

## ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is written with the intent to provide a literature overview of the term 'Asiatic Mode of Production'. Although the influence of this term seems to have waned, its basic idea that the East is unique, as it has no history seems to linger on. Therefore, it is necessary to take stock of the major contributions to the discussion of the Asiatic mode of production, most notably that of Marx, Anderson and Wickham. In the second half of the paper, the ideas behind the term are applied to the Ottoman Empire and the lack of hereditary nobility and private property are critically examined.*

**Keywords:** *Asiatic Mode of Production, Ottoman Empire, Orientalism, Marxism, Feudalism, Agrarian Relations.*

### ÖZET

*Bu makale Asya tipi üretim tarzı üzerine yazılmış eserlerin eleştirel bir incelemesini yapmak amacıyla yazılmıştır. Bu terimin etkisi artık azalmış olsa da, Doğu'nun tarihinin olmadığı ve bu nedenle de Batı'dan farklı olduğu düşüncesi hala etkili olmaya devam etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, Asya tipi üretim tarzı tartışmalarında yapılan, başta Marx, Anderson ve Wickham olmak üzere yazarların katkılarını incelemek gereklidir. Makalenin ikinci yarısında Asya tipi üretim tarzı Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na uygulanmış ve terim özellikle de sıklıkla gündeme gelen soylu sınıfının ve özel mülkiyetin olmaması bağlamında incelenmiştir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Asya Tipi Üretim Tarzı, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Oryantalizm, Marksizm, Feodalizm, Tarımsal İlişkiler.*

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## Introduction

We are far from the fervor of the Asiatic Mode of Production (hereafter AMP) debates of the 1930s or even 1970s, and the term started to lose its cutting edge in specific literatures. After the setbacks of the term were severely criticized by writers such as Anderson, Amin, Rodinson, and by many others in specific Ottoman, Indian etc, literatures (if with the result that the main elements of the AMP thesis were reproduced under new disguises), the current situation represents a stalemate. As a result, it is necessary to discuss the viability of the AMP as a concept to foster a better understanding of the evolution of the East in particular and of development of capitalism in general.

In the following, I will emphasize the studies that directly refer to the AMP. Nevertheless, I felt it necessary to refer to the critical literature towards Orientalism both in an unconventionally long footnote (see footnote 1) and as a background color sometimes contrasting with the theoretical gist of the arguments of various writers upon whose studies I will elaborate. This uneasy relationship can also be easily observed in the second half of this paper which focuses on the Ottoman debates. In the first half of the 1970s, the Turkish scholars had developed their version of the AMP thesis initiated by the works of Sencer Divitcioglu. These studies enabled the radical Turkish intellectuals to depict the Turkish society as a Third World country and to propose an alternative radical strategy without subscribing to the Soviet or other socialist party lines (Faroqhi 1992). In the second part of the 1970s, however, we observe that Anderson's work (1974a) with its suggestion to discard the AMP thesis found a warm welcome, which resulted after the 1980s in a further distancing from the AMP thesis.

In what follows I will try to discuss the development of the idea of the "uniqueness of the East" (or of the "West") culminating in Marx's arguments about the AMP, in a way trying to delineate the "weaknesses" of the thesis. These weaknesses, I will argue, made the AMP thesis easily vulnerable to Anderson's criticisms, discussion of which will form the next topic of the first half of the paper. I will try to show that, the value of some of his criticisms against the AMP thesis notwithstanding, Anderson's work easily gets rid of late Marx's work which aimed at finding alternative historical paths of evolution. This section will end with a discussion of the comments of Wickham and Wood over Anderson's work.

In the second half of the paper, I will provide a brief history of the agrarian relations of the Ottoman Empire from the standpoint of a standard Ottoman history which have close affinities with the AMP thesis. Nevertheless, even this section will give the paper a scope to delineate the “weaknesses” of the AMP thesis. In the next section, I will summarize some arguments of the recent contributions to the Ottoman literature suggesting alternative interpretations of the Ottoman history, which have further implications for rejecting the AMP thesis for the Ottoman history. However, choosing the Ottoman case for a discussion of the AMP thesis might be problematic. On the one hand, Ottoman Empire and its difference from Western Europe has always been emphasized starting with the post-Renaissance literature culminating in Anderson’s book (1974a) which interpreted the Ottoman Empire (together with China and India) as a perfect example of the AMP. On the other hand, there are arguments that Ottoman Empire cannot be taken as a full-fledged example for the AMP- arguments which are gaining strength together with the new studies enlightening the political, social and economic functioning of the Ottoman society. Whatever the case, the Ottoman Empire and its differences from the Western European development should be studied. As I will try to argue in the following pages, even if we criticize the AMP thesis, we have to formulate a theory, which will enable us to theorize alternative historical paths in line with late Marx’s inquiry.

### ***The Development of the Term AMP***

Marx blazed the trail of the discussions about the AMP. He studied the Asian societies “with the same qualitative intensity that he devoted to the study of capitalism”, as the alternative paths were important for reaching an understanding of the evolution of the humankind and for the critique of capitalism (Kradner 1975, 296). After Marx, this topic came to the fore with changing emphases again and again in different contexts. In the Komintern debates of the late 1920s and early 1930s, for example, what was at stake was the course of the Chinese revolution. One side of the debate argued that China could be characterized as feudal or semi-feudal, thus was ripe for the “bourgeois-democratic revolution”. Against this, the other side (*Aziatchiki*) was arguing that China, being a perfect example of the AMP, had a weak and underdeveloped bourgeoisie, and the peasants and the proletariat should lead the revolution (Fogel 1988, 58). This period was closed with the purge of the *Aziatchiki* and the removal of the term from the official list of modes of productions of human evolution (Nureev 1990, 56). To a great extent, it can be said that political considerations in this period predominated over scientific concerns.

However, the debates over the AMP in the context of other nations were not less political. Just to give an example, at around the same time, the Japanese Marxists were discussing the AMP in the context of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, but this time with inverted meanings depending on their national conditions. In this case, one side of the debate was arguing that the Meiji Restoration could be taken as a bourgeois democratic revolution while the other side was interpreting it as an absolutist revolution (Fogel 1988, 68). In the Chinese case the followers of the AMP thesis were supporting the socialist revolution, while in Japan defending AMP came to mean agreeing to the two-stage revolution thesis of the Comintern. Therefore, it can be said that there have been many and not rarely contradictory interpretations of the term AMP.

The 1960s gave another impetus to the debate as the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPSU lifted the ban over the *Aziatchiki*. But this time the political factors, as well as the state of the social sciences and especially that of history and anthropology, were very influential in taking up the concept once again (Bailey 1981, 91). Besides this, we can observe a diversification of the political considerations. Thus, in the 1970s the participants to the debate were arguing the following about the “continued existence of the elements of AMP”:

- 1- They are an object of study to be related to capitalist penetration and the development of strategies for the achievement of socialism (Amin).
- 2- They are evidence of the necessity to follow a novel road to socialism, differing from that of the Soviet Union or proposed by European communist parties (Wielanga).
- 3- They are an attribute of backwardness and lack of independent development, that is, the AMP is a term of abuse (Habib)
- 4- The historic existence of elements of the AMP in the Soviet Union or China is used to explain why socialism has not been achieved in these countries (Bailey 1981, 94-95).

