity with neoliberalism. Additionally, he does not limit politics to government. He values self-government through social movements and associations. Therefore, he prioritizes coming up with alternatives in political society.

However, it is important to note that these alternatives are theoretical. So, one should not expect a full-fledged “manifesto” for political society. Also, one should also remember how he speaks from a Western point of view, when he discusses these alternatives.

This book will benefit those who study political science, sociology, and political sociology from a theoretical perspective. A basic foundation of sociological theory may be necessary, but it is not a must to understand and enjoy the book.

---

## Law, State, and Society in Modern Iran: Constitutionalism, Autocracy, and Legal Reform, 1906-1941

---

By Hadi Enayat

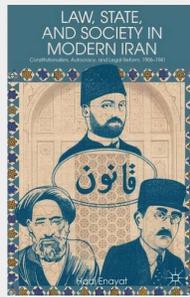
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 256 pages, \$100.00, ISBN: 9781137282019.

---

Reviewed by H. E. Chehabi

---

LIKE THE NEIGHBORING Ottoman Empire, Iran escaped foreign rule in the age of imperialism. Its continued sovereignty notwithstanding, European powers did not treat Iran as an equal. The most visible manifestation of the country’s subaltern status in the international society of states were the so-called capitulations, imposed treaties in which Iran (like the Ottoman Empire) exempted the subjects of foreign countries from its own jurisdiction, without securing a similar treatment for its own subjects from the other side. These unequal treaties were justified, in Iran and elsewhere in the non-Western world, by the absence of a rational legal system, because of which a European could not expect to have a fair trial in a local court. For Iran to emancipate itself internationally, therefore, a new legal system had to be created as a necessary precondition for the abolition of the capitulations. But this was far from being the sole impetus for creating a modern legal system. Modernists held Iran’s traditional absolute monarchy responsible for the weakness that had allowed foreign powers to impose their will on Iran in the first place.



Establishing the rule of law was thus of paramount importance, and given Iran’s independence, reforms were implemented by domestic forces. Hadi Enayat’s book is about how this was done in practice, and with what results.

According to conventional wisdom, the creation of Iran’s modern legal system dates from the early years of the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1925-41), when Ali-Akbar Davar was Minister of Justice. Enayat’s great merit is to show that, while Davar’s reforms do indeed merit serious analysis, they had a prehistory going back to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906. The years between the overthrow of the absolute monarchy of the Qajar dynasty in 1906 and the establishment of a royal dictatorship under the new Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 are usually regarded as a transitional period in which Iranian politicians bickered while the country was going to pieces under the double impact of domestic centrifugal forces and foreign intervention. Enayat shows that while this is true, it is not the whole truth; in fact, the groundwork for Pahlavi-era was