To understand and evaluate the contemporary architecture of Iran needs a multi-disciplinary study encompassing the many social disruptions that have occurred both in the past and during the recent history of this country, where invasions have occurred and which has often been confronted with periods of autocratic rule. As a matter of fact, if we believe that architecture cannot be dissociated from its social and political contextual roots, we need to look at what notions of identity, culture, tradition and history it represents.

To comprehend the past we must develop some dialectic empathy with its relationship to present-day Iran, whose culture is based essentially on metaphysical concepts, and which is being confronted in the modern times with new Western values: scientism, rationalism and new economic considerations of world geo-politics. Such confrontations have, throughout history, led to an erosion and disintegration of traditional forms and customs.

In the West, the rationalization of knowledge, followed by its demythologization, led to the secularization of thought and, consequently, to the crumbling of metaphysical values. This movement in human thought, bolstered in the 20th century by its scientific and economic supports, was becoming the reference, model and point of convergence for most countries. In fact, over the last centuries, the struggle against poverty, injustice and oppression in the West appeared as a beacon for emerging societies, considering the fact that right up to the present most emerging Third World countries have still been burdened with social disorder. However, while the Western model remained in mind, the access to or desire for so-called emancipation still had to factor in different basic cultural confrontations.

These confrontations, based on differences in customs and mores, also had to stand against politically radical interpretations that were directly opposed to the basic enlightened interpretations of the new emancipated era. Much has been written about Islam’s supposed resistance to modernization. But such a view is an easy dismissal of deeper issues that are to do with political circumstances beyond social and cultural control. Maybe one of the main reasons for this cultural confrontation lies not in a rejection of modernity or modernization, but in an awareness of what is happening to the West, where local and cultural identities are being overshadowed by an all-pervading commercial and severe rational culture.

It is clear that today an awareness in emergent societies has occurred and new analysis has brought forth critical viewpoints. An encroaching economic market culture has in some way fragmented the emancipated context for which the West has so perseveringly fought. Today, notions of tradition or identity, while threatening to stagnation threats, are also, in face of a prosperous West, seen as a kind of salvation towards the anxiety of political cynicism through commercial interests and exchanges. The distortion in views, facts and dreams, has created a multifaceted alienation for the evaluation of whatsoever could be called emancipated, advanced or modern.

While this dichotomy in beliefs remains, new theories of universalism and globalization in general benefit from humankind’s numerous competencies and scientific progress. Closed, cramped boundaries of the past have been replaced by a virtual context in which contact and dialogue are tempered by the pace of different tolerant philosophical attitudes.