Although the discussions about the AMP were diversified, and thus the necessity for revising the terms of the debate gained an urgency, it can be stated that “the literature has largely fed on itself” (Krader 1975, xi). The technical difficulties played their roles in this outcome as the number of qualified researchers to study the Asiatic societies as a comparative undertaking in relation to the development of capitalism in the West was extremely limited. Orientalism<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For Orientalism (see Said 1978; Rodinson 1979; Turner 1978 and Gran 1979). Said (1978, 2-3) defines Orientalism in three different ways. First, it is what the Orientalist does when researching

also contributed to this with its taken for granted assumptions over the East. But it is necessary to keep in mind that the actual process of the development of capitalism in the West is also problematic. Therefore, once we leave the secure waters of assuming the difference (of course, this does not necessitate being

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the Orient as an anthropologist, sociologist, historian or philologist. Second, it is a “style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction” between the East and the West. Third, it is the corporate institution for dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient.” “To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly although not exclusively of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such desperate realms as the imagination itself, the whole of India and Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, the spice trade, colonial armies and a long tradition of colonial administrators, a formidable scholarly corpus, innumerable Oriental ‘experts’ and ‘hands’, an Oriental professorate, a complex ray of ‘Oriental’ ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty, sensuality) many Eastern sects, philosophies, and wisdoms domesticated for local European use –the list can be extended more or less indefinitely-” (*ibid.*, 4). But “one ought never to assume that the structure of Orientalism is nothing more than a structure of lies or of myths which were the truth about them to be told, would simply blow away” (*ibid.*, 6). Said does not accept Orientalism to be an instrument of colonialism though Orientalism as an institution develop largely in the colonial period. “To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact” (*ibid.*, 39).

Turner (1978, 6) gives another colorful critique of Orientalism: “Orientalism takes as its object of study an entity referred as ‘Islamic civilization’ within which ‘Classical Islam’ is the crucial feature. This ‘civilization’ is treated as a bundle of elements of high culture, in particular religion, philosophy, architecture and poetry. The primary aim of Orientalism is to uncover the deep symbolic significance of Islamic cultural expression, of which the Arabic language is the primary vehicle. Hence research has been traditionally focused on the literary outpourings of the ruling institutions, the *ulema*, *Seray*, and the royal bureaucracy. Because of this concentration on the culture of the elite, Orientalism conceives politics as the internecine struggles of the royal family and history as the oscillation of dynasties. For urban geography, Orientalism substitutes the cartography of imperial cities, while political economy is replaced the study of *waqf* legislation, the history of imperial finance and numismatology.”

Although these studies, all of them written in the last two years of the 1970s, continue to be important critiques of Orientalism, they cannot sufficiently answer the reason of the power of it. Said (1978, 204) avers that “Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient’s difference with its weakness”, but even if we accept the formulations about powerful West versus powerless East, it is necessary to theorize at least the receptors of this power in the East. Here is not the place to write on this very important problem, nevertheless I would like to write my contention that Orientalism cannot be taken only as a project of the West over the East. At least the “twain meets” here, that is both contemporary Western and Eastern powers agree on the essential terms of Orientalism. Not only in the West, but also among any class, intellectual or state bureaucrat in the East, it is practically impossible to find anybody who will reject the “lethargic past” of the Orient.

content with overshadowing all differences), the complex character of the development of capitalism becomes a not-so-easy task both in the “Eastern” and “Western” contexts. In the following, I will try to explain the development of the idea of the uniqueness of the West, and Marx’s analysis of the AMP. Then I will discuss P. Anderson’s discussion of the term together with the critiques of Wickham and Wood.

The idea of the difference between the East and West can first be seen in ancient times. Aristotle had a notion of “Oriental despotism” referring to the Persians who occupied Anatolia (Asia Minor) and the term Asia emerged in that period. Against this, Europe denoted the contemporary Greece and meant a “dynamic, progressing and participatory polity” (Fogel 1988, 56). It was Hobbes and Montesquieu who contributed much to the revival of this term.<sup>2</sup> According to Anderson (1974, 462), Machiavelli, Harrington, Bernier, Adam Smith and Hegel were the other thinkers who contributed to the formation of the idea that the West and the East are completely different entities. These writers emphasized the state property of land, lack of juridical restraints, religious substitution of law, absence of hereditary nobility, tax and rent couple,<sup>3</sup> servile social equality, isolated village communities, agrarian predominance over industry, public hydraulic works, torrid climatic environment and historical immutability as characteristics of the East.

Concerning the seventeenth century European precedents of Marx’s AMP thesis, two conclusions will be emphasized here. First, although the eighteenth century thinkers attempted to find explanations for the contrast between the stagnation of the East and the rapid change in the West, the debates were made with reference to their “internal” considerations. According to Krader (1975, 6-7), “the speculations about the Oriental despotism or tyranny, the forms of landownership in Asia, the Oriental society, supported at one time the mercantilist policies, the advocates of free trade, the East India Company, at

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<sup>2</sup> According to Valensi (1987, 2, 93) the words *despote*, *despotique* and *despotisme* appeared in a French dictionary for the first time in 1720. The term was used by Hobbes in *The Elements of Law*, and *Natural and Politic* in 1640 and *The Leviathan* in 1651 and by Montesquieu in *L’esprit des lois* in 1748. However, before than that, the term was first used in Venice against Florence in the second half of the sixteenth century, and later against James I and Cromwell, France and the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth century (*ibid.*, 90-91).

<sup>3</sup> The tax-rent couple argument was originally put forward by A. Smith. For him, the tax-rent couple was determinant in the lack of differentiation of the public and private spheres in the Orient, an idea which later adopted by the legal theory of feudalism in the West (Krader 1975, 40-41).

another the utilitarians, the liberal interests, and the colonialists throughout.” For example, Montesquieu’s contempt for the “Oriental despotism” and the latter’s lack of hereditary aristocracy and private property in land is nothing but a discussion within the French context, which uses the Orient only as an external relation at best.<sup>4</sup> Second, it is necessary to have in mind that the two traditions Marx followed; namely the political economy and German philosophy had strong views suitable for the formulation of the AMP.

In what follows I will discuss the problems in the formulation of the AMP by Marx. First, it can be stated that the AMP has a rather awkward position in the Marxist evolutionary schema.<sup>5</sup> In Marx’s writings, we see the term AMP in the *Preface* as among the major economic formations of society, together with ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois ones. And this is an innovation compared to the *Communist Manifesto* where he depicts three forms of the class society: slave society of antiquity, feudalism and bourgeois (Hobsbawm 1989, 31). In the *Preface* and *German Ideology*, Marx aims in “highly abstract terms” to depict the “general mechanism of all social change” (*ibid.*, 11). Here we observe some basic traits of the idea of progress, the key terms of which are social division of labor, growing emancipation of man from nature and increasing human individualization (for the influence of these concepts on Marx’s work see Comninel 1990, especially the third chapter).

In the *German Ideology*, Marx provides various stages of a historical evolution, all of which were characterized by a correspondence between social division of labor and forms of property without suggesting any logical connection between them (*ibid.*, 27). These are communal, communal and state property in antiquity (i.e. communal city property side by side with private property), feudal and rank ownership (broken-down Roman and conquering Germanic tribal

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<sup>4</sup> All over Europe in this period, when the arguments about good government was raging, not only the Orient in general but the word “the Turk” was used in all political confrontations. For example, in France the sides were accusing the other with the terms “Calvinoturkism” and “Turkopapism” (Valensi 1987, 91).

