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'Sattelzeit': the invention of 'premodern history' in the 1970s

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ABSTRACT

In her historicisation of the concept of the 'Sattelzeit,' Julia Angster argues that the term does not represent a meaningful definition of a specific historical epoch. Instead, it serves as source material for analysing the notions of West German historians during the 1970s. Although their conception of the 'Sattelzeit' built on the work of R. Koselleck, it simplifies his concept by transforming an analytical tool of conceptual history into a starting point for social history. It enabled the conception of the Western world, understood as the epitome of 'modernity', as a counterpart to a non-modern other. This, in turn, was influenced by modernisation theories developed by US sociology in the 1950s, ultimately aimed at guiding US policies in the 'development' of the 'Third World'. Modernity thus became a political goal and a result of economic development, to be perceived in the European past as well as in the present of the 'developing world'. In the 1970s, this understanding of 'modernity' was crucial for West German historiography and politics, both trying to inscribe themselves into the modern world of the West.

This paper is not about premodern history. It is not concerned with the current field of research on those centuries and millennia that came before, for instance, the French Revolution and the invention of the steam engine. Rather, it is focused on 'modernity' when it is constructed by framing Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern History – periods that cover a vast amount of time and many issues – as a coherent entity: the 'Premodern World', a world whose common denominator is being 'not modern'. During the 1970s, the conventional triad was replaced by a simpler but more profoundly dividing dichotomy: the premodern and the modern periods.[1] The crucial signifier of this new form of periodisation is, obviously, the adjective 'modern', which, just like the noun 'modernity', is an underdefined umbrella term. Definitions tend to list modernity's ingredients and emphasise its distinctness from the premodern way of life. Some, like the Encyclopaedia Britannica, point out the essential aspect of self-perception:

> 'Modernity, the self-definition of a generation about its own technological innovation, governance, and socio-economics. To participate in modernity was to conceive of one's society as engaging in organizational and knowledge advances that make one's immediate predecessors appear antiquated or, at least, surpassed. [...] More specifically, modernity was associated with individual subjectivity, scientific explanation and rationalization, a decline in emphasis on religious worldviews, the emergence of bureaucracy, rapid urbanization, the rise of nation-states, and accelerated financial exchange and communication'.[2]

All definitions of modernity rely on its distinction from traditional forms of society, economy, political order, and worldview, which in turn obtain their moniker 'traditional' by being not modern. This is, of course, a circular argument. The proper value of the term modernity lies in its function: The 'othering' of whole epochs of history gives the modern period – and more so, modernity as a concept – consistency and meaning. The impact of this concept on historiography is vast and largely undertheorised. It needs historicising. In the 1880s, the definition of modernity in the fields of literature, art, and architecture referred to a radical break with traditions and conventions. The definition of modernity as an era of profound transformation of society, politics, economy, and, not least, ideas was only adopted by sociology in the early twentieth century and by historiography in the 1970s and 1980s. In their view, modernity began in Europe, then spread to the so-called rest of the world. This notion of a universal historical epoch is primarily characterised by European concepts and categories, such as political modernity, the individual, or, as James C. Scott has put it: 'the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws'.[3] This concept of modernity was crucial to European and West German historiography until the 1990s, when it started to lose its hegemonic function. First, the concept lost its coherence and its function as a structuring element of periodisation. It fell apart into different versions of itself, such as 'high modernism' or post-, late-, and reflective modernity. How do you deal with an epoch that is characterised by the fact that it leads into the present but has long outlasted its consistency?[4] More crucial and fundamental was another form of criticism: Proponents of postcolonial studies criticised the inherent and blatant Eurocentrism of a concept of universal modernity, rejected its underlying categories and notions, and tried to offer alternatives.[5] This has challenged the core assumptions of European concepts of modernity, historicism, and historical periodisation.[6] The scrutiny and critique from outside Europe have thereby challenged core notions of European national historiographies of the 19th and 20th centuries, not least in Germany, where since the 1970s, notions of modernity and modernisation played a crucial role in the field of 'modern history'.