<sup>5</sup> According to Haldon (1993, 20-21) there are three major strands in Marx’s understanding of history. First, a general philosophy of history, entailing both the notion of progress and evolution which owes much to Hegel; second, a theory of historical causation and change depending upon the arguments for the primacy of productive forces; and third, an analytical strand, concerning the concepts of modes of production, their historical sequence, and the relationship between actual social formations in all their complexity. Likewise, it is possible to find arguments attesting to the primacy of the forces of production (as can be seen in the *Preface*) or of the relations of production (as can be seen in *Capital III*).

institutions, no-cities, relatively undeveloped division of labor). At this stage, Marx argues that transition to capitalism is a product of feudal evolution and provided an explanation depending on cities, a division of labor between production and trade, long distance trade, consequent division of labor between different states (*ibid.*, 29-30).

Marx's own subject of interest in his historical inquiries was capitalism in itself rather than the pre-capitalist formations themselves, "and he dealt with the rest of history... as it bore on the origins and development of capitalism" (*ibid.*, 20).<sup>6</sup> Therefore in the *Formen*, he classified four alternative routes out of the primitive society, i.e. Oriental (Indian), Greco-Roman, Germanic and Slavonic ones, of which, according to Marx, the Oriental mode represented the most backward route out of the primitive society (*ibid.*, 25-32).

As a result, we see the oriental mode of production, on the one hand, as a stage in the historical evolution (*German Ideology, Preface*), (oriental, slave society or antiquity, feudalism and bourgeois or capitalism), i.e. a historical concept implying a progress. On the other hand, it is conceptualized as a way out of the primitive society (*Formen*), together with the Greco-Roman, Germanic and Slavonic ones. Here, not only the term turns into a geographical concept instead of a historical one, but also the idea of progress gives its place to an emphasis on the lack of progress especially in the oriental and Slavonic modes. These two conceptualizations, as Hobsbawm claims, are contradictory, as the AMP, which was taken as the most primitive one in the historical stage of evolution, was also depicted at the same time as the most resistant, indeed completely change-proof against the factors other than external ones.

I think this problem causes the uncertainty about the historical location of the AMP, causing the much-criticized notion of "people without history". As a result, it is not clear whether we are to compare the AMP to feudalism or to capitalism, causing some serious inconsistencies in many analyses. I will turn to this topic in the following pages. Second, this problem is not only limited to the East. As the other side of the coin, similar problems can be seen in the feudal mode of production as it is seen in the debates in the context of the transitions from ancient mode to feudalism. Marx did not elaborate on the relations between ancient and feudal mode of productions and on the Germanic and slave ways out of the primitive community. He only put forward some ideas which will be

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<sup>6</sup> It was Engels who dwelt more on feudalism itself. Marx emphasized peasant community more than say manorial developments in feudalism (*ibid.*, 24).



criticized by some later studies (for example Wickham 1994a, 29), such as feudalism depending on the fusion between Roman and Germanic ways. Depending on this fusion, he believed that Germanic way was superior to the Oriental one although class differentiation or cities were absent or extremely limited in the Germanic tribal society (Hobsbawm 1989, 28).

Second set of problems about the AMP consists of uncertainties with the content of the AMP thesis itself. Marx defines the AMP in terms of the legal absence of private property as Bernier does<sup>7</sup> and with the tax-rent couple as A. Smith does. As for the absence of private property Marx and Engels find two culprits: self-sustaining small community and the so-called hydraulic state (Marx 1964, 70). Marx emphasizes in *Grundrisse* the self-sustaining village, and in *Capital* the state ownership but he links them together by arguing that the state ownership of the soil hides the tribal communal ownership. According to Anderson (1974a, 489-491) this formulation is problematic. First of all, the “self-sufficiency, equality and the isolation of the Indian communities was... always a myth”; he argues that there is not any communal property in India, and tillage was always individual and Marx here is deceived by the colonial resources he used. He also states that there were not any significant hydraulic works in India, Turkey and China. Second, the two basic assumptions do not hold as the hydraulic state argument necessitates complex class stratification, while the self-sufficient community argument depends on a virtually pre-class classless social structure and they are not to be seen at the same time at any place. Third, related to the second problem, the former argument extends the AMP to ancient societies such as Sumerian Mesopotamia, Pharaonic Egypt, Hittite Anatolia, Mycenaean Greece or Etruscan Italy, while the latter to tribal and semi-tribal formulations such as Polynesian islands, African chieftainries and Amerindian settlements. Thus, they cause a vagueness with these places which were neither oriental nor developed as the Asiatic states in question, namely Turkey, India, and China (*ibid.*, 485). As a result, he proposes the term AMP should be given the decent burial it deserves.

The second argument of the AMP is the tax-rent couple thesis, which depends on the following paragraph written by Marx about the role of the state:

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<sup>7</sup> According to Krader (1975, 313-314), although contemporary writers emphasize property ownership in the AMP discussions, and Roe, Methold and Bernier emphasized “the formal-juridical question of ownership and possession of the land” Marx’s main question was the allocation of the surplus product and the extraction of surplus value. As Krader’s view is not a generally accepted one (see for example, Anderson 1974, 473), I will discuss both aspects, that is the lack of property and the tax-rent couple in this paper.

“Should the direct producers not be confronted by a private landowner, but rather, as in Asia, under direct subordination to a state which stands over them as their landlord and simultaneously as sovereign, then rent and taxes coincide, or rather there exists no tax which differs from this form of ground rent. Under such circumstances there need exist no stronger political or economic pressure than that common to all subjection to that state. The state is then the supreme lord. Sovereignty here consists in the ownership of land concentrated on a national scale. But on the other hand, no private ownership of land exists, although there is private and common possession and use of land” (Marx 1962, 791).

This paragraph has the merit of differentiating between ownership and possession and thus is very important for understanding the development of the property rights. In the following section, I will discuss this problem with specific reference to the Ottoman Empire. Here, I will just note the criticisms against this formulation (Berktaş 1987 and 1992; Haldon 1992 and 1993) that tax and rent do not form a distinction between the modes of production and only are the expressions of political-juridical forms. Moreover, Haldon (1993, 82) argues that there are not modal differences as the state in the West also depended on a form of tax, similar to the East. For example, when Anderson (1974a, 35) writes about the “centralized feudal rent” as opposed to the “local feudal rent” in the French context, what is at stake is not totally different from the “Eastern” context.

It is interesting that, although Anderson rejects the AMP thesis, he retains the tax-rent couple thesis and an emphasis on the political-juridical relations. In this section, after summarizing his arguments, I will try to discuss criticisms of Wickham and Wood against Anderson’s theory. Anderson (1974a, 417), while arguing for discarding the AMP thesis, does not accept extension of feudalism to the East as feudalism for him is nothing but a specific Romano-Germanic synthesis. He argues that because of the problems of the term AMP and the belief in the universality of the successive phases of socio-economic development, Marxists tend to generalize feudalism as a “world-wide phenomenon” and avers that;

“The feudal mode of production is minimally defined in this usage as the combination of large landownership with small peasant production, where the exploiting class extracts the surplus from the immediate producer by customary forms extra-economic coercion- labor services, deliveries in kind, or rents in cash- and where commodity exchange and labor mobility are correspondingly restricted” (Anderson 1974a, 401).

Anderson criticizes the adherents of this “minimal usage”, as they divorce political and legal superstructures from the economic infrastructure. He argues that in this way, the specificity of the European feudalism, which is characterized with parcellized sovereignty, vassal hierarchy and fief system is neglected. For him these characteristics are the main reasons of the development of industrial capitalism in Europe (*ibid.*, 402). He states that legal, political and ideological superstructures can not be separated from extra-economic coercion of this period. Therefore he rejects extending feudalism to other parts of the world and argues that,

“...the scientific invalidity of this theoretical ecumenism can be demonstrated from the logical paradox in which it results. For if, in effect, the feudal mode of production can be defined independently of the variant juridical and political superstructures which accompany it, such that its presence can be registered throughout the globe wherever primitive and tribal social formations were superseded, the problem then arises: how is the unique dynamism of the European theatre of international feudalism to be explained?...” (Anderson 1974a, 402).

Instead of the AMP or feudalism at the world scale theses, Anderson proposes a taxonomy of the political-legal superstructures of the various modes of production prior to capitalism (*ibid.*, 403). Emphasizing the parcellized sovereignty and enfiefment of West European feudalism, he argues that only Japan had similar “social panorama” comprised of parcellization of sovereignty and scalar property in land, fusion of vassalage, benefice and immunity into a fief system, hereditary ruling class and peasantry bounded to the soil (*ibid.*, 413-14). Nevertheless, according to Anderson (415-421), although Japan witnessed a “march towards industrial capitalism” together with the West, it suffered from the lack of Absolutism, and of a “concatenation of antiquity and feudalism”, therefore, its evolution in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries necessitated an exogenous Western push.

I think this analysis of Anderson suffers from a functionalism which reads back the characteristics of feudalism (or lack of it) from the success (or failure) of industrialism. Besides this, his suggestion of discarding the AMP in favor of a taxonomy of the politico-legal superstructures is utmost problematic and

contradictory with the main thesis of his book.<sup>8</sup> For Anderson, the analysis of Absolutism as a political equilibrium between bourgeoisie and nobility or as the outright dominance of capital as suggested by Marx and Engels is not satisfactory. He argues that the end of serfdom does not mean the disappearance of feudal relations, defined as “private extra-economic coercion, personal dependence and combination of the immediate producer with the instruments of production”. According to Anderson, “so long as aristocratic agrarian property blocked a free market in land and factual mobility of manpower... rural relations of production remained feudal” (*ibid.*, 17). Although here, he emphasizes a political economy definition of feudalism, when it comes to analyzing the specific differences of European feudalism, he turns back to political-juridical characteristics demoting the former into a “minimal definition”. Then why and how can feudalism *per se* and Absolutism, which depended on different settings of political-juridical relations, can be argued to be both feudal?

Another very interesting problem of Anderson is this. As mentioned above, the most important reason of his rejection of the AMP thesis is the mismatch between an entirely self-sustaining small community and the hydraulic state. In so doing, he criticizes the studies of late Marx who questioned a direct transition from the Russian village commune to socialism (Anderson 1974a, 488-489). What is striking here is that Anderson criticizes late Marx with reference to Indian villages, which depended on the castes, and proves that these cannot form an appropriate route towards socialism. Anderson argues that in this instance not Marx but Hegel was more illuminating.<sup>9</sup> But, his analysis takes Marx’s analysis in a distorted manner since Marx does not theorize on transition to socialism from a system of rural communities and the cast system, but from a relatively undifferentiated Russian rural community. That is to say, it is impossible to disprove Marx with reference to Indian villages as he refers specifically to

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<sup>8</sup> Anderson’s functionalism and his suggestion for a taxonomy for the East are closely related. When it comes to the West, Anderson (1974b, 129-130) rejects any taxonomy and avers that “a *typology* of European feudalism is necessary- rather than a mere *pedigree*”.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson’s footnote (*ibid.*, 489) with reference to Hegel is as follows: “*The Philosophy of History*, pp. 150-61. Hegel, tranquilly affirming that ‘equality in civil life is something absolutely impossible’ and that ‘this principle leads us to put up with variety of occupations, and distinctions of the classes to which they are entrusted’, nevertheless could not contain his revulsion against the Indian caste system, in which ‘the individual belongs to such a class by *birth*, and is bound to it for life. All the concrete vitality that makes its appearance sinks back into death. A chain binds down the life that was just upon the point of breaking forth.’ (p. 152)”.

Russian *obshinnoe*.<sup>10</sup> To claim that there can be a route towards socialism from all village communities could be as legitimate as arguing that all European feudalisms show an equal tendency towards capitalism. In doing so, Anderson easily gets rid of late Marx's work. Late Marx's arguments, which were shaped by the expectations about a Russian revolution<sup>11</sup> (his letters to Vera Zasulic) might be right or wrong. However, here the real problem is, as seen in many other arguments of his book, Anderson's distortion of the realities (and here Marx's arguments) in order to put history into the straight jacket of his theory. In this instance, Anderson simply brushes Marx's questioning of the possibility of a historical evolution without taking recourse to a bourgeois revolution under the rug, just to legitimize his theory which prioritizes the bourgeois revolutions (together with the argument that the bourgeois revolutions should be against Absolutisms).

Last but not least, Anderson's arguments such as the lack of artisan guilds in Islamic cities (*ibid.*, 504), lack of esteem for trade of Turkic successors (*ibid.*, 516 and 376) are simply and plainly go against factual evidence.<sup>12</sup> As one of his claimed aims in writing this book was to produce an alternative theory as opposed to Marxist philosophers writing at a distance from the specific empirical issues posed by the historians (*ibid.*, 7), these misinterpretations strain his analyses on the AMP.

Rejecting the AMP thesis and suggesting a taxonomy for the East with reference to superstructural elements is not an innovation of Anderson. For example, Rodinson (1979; Byres 1985, 14-15) adopts an in-between approach in

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<sup>10</sup> Marx does not even speak of the transition from all type of Russian village communes but stresses the *obshinnoe* type of village communes. Although "structurally and functionally different from one locality to another" (Watters 1968, 137) there were two types of communes in Russia: First, the most wide-spread one, the one with periodic quantitative repartition (*obshinnoe*); and the second, the one with hereditary household tenure (*podyornoe*), mostly in western and southwestern *guberniias* (Seton-Watson 1985, 45).

<sup>11</sup> For Hobsbawm (1989, 49), "No misinterpretation of Marx is more grotesque than the one which suggests that he expected a revolution exclusively from the advanced industrial countries of the West."

<sup>12</sup> These arguments contradict with other information Anderson gives in his book. For example, he writes that, "At its apogee under Suleiman I in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, the Osmanli realm was the most powerful Empire in the world. Overshadowing his nearest European rival, Suleiman I enjoyed a revenue twice that of Charles V" (*ibid.*, 365). The source of this revenue was the Eastern trade which continued until the seventeenth century when Mediterranean trade started to lose its significance.

the debates of whether the AMP or feudalism holds for the East. Instead of choosing a side, he prefers to recognize an infinitive variety of the modes of production.<sup>13</sup> Or Amin's tributary mode of production which was devised as a substitute for the AMP also reproduces the European feudalism as a super-structurally different form of the tributary mode of production, thus enabling both a political economy definition on a global scale and endless superstructural varieties added onto it (Haldon 1993, 66-67; Berktaş 1987, 299).