In this paper, I will analyse the birth, not of the modern world, but instead of the idea of a watershed between the modern and the premodern. This watershed was found in the source material, language, and basic notions of authors writing around 1800. This idea arose in the West during the 1970s and was most influential in West German historiography. It has influenced the writing of modern history but is also shaping university courses, departmental architecture, and research funding.[7] For instance, the University of Tübingen is home to the 'Zentrum Vormodernes Europa',[8] a centre of interdisciplinary research on European societies and culture before 1800. Here, the Premodern Era is explicitly described as the timespan ranging from Antiquity to the '*Sattelzeit*', a time, 'when the foundations were laid upon which European cultures are still resting today'. The term *Sattelzeit* implies a pivotal era around 1800 which marks the onset of the modern world or, rather, a watershed between the premodern and the modern. It was coined by Reinhart Koselleck, a West German historian, in the early 1970s.[9] This concept had a significant impact on German historiography of the modern era, even though it was very much diluted in its implementation. It represents a defining act of historiographical self-interpretation that took place in the 1970s but has its roots in the nineteenth century.[10]

My aim is not to inquire how far back modernity can be traced in earlier periods, for instance, by discussing statehood in the Greek polis or technological prowess and efficient administration of the Roman Empire. Instead, I am interested in some historians' apparent need to define modernity by constructing an 'other'. This other, the Premodern, was perceived by Western scholars between the late 1960s and 1980s as a coherent entity, and it was defined as being non-us, non-now, not-yet-now. From this premodern world arose modernity, a process that began from 1800 onwards and involved 'modernisation', a macro-process uniting social, political, economic, technological, cultural, and scientific strands of development into a holistic new order of things. The driving forces of this process were seen as economic in nature, the main protagonist of this development was 'society', and the result of it all was the present world as seen in the 1970s in the West. This concept of 'modern history' as a story of modernisation, as a fundamental transformation of (European)

societies, offers rich source material for analysing and historicising the notions and self-perceptions of West German historians during those decades. I aim to put this phase of history writing into context in terms of ideas and culture and to analyse the underlying worldview of this phase of West German history writing.

What is intriguing and simultaneously revealing is the apparent nexus of this concept of modernisation to American modernisation theory of the 1950s and 1960s and its impact on Western 'development policy' aimed at postcolonial societies in the global south. I find very similar patterns of differentiation between traditional and modern societies when comparing the historiography of nineteenth-century Europe with modernisation theory and Western perceptions of non-Western societies. The same list of criteria was applied concerning coeval and historical objects of study. In fact, the practices and basic concepts of West German 'modern history' were influenced by notions of tradition and modernity, which were related to and influenced by modernisation theory. This, in turn, was closely tied to development policies in the context of decolonisation but had its roots in much older experiences of imperial interactions. The history of transformation, of 'development' framed as a universal process of modernisation, was applied to dealings with coeval 'underdeveloped' societies in the same way that it was to the analysis of premodern cultures and societies. Both objects of study were seen as a common, traditional 'other' to Europe and the West's 'modern' present. Notions of historicity lead to the othering of non-Western cultures as well as societies of the past. This alterity undergirded a Western sense of self, particularly their role and place in the world.[11]

In this article, I will first introduce the making and the central tenets of the concept of *Sattelzeit*. My focus is on West German historiography in the 1970s. I interpret this construction of modernity as the self-interpretation and worldview of a society trying to inscribe itself into the Western world and its history. In the second part of this paper, I will discuss the importance of modernisation theory, specifically the ideas of development and progress, for this concept of modernity. This theory is based on a categorical distinction between modern and traditional societies, a distinction that derives its criteria from contemporaneous Western features, such as economic growth and science. These are considered universal yardsticks for all humanity, measuring progress and individually assigning to societies past and present their position on the ladder towards modernity, i.e. welfare and knowledge. For postcolonial societies, the result was a 'denial of coevalness,' as Johannes Fabian and Dipesh Chakrabarty have pointed out. Instances of economic and cultural difference were being read as temporal backwardness, as premodern, as 'not-yet like us'. That way, postcolonial societies were being othered and relegated to the 'waiting room of history'[12] by filing them with the last three millennia of global history, an antechamber to humanity's 'take off' into modernity. The term 'premodern' defines a long phase of 'not-yet', a static world of 'traditional' life, applicable to post-colonial Africa as well as to early medieval Europe. Hence, in the 1970s, West German modern historians analysed European societies of the past using notions stemming from current dealings with 'Third World' countries and colonial perspectives of the early nineteenth century.