Chris Wickham criticizes Anderson's denial of the existence of feudalism in (and his suggestion in favor of a taxonomy for) the rest of the world, and argues that feudalism did exist in the whole world but it did not dominate the non-western social formations. Anderson, lacking a conception differentiating mode of production and social formation, Wickham argues, could not analyze this properly (Wickham 1994a, 12n). Moreover, he criticizes Anderson's super-structuralist approach arguing that European classic feudalism was far from being universal even for medieval Christian western European systems (*ibid.*, 33; Wickham 1994b, 46). Wickham (1994b, 45), on the other hand, rejects the infinite variety thesis which can easily result from a mode of production/social formation analysis. Instead, he emphasizes a political economy approach and argues that surplus-appropriation methods are limited to a few basic types, such as "slavery, rent-taking (either 'feudal', i.e. backed up by coercion, or determined by market forces), tribute and taxation, wage-labor, the manipulation of the petty commodity market". For him, feudalism cannot be taken as "fiefs, vassals and military service" as Anderson does in a way which Wickham argues to be non-Marxist. Therefore, emphasizing landowning and coercive rent-taking, he argues that feudalism was a world system which unified Capetian France and *Ancien Regime* France and Russia and Sung China and Qajar Iran and the late Roman Empire and modern Guatemala (*ibid.*, 47).

Wickham (*ibid.*, 49) thinks that the AMP thesis has also "too many institutions arbitrarily attached to it" such as the "private-justice-and-serfdom-and-labor-service" version of the feudal mode. However, when it comes to the differences between the western and non-western civilizations, he reproduces the

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<sup>13</sup> "If labels are needed, I would suggest the following terms: 'modes of production in which there is exploitation', adding, as appropriate, the adjective 'communal' or 'individual'. The corresponding economic systems could be called in general, 'pre-capitalist systems of exploitation', and categories could be distinguished among them, if need be, by means of expressions such as: predominantly communal (or individual), predominantly agrarian (pr pastoral), etc." (Rodinson, 1979, 66).

formula of Anderson and Amin formula in other terms. He argues that Eastern societies with their tax-raising systems in contradistinction to the coercive rent taking character of the West, makes a different system (*ibid.*, 72). Accompanying this “economic” difference, he also emphasizes the privatization of the power as a *differentia specifica* of the West (*ibid.*, 73). In the Ottoman context, he argues that the tax-raising system together with the lack of the privatization of power was determining (*ibid.*, 65). His only difference was his agreeing to the existence of the feudal elements in the Ottoman Empire and his arguments that this system can only be an “unusually developed economic and political system”, though he does not reject that this system can be the most primitive of social forms (*sic*) (*ibid.*, 65-66).

I will finish this section with reference to the original AMP interpretation of Ellen Meiksins Wood. For Wood (1994, 1995), the critical element of Marxism is its insistence on the historical specificity of capitalism and this gives rise to its superiority over classical political economy which takes the logic of capitalism as granted. Nevertheless, the latter’s assumptions are also embraced by some varieties of Marxism, which interpret the evolution of capitalism as the growth of already existing seeds of trade and markets and which adopted technological determinism as the key to historical evolution, taking the markets as opportunities instead of imperatives. For this type of Marxisms, Wood (1994, 18-19) argues: “The change was rather in what happened to the forces and institutions- political, legal, cultural, and ideological as well as technical- that had impeded the natural evolution of trade and the maturation of markets.” Instead, she proposes an emphasis on the specific social property relations and the specific mode of exploitation that determine these specific laws of motion.” In these terms, Wood’s works are very important critiques of Anderson.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of the AMP thesis, Wood does not accept that this thesis should be discarded as Anderson suggests, although there has never been a perfect representative of this social type. For Wood (1995, 34), the AMP represents the polar opposite of the capitalist mode of production, and as such it “must still be taken seriously”. In this view, the existence of landed property in China is not important as it was a perquisite of office in the “Asiatic state,” and the important

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<sup>14</sup> Wood’s *Pristine Culture of Capitalism* was mostly devoted to a critique of Anderson and Nairn. Be it precocious development of English capitalism, the emphasis on the French absolutism, the significance of the Roman law, French revolutionary ideology, the superior qualities of French classicism or sociology, whatever the latter writers argue receives its share from Wood’s criticisms.

relation is the one between private property and political power. The peculiarity of the Western feudalism in this regard is, in line with Wickham, privatization not fragmentation or parcellization of power. For her (*ibid.*, 37),

“The state power whose fragmentation produced Western feudalism had already been substantially privatized, located in private property. The form of imperial administration that preceded feudalism in the West, built upon the foundations of a state already grounded in private property and class rule, was unique in that imperial power was exercised not so much through a hierarchy of bureaucratic officials in the manner of the ‘Asiatic’ state, but through what has been described as a confederation of local aristocracies, a municipal system dominated by local private proprietors whose property endowed them with political authority as well as the power of surplus appropriation”.

According to Wood, although the power of the feudal lord to direct production was far from complete, in the West a considerable step was taken towards the integration of surplus extraction and the organization of production. She argues that the property of the feudal lord was not absolute but this does not change the fact that feudalism represents a great leap forward in terms of the authority of the private property. “In fact, the conditional nature of feudal property was in a sense a hallmark of its strength, not a sign of weakness, since the condition on which the lord held his land was that he must become a fragment of state invested with the very functions that gave him the power of surplus extraction” (*ibid.*, 39). The significance of these lines is obvious and in the following section on the Ottoman state, I will discuss specific issues on property and the power relations of the state and the lords.

### **A Brief History of the Agrarian Relations of the Ottoman Empire**

In the rest of this paper, I will try to discuss the theses of the AMP with reference to the Ottoman Empire. In the first half, I will briefly summarize the agrarian property structure of the Ottoman Empire. In the second half, I will discuss the theses of some new contributions (among others Berktaş 1987 and 1992; Haldon 1992 and 1993; Inan 1991b and 1994) to the Ottoman debates.

According to Huri Inan (1991b, 57-58): “a central issue confronting the students of the Ottoman agriculture is that of explaining the underlying mechanisms that were responsible for the persistence of the independent peasantry.” The generally held explanation on this subject is the state’s determination in protecting its fiscal base. This can be taken as among the



common characteristics of the absolutist states. “It was perhaps not a coincidence that Serbia, Morea, Wallachia, Moldavia and one might add Egypt, areas in which merchants and large landlords stood to benefit most” from greater world market orientation were to secede from the Empire (Pamuk 1987, 8). Also, the state had to protect the independent peasantry in order to “prevent the formations of rival nodes of authority” (Keyder 1991, 10). Lastly, the independent peasantry was also the basis of the central state’s political legitimacy (Inan 1991b, 59).

The Ottoman agriculture at its peak in the sixteenth century was based on the institution of the *timar* system. The essence of the system was land grants to the *sipahi* class (warrior class) (*timar*), to the high bureaucrats (*zeamet*) and to the Sultan and the members of the imperial family (*has*). The *timar* holders collected revenue from the farmers (tax-rent couple) and they had to provide the military necessities of the state, such as cavalymen with full equipment according to the size of the land. “The sipahis or timariots lived on their estates and had a certain jurisdiction over their peasants, including the right to compel those who left, to return –but they were under much stricter supervision from the central government than was the case in Europe, and their land was subjected to periodic surveys for tax purposes” (Issawi 1982, 137). In the *timar* system land grants were not formally hereditary but there was an increasing tendency towards assigning the same land to the heirs, sometimes to a widow (*ibid*). But the state took measures, in its ideal form, to prevent the *timars* turning into feudal property. For example, the villages were given to the holders not as a whole but were divided into different *timars* (Timur 1989, 25-26). Also the jurisdictional rights of the *timar* holders were limited. On the whole, in Islamic law (*Shari’a*) village communities had recourse to a body of legal doctrine which could be interpreted by the *ulama* to defend their customary rights to land. As a result, except in Syrian and Iraqi provinces tax and rent collecting landlords were not able to “enclose” even after the land code of 1858 (Keyder 1911, 11). The *timar* system was not limited to the agriculture, but revenues from mines, urban property<sup>15</sup> etc. were also included in the system (Islamoglu and Keyder 1987, 392).

The expansion of the Ottoman Empire came to a halt in the sixteenth century creating an enormous burden on the state finance. To exacerbate the revenue crisis of the state, the trade routes changed in the seventeenth century and Ottoman lands lost their significance in the world trade. At the same time, the Ottoman state could not cope up with the changing conditions of warfare. On the

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<sup>15</sup> The urban properties and the real estate can also be given as *timars* in some provinces (Marcus 1985).

other hand, in the same period Europe was witnessing a ‘price revolution’, which had significant consequences for Ottoman lands. The inflation was imported as merchants found it more profitable to sell the basic staples abroad, rendering the state powerless as “contraband carried the day” (Inan 1991b, 50). Also, in the second half of the century, the population increased and despite some productivity growth in Ottoman agriculture<sup>16</sup> (*ibid.*, 68), the conditions of the people worsened resulting in Celali uprisings between 1590 and 1650.

The result of the growing weakness of the state was the rising power of the *ayans* (local lords). In order to find a solution to the revenue crisis, the state introduced tax-farming system (*iltizam*) as a widespread policy in the seventeenth century. Before this, the *iltizam* system “had been confined to certain sources of revenue such as customs dues, the poll-tax levied on non-Muslims and the sheep tax. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the *iltizam* system was applied to the traditional agricultural tax (*osr*) as well. Revenues on imperial domains, on *waqfs* (pious foundations), estates, on former timar land were all farmed out” (Islamoglu and Keyder 1987, 58). As the lands were farmed out for short time periods, the tax-farmers were trying to squeeze maximum revenue from the lands without regarding the future productivity. To prevent the land exhaustion, the state in 1695 extended the period to the life time basis (*malikane*). These were not only for lifetime, but also the heirs of the *malikane* owners had preferential rights. The increase in the power of the *ayans* culminated in 1808 by *Sened-i Ittifak*, which recognized the rights of the *ayans*, though the property rights were not declared legally until the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Another development of the eighteenth century was the emergence of the commercial estates (*ciftliks*). “Large *ciftliks* were established in the Balkans, in Thrace (supplying the Istanbul market) and in Western Anatolia where Izmir developed from a coastal town to a major port of export trade within a century” (*ibid.*, 59). In *ciftliks* cash crop cultivation started. But the period between 1600 and 1800 was of population decline so to find labor was an important problem. Enserfed peasantry and sharecroppers and sometimes slaves were recruited in the *ciftliks*. Generally, it is accepted that *ciftliks* prevailed in the Balkans. “In Anatolia, where commodity production for long distance markets remained more limited, local elements did appropriate a greater part of the surplus as the relative

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<sup>16</sup> According to Inan (1994, 13) at the peak of its power Ottoman state system was successful in its endeavor to prevent the sale of peasant plots. However, this cannot be taken as barriers to increases in agricultural productivity, as production increased mainly in response to the state demands of taxation.

power of the central bureaucracy declined” (Pamuk 1987, 89). Even in Izmir, the most commercialized region in Anatolia, free peasantry prevailed, the *ayans* contented with tax collection and large holdings were limited (*ibid.*, 100). It is also argued that even the *ciftliks* in the Balkans were different from the East European large farms. “It was attempts to overtax rather than the enserfment of the peasantry which characterized the Balkan *ciftlik* (Keyder 1991, 8). As labor was hard to find, *ciftlik* owners, when possible, turned their farms into cattle ranches and dairy farms (*mandira*) and even in the *ciftliks* there was no monoculture (İnalçik 1911, 27-28). As a result, the *ciftlik* system increased the burden of the peasantry but generally left the way of production unchanged (Veinstein, 1911, 43; Keyder 1990, 20).

The formation of large estates, other than usurping the land of the *reaya*, can be formed by the land grants of *miri* origin to the persons. These lands were turned into *waqfs* again without changing the organization of production (Keyder 1911, 19). Also lands of *mevat* origin (uncultivated lands) were turned into big estates after *reclamation* (*senlendirme* or *ihya*), and when these changes occurred, “*cifthane* as a system continued to exist as the predominant organization of agricultural lands” under the *malikane* system (*ibid.*, 23). Another form of large estates was the state farms specialized in rice production. At that time, there were three social groups which were able to afford being tax-farmers; “merchants (usurers included), local notables, highly placed patrimonial bureaucrats” (Sunar 1911, 71). Their revenue sources were export trade and the farming out of state revenues such as “collection of *salgun* taxes, the recruiting of troops and collection of provisions and livestock for the army and credit transactions. Their abuses in the collection of taxes such as ‘right of *aghalik*’... was a convenient way to maximize their profits” (Veinstein 1991, 51). However, the position of the *ayans* was generally precarious. They were faced with the opposition of the primary *multezims*, the *reaya* and of most importance, of the state (*ibid.*, 52). The state always prioritized confining the commercial production only to the reclaimed lands (wastelands) and to the state farms (Inan 1991b, 63).

After 1808, the *ayans* came quickly to be on the falling side. Mahmud II eliminated the military power of the *ayans* and initiated military and administrative reforms. “But he failed to provide an adequate tax basis for a sustained process of innovations on the one hand, and to pay simultaneously for wars and court and cultural life on the other” (Sunar 1991, 79). In 1826 together with the elimination of moneylenders, the janissaries were dissolved at a time when the country needed the military prowess most because of an imminent war

risk. The reason perhaps lied in the janissaries' turning into an obstacle for the Sultan's radical interference in internal matters. Some of the *janissaries* and *aghass* were *ciftlik* owners and were dealing heavily with contraband trade (Timur 1989, 171). The official explanation of the dissolution of the janissaries was the latter's seizing an important portion of the state revenues, thus forcing the sultan to confiscations. Yet, even if the Sultan declared the abolition of the confiscations in 1828, they started again after 1831 when the timar system was formally abolished. "Lands which reverted to the central government were then leased to *multezim* for tax collection purposes (Pamuk 1991, 87). Nevertheless, in this period 25 % of the cultivable land belonged to the *waqfs* and they were left untouched in the 1830s. Though large holdings declined towards the mid-nineteenth century, there were about twenty thousand seasonal wage workers hired annually (*ibid.*, 93).