1. '*Sattelzeit*': the making of 'modernity'

'*Sattelzeit*' is a crucial element of the concept of modern history. *Sattelzeit* (saddle period) imagines the temporal shift between two epochs as a dale or pass found between mountain ranges. This metaphor is used to depict the phase of transition between premodern and modern times and dates the fundamental transformation of Europe between roughly 1750 and 1850. This shifted the boundary between 'old Europe' and Modernity from its established place in 1500 to the decades around 1800. The term *Sattelzeit* was initially coined by Reinhart Koselleck, who casually mentioned it in his introduction to the seven-volume Encyclopaedia '*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*' (Historical Core Concepts), which first began publication in 1972.[13] The term itself is actually quite vague and ambivalent since the German word '*Sattel*' literally means 'saddle' as on a horse's back or between mountain ranges. It is thus open to different readings, be it the metaphor of a mountain saddle or a

mounted rider looking forward and backward in time.[14] What was actually meant was a hinge between two different epochs of history. This is obvious from the purpose of the 'Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe'. The aim of the editors – Werner Conze, Otto Brunner, and Reinhart Koselleck, but primarily the latter – was to identify the transformation between a premodern and a modern world in the changing meaning and usage of 'core concepts' or terms, such as 'state', 'society', 'modern/modernity', 'progress', 'work', 'education', 'rule', 'people/nation/nationalism', 'history', and 'enlightenment', The basic idea of this long-term endeavour was to find the onset of modernity, the beginning of our present, in the use of language and the changing meaning of concepts.[15] This was a novel approach, termed 'Begriffsgeschichte', i.e. conceptual history. It had its basis in social history and the history of ideas. Still, it was not at all intended as a broad overview of the social, political, or cultural history of the decades around 1800. Instead, conceptual history limited itself to analysing the meaning and usage of crucial terms. The idea was to historicise the very idea of modernity. The historical transition between the premodern and modern periods was to be the very object of study, not its limit.[16] Central to Koselleck's endeavour was the historicisation of temporal concepts, of notions of historical time.[17] However, the notion of a Sattelzeit gained a life of its own, strengthening the idea of modernity as an epoch and a state of human development fundamentally different from premodern times, distinguishing modern societies from traditional ones. Sattelzeit became the onset of a historical epoch, the end of which was the researchers' present. In everyday historical work, Sattelzeit thus became synonymous with the very limit of a field of research that Koselleck had meant to bridge.[18]

The idea of an 'Epochenschwelle',[19] a historical watershed around 1800, has been diagnosed in different ways and contexts since the late eighteenth century. The experience of entering a new epoch was voiced repeatedly by contemporaries of the economic and political revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the 1890s, German protestant theologians such as Ernst Troeltsch suggested moving the boundary between the old and new times from the Reformation to the French Revolution. In the 1930s, young conservative historians and intellectuals in interwar Germany established the notion of 1800 as a caesura, but with the premodern past recast as a static, well-ordered, and for that reason, wholesome era.[20] A prominent example is Otto Brunner's notion of Old Europe ('Alteuropa'), which comprised European history from 700 BC to 1800. This timespan was cast as a static and coherent epoch, the coherence of which Brunner saw in a history of ideas linking Homer with Goethe. To him, Alteuropa functioned as a sort of utopian counter-epoch, an intact world against which the age of modernity appeared deficient and degraded.[21] In the eyes of this generation of German historians, around 1800, revolutions, liberalism, and industrialisation had intruded and wrought disorder, which in turn had led to their own experiences of war and turmoil. After 1945, however, this interpretation changed: Now, the very concept of modernity offered reorientation and a moral compass. Modernity, now closely associated with Western liberalism, appeared as the answer to National Socialism, which was initially cast as anti-modern, even atavistic, as a relapse into premodern barbarianism.[22] In 1962, the eminent British historian Eric Hobsbawm published his seminal book on the Age of Revolution.[23] This book was crucial in shaping a European – and Marxist – perspective of the beginning of the modern world in the 'dual revolution' of the French Revolution and the British Industrial Revolution. In this concept of a dual revolution, we find the welding of two distinct processes of economic and political transformation, which, only when taken together, create the idea of a comprehensive, coherent process of progress. Social, economic, and political change were now seen as parts of a coherent, singular process of modernisation. The dual revolution, therefore, causes and marks the beginning of modernity and, together with the Enlightenment, serves as the crucial factor of the so-called Sattelzeit. More recently, the notion of an epochal watershed around 1800 has also been tried on and adopted by global historians, namely by Christopher Bayly. In his Birth of the Modern World, Bayly identified a global wave of revolutionary changes that occurred around 1800, thereby transcending the Eurocentricity of the notion not only of a Sattelzeit but of modernity itself while at the same time keeping the basic temporal dichotomy intact.[24]