With the tax-farming system the burden over the peasants increased. As mentioned above, the landholders did not change the way of production but only demanded extra payments. This was the main reason of the peasant disturbance in the Balkans enmeshed with the nationalistic feelings. Consequently, in 1839 Tanzimat period aimed at overcoming "the resistance of the landholding groups and the nationalistic movements of the Balkans on the one hand, and the obstacles to reform posed within the bureaucracy by provincial governors (*pashas*, generals) and other high-ranking officials who were poorly paid and therefore allowed or forced to engage in corruption by withholding revenue from the state on the other" (Sunar 1991, 79). Though the *Rescript of Tanzimat* abolished *corvée*, it also confirmed and reinforced the rights of the landowners on land" (Inalcik 1991, 31).

After 1839, tithes were fixed at 10 percent collected in kind. The state, while trying to protect the free peasantry, at the same time taxed them heavily causing an excessive dependence of the peasants to the usurers. The state was against large holdings which were producing and selling according to the economic calculations. As a result, this increased the dependency of landholders to sharecropping, and usury became the most widespread vehicle to put the peasants to work.

Another important development was the Free Trade Treaty with England in 1838. This Treaty is generally taken as a promoter of Ottoman Empire's peripheralization (Keyder 1990, 30). It should be added that the expansion of the Ottoman trade did not start with the Treaty but earlier in the 1820s. The Treaty levied a 12% tax on exports and 3% tax on imports. This sounds rather strange as the state did not content with not protecting the industry of the empire but seemed

to impede its development. The state established factories by its own in order to supply some indispensable goods, especially in the 1840s but most of them were closed down in the 1850s.

Private property in land was recognized with the 1858 Land Code arguably through the influences of foreign pressure, especially that of Britain. "The central provisions of the Code were that all land was to be registered in individual and not collective ownership (thus facilitating direct taxation) and that usufructuary title would be granted to those who would prove continuous occupation. In Turkey, the result was the transfer of the bulk of the land into the hands of the peasants, and consequently an increase in the wages rendering any capitalist investment infeasible. "This was a fatal blow to the industry and capitalist farming. In the 1860s an average annual wage could have bought several acres of land and two to four draft animals" (Issawi 1982, 146). However, there were large estates especially in Izmir-Aydin and Adana and Salonica regions. The Land Code was extended in 1867, allowing also the foreigners to own lands.

After 1854, Ottoman State increasingly relied on external borrowing. For the repayment, there was no choice other than making the peasants pay at least the interest of the debt. When the state declared default in 1876, the Ottoman Public Debt Administration even excluded the intermediary processing of the Porte and handled directly with the peasantry (Keyder 1990, 37). The peasantry was fed up with the high taxes and also the country witnessed national problems and devastating wars until the First World War. Between 1906 and 1908 riots shook important cities such as Erzurum, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Van, Kayseri, Sivas, Kastamonu, Ankara, Trabzon and Sinop (Kars 1984, 18) and the Balkans. Among the demands of the rioters there were the abolition of certain taxes and the demands for the recognition of their participation in the local financial matters. These had serious consequences enabling the party of the Union and Progress to come to power in 1908, which according to some writers (see for example, Kansu 1997) paved the way for the unmediated bourgeois rule in Turkey.

### **The AMP in the Ottoman Empire**

As it may be easily inferred from the above section, the history of the Ottoman Empire provides contradictory remarks for the AMP. On the one hand, the role of the state has always been prominent with its main aim being to protect its tax base, i.e. the independent peasantry. Likewise, the evolution of the Ottoman property rights structure cannot be claimed to be congruent with an evolution that

leads to the development of an agrarian capitalism. On the other hand, this history is not identical with a stagnant history as it is often argued by the AMP thesis. Not only the agricultural productivity was not stagnant and witnessed significant increases even in the sixteenth century (see Inan 1994), but also the system always depended on a tension between the ‘centrifugal forces’ and the state.<sup>17</sup> These centrifugal forces, which were blamed by the State resources for the hardships lived in the Empire, were always visible rendering the basic tenets of the AMP questionable, especially the assumptions about the absence of hereditary nobility and the lack of private property in land.

As for the absence of nobility, it can be argued that the timar holders that formed the spine of the system at its peak were different from ordinary multezims or tax-farmers. The former category, until it was overshadowed by the latter, had enjoyed extraordinary legal powers, some of which were not different from the European feudalism’s “privatization of sovereignty”. Hence, despite the conventional wisdom sufficing with taking the religious law and Sultan’s law at their face value and arguing their influence on delaying the establishment of property rights, the actual mechanism was more complicated than this.

For example, for Anderson (1974a, 425), the distinctive characteristic of Western Europe compared to the Eastern civilizations and even to Japan was the transformation of the conditional private property into the absolute private property during Renaissance. He attributes a great role to the Western landowning mobility in this process and argues that:

“In the long transitional epoch in which land remained quantitatively the predominant source of wealth across the continent, the consolidation of an unrestricted and hereditary private property in it was a fundamental step towards the release of the necessary factors of production for the accumulation of capital proper. The very ‘vinculism’ which the European aristocracy displayed in the early modern age was already evidence of the objective pressures towards a free market in land that was ultimately to generate a capitalist agriculture. Indeed, the

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<sup>17</sup> Also a very important characteristic of the AMP debates in the context of the Ottoman Empire is its equation of the centralist Ottoman state and the Anatolian territory. Even if we accept that there was AMP in the Ottoman Empire this does not necessarily translate into AMP in Anatolia. The other Turkic principalities in Anatolia which depended on the rule of their landlord classes continued to live until the seventeenth century, much later than the peak days of the Ottoman centralism when the centralist system started to dissolve. In these principalities all land belonged to the entire ruling family, and even if we are to accept the thesis, it was only the Ottoman State to institutionalize a system monopolizing all power in the hands of a single ruler (see Köprülü 1992).

legal order born of the revival of Roman law created the *general* juridical conditions for a successful passage to the capitalist mode of production as such, in both town and country. The security of ownership and fixity of contract, the protection and predictability of economic transactions between individual parties assured by a written civil law was never repeated elsewhere. Islamic law was at best vague and uncertain in matters of real estate; it was inextricably religious and therefore confused and contentious in interpretation ...” (*ibid*).

The other problematic arguments in this paragraph, such as capitalist agriculture in Europe, which owes to the “vinculum” of the European aristocracy and the significance of Roman law as abating the transition towards capitalism notwithstanding (these lines are amply criticized in Brenner’s and Wood’s work), the functionalism of Anderson’s approach towards the rise of absolute private property needs further discussion. As mentioned above, Wood (1995, 39) does not accept the “rise of the absolute private property” thesis, and argues that feudal property depended on conditional as well as absolute notions of property. She adds that “the conditional nature of feudal property was in a sense a hallmark of its strength, not a sign of its weakness, since the condition on which the lord held his land was that he must become a fragment of the state invested with the very functions that gave him the power of surplus extraction.”

In line with Wood’s criticism and against Anderson, Sugarman (1983, 224) criticizes the functionalism of the arguments which prioritize the rise of absolutist private property in the transition to capitalism. Although formulated with the same essence but in different forms by different authors (“rise of absolute private property” or “the shift from status to contract”), these arguments, Sugarman (*ibid.*, 226) argues, “give legal form an active *functional* role in shaping social order”. However, the “rise of private property” has been more complex and contradictory than that depicted in these formulations. “What these accounts tend to de-emphasize is the continued importance of the *institution* of property as a ‘bundle of rights’ i.e. a range or hierarchy of different rights vested perhaps in different people co-existing in the same piece of land or goods, which qualified the use of enjoyment of property” (*ibid.*, 227). Sugarman avers that not absolute and categorical but flexible and functional institutions of property suited best to the interests of the landed class. This renders Anderson’s claim that the Islamic law “was at best vague and uncertain” debatable. Moreover, Anderson’s “Islamic law” is an extremely crude term. Like the analysis provided by Comninel (1995, 37) for the English case, which emphasizes that the rise of private property in England was the result of a process which was characterized with the curtailment

of customary law and the rise of the common law (Comninel 1995, 37), the “gradations” of the “Islamic law” should be taken into the picture (see also Gran 1979).

Similarly, without taking these “gradations” into consideration, the arguments about the centralist character of the Islamic law are dubious. In the Ottoman Empire, the centralist state did not or could not impose a state-made law from above. Instead, it could only compile local customary law (*orfi hukuk*), “cited it as precedent, codified it, and re-issued it as customary-sultanic law (*hukuk-i padisahi* or *yasag-i padisahi*, where reference to its customary origins is omitted altogether)” (Inan 1994, 24; Berktaş 1992, 133). There were two types of timars; those termed to be *serbest* {free} and those that were not. The former types gave the right to collect certain dues whose most important components were “the crime and murder fines, which symbolized the entire ‘privilege to pursue and arrest criminals, and after having obtained the *kadi* court’s verdict, to implement the sentences passed, including collection of all monetary fines” (*ibid.*, 168n).

Although the state ideology claimed that all of the revenues belonged to the “eminent domain” of the Sultan,<sup>18</sup> the landowner class continued to be powerful until the reign of Murad II (1421-51) and Mehmed II (1451-81). Although the latter confiscated *waqf* lands and some other property during the last years of his reign, these were returned back by his son Bayezid II (1447-1512) (Haldon 1993, 168). Furthermore, together with Selim I (1512-20), the old Turkish nobility started to regain its ancestral holdings as timar grants. They possessed private plots cultivated by day laborers or sharecroppers which were entirely at their private disposal (*ibid.*, 169). Timar holders were also tax collectors, and in exchange, they were given the rights of collection of fines, and receipt of customary prestations of labor, fodder and wood, which enabled them to accumulate considerable fortunes. Moreover, even at the peak of the state power in the sixteenth century, there was a hereditary ruling class, though not a hereditary aristocracy (*ibid.*, 170). Together with the weakening of the Empire in the seventeenth century, they increased their powers and gained the right of passing their position of sipahi (*ruler*) to their sons, which was the last obstacle in front of their rights of possession.

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<sup>18</sup> This is not different in England, as after 1066 William I of England claimed similar rights supported by Papal authority (Haldon 1993, 162).



Moreover, even at times when the state power was at its peak, there were other institutions granting the possession rights of the individuals.<sup>19</sup> First of all, contrary to rural estates, around 75-80% of the urban real estates in many cities were owned privately (the rest belonging to the *waqfs*) (Marcus 1985, 111). This is important as some agricultural properties, such as gardens and orchards were concentrated in towns and suburbs (Anderson 1974a, 502). However, the most important institution in this regard was the *waqf*. The *waqf* estates as corporate religious institutions provided a perfect example of circumventing both the Koranic prescriptions on inheritance for the benefit of a certain kin and sole 'state ownership of land' (Haldon 1993, 177). The *waqfs* represented a distinct set of property rights: the owners "relinquished their formal ownership rights; the property could not be bought, sold, inherited, or granted as a gift, and only in special circumstances could it be returned to private ownership" (Marcus 1985, 112). However, in this way, the owners could prevent confiscations of the state, and continue to enjoy the usufruct of the land. In exchange, they had to take over some charitable functions, which can range from some welfare services towards the poor to providing fodder for birds when it snowed (Köprülü 1992, 64). Although the fiscal privileges of the *waqfs* did not represent absolute privileges, they "were constantly subject to the exigencies of power struggles between the beneficiaries of these *waqfs* and the central state" (Inan 1994, 4).

In the Ottoman debates, two trends, one criticizing the other rejecting the AMP, determine the tone of the debates. I will finish this section with a long quote from Haldon (1993, 182-183) summarizing the latest conventions of the Ottoman scholarship.

"In all these developments, it is important to realize that the absence of juridically-defined private property, the continued possibility for the Sultan arbitrarily to confiscate fortunes and wealth amassed during a career at court, the lack of sanction for privately-held estates and the absence of a formal, titled nobility, are all phenomena belonging properly to the political arena of Ottoman state practice, without, of course, wishing to deny that they provided also both the context for the institutional forms which the Ottoman landed elite took, as well as the ideological authority for the Sultan to intervene directly in economic relations. And we have already seen, this 'absence' was in practice, for much of the time, a reflection of the Ottoman state theory: particularly in the period before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, but also thereafter, it is clear that effective possession of lands, and therefore control over the incomes to be

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<sup>19</sup> For a similar analysis on the ban over the interest in the Ottoman Empire see Rodinson 1979.

derived from them, was in the hands of a fluctuating provincial elite made up of *timar-holders*, tax-farmers, those dependent upon the income from pious foundations and, from the later sixteenth century on, members of the regional notables, the *ayan*” (Haldon 1993, 181-182).

## Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to discuss the viability of the AMP thesis to understand the development of capitalism in the East and the West. This conceptualization suffers from important weaknesses. First of all, there are problems with Marx’s formulation, which conceived the AMP both as historical and geographical concepts. While the former conceptualization takes the AMP as the first stage of the historical progress, the latter one emphasizes the lack of progress. These two are contradictory as the AMP, which was taken as the most primitive one in the historical stage of evolution, was also depicted at the same time as change-proof against the factors other than external ones. Also, this formulation causes other inconsistencies; it is unknown whether we have to compare the AMP with capitalism or feudalism. It is not clear whether we are talking about an eternal AMP in the East or whether it has any time constraints. Second, there are problems with the content of the AMP thesis as it depends both on self-sustaining small community and the so-called hydraulic state arguments. Again these arguments are inconsistent as the former presupposes a primitive mode of production while the other one necessitates a complex social organization.

However, the arguments suggesting “burying” the AMP thesis are also problematic. Most notably Anderson’s suggestion for a taxonomy of the politico-legal superstructures in the East is questionable and incongruent with the basic thesis of his book, namely the feudal character of the Absolutist state. If we are to prioritize politico-legal structures, how could we argue that French feudalism per se and Absolutist state which depended on different set of politico-legal relations can both be taken as feudal? If we are to accept his contention that, “so long as aristocratic agrarian property blocked a free market in land and factual mobility of manpower ... rural relations of production remained feudal” (Anderson 1974a, 17), why will not we question the validity of these lines for the East as well?

A study of the Ottoman Empire in this regard gives us some contradictory results for the AMP. On the one hand, there are some clear differences between the English agrarian capitalism and development of Ottoman property rights. The economic and political viability as well as the ideological legitimacy of the State

depended on the “persistence of the independent peasantry”. However, all of these depend on an “ideal image” disseminated by the State itself which did not suit to the realities even at the peak of the State power. This renders the other basic variables of the AMP thesis in the Ottoman context, i.e. the lack of hereditary nobility and private property in land questionable. It seems that we urgently need more studies to answer these questions.

Lastly, it should be stated that, the problems with the AMP thesis do not necessitate discarding the term altogether. Late Marx’s contention that we have to theorize on alternative historical evolutions continues to be a high-priority task ahead of us.

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