As for Europe, the most conspicuous features of this narrative are the revolutions in America and France, which put an end to the Ancien Régime, absolutist rule, the 'society of orders' (Roland Mousnier), and the manorial system. In their place came the formation of a market-based class society, mass production, the emergence of and production for world trade, a global division of labour, and a massive rise in both regional and global mobility. According to this narrative, these events brought about the rise of political modernity. That, in turn, meant a redefinition of statehood, sovereignty, and even the theoretical foundations of legitimate rule. It produced popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, parliamentary government, citizenship, bureaucracy, and, eventually, the formation of the nation-state. This was accompanied by a public sphere based on mass media.[25] Last but not least, the whole package was underpinned by an accelerating scientific revolution, which partly replaced the divine right of rule and gave rise to new societal norms.[26]

In 1970s West Germany, this narrative became a core tenet of a new field of research, promoting a different kind of social history writing termed 'historical social science'. Its most prominent protagonists were Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka, who, in the early 1970s, established themselves at the University of Bielefeld. This research group was known as the Bielefeld School and quickly became the most influential field in West German historiography on the nineteenth century, a position they held into the early 1990s.[27] The school's general aim was, in Wehler's own words:

> 'to explain the complicated process of transformation which transformed, in less than two hundred years, almost two thousand agrarian-early-capitalist, aristocratic-patrician, corporate-absolutist ruling associations of old European Germany into an interventionist-regulated, republican-democratic society of the highly organized industrial capitalism of our time, to describe the main features and, if possible, to explain this transition into a qualitatively new formation of society'.[28]

Here, the concept of *Sattelzeit* was taken up but in an essentialist way. While the aspects of social history inherent in Koselleck's conceptual history were taken up, the history of ideas was omitted. The transition to modernity, which Koselleck had found in the source material and treated as interpretations by authors of the time, was now taken as fact. Modernity itself was reified. Generally, the manifold aspects of change in Europe were seen as driven by economic factors by both Marxist and liberal authors. Hans-Ulrich Wehler's influential narrative of the nineteenth century, specifically, cast the development of capitalism as the central dynamic force of historical development.[29] His concept of society was explicitly framed by economic parameters and formed by market-related classes. Politics, in turn, was seen as 'the fight of economic interest groups for power and domination, within the narrow framework set by socio-economic conditions'.[30] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann argued that to Wehler 'theory' meant the American social sciences of the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, Wehler attached Talcott Parsons to Max Weber, reading their works from a modernisation-theoretical perspective. He then added Jürgen Habermas' normative social theory to the mix. From this vantage point, Wehler produced empirical, archive-based studies searching German society for deficits in political modernity.[31] These deficits were then used to explain Germany's path to National Socialism. This kind of 'critical social historiography' was to serve as a guide to a democratic and modern German society in the present time.[32]

To explain the rise of National Socialism, the notion of a German '*Sonderweg*' (special path) was coined: Germany was seen as deviating from the path towards modernity taken by Western European countries in the nineteenth century. Germany's deviation from this path was due to a deficit of political modernity despite being economically advanced. The nexus between economic and political modernity is a crucial point. German history here is the result of only partial modernisation, of industrialisation without political modernisation. A conservative, illiberal, and non-democratic state fostering an authoritarian political culture in an economically highly modern society led the way to outward military aggression, two world wars, and National Socialism.[33] According to this narrative, the root causes of National Socialism were found in the divergence of the *Deutsche Kaiserreich* (German Empire) from the Western, especially British, path. Around 1970, West

German historians considered nineteenth-century British society, economy, and government a benchmark and a blueprint for modernity.[34] In the 1970s, this idea had become near-canonical. Political modernity thus appeared to West German liberals and social democrats as the entry card to membership in a community of normal, advanced, and civilised Western nations. Crucial for understanding this worldview is the biographical background of the generation coming into influential positions in academia and government: Dirk Moses called them the '1945ers', members of a generation born in the 1920s, strongly influenced by the experience of National Socialism, the Holocaust, allied occupation, and the rebuilding of democracy and civil society during the early Cold War years. This generation rebuilt and shaped post-war Germany between the late 1960s and the 1990s.[35] They understood themselves as part of a transnational, 'Western', and liberal consensus.[36]

The basic idea of modernisation as a universal and benevolent historical process was integral to their outlook and very much part of the West German political reformism of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These reforms led by the centre-left governments aimed at democratisation, liberalisation, and the enhanced participation of West German society. They included legal reforms, educational reforms, infrastructure measures, and, above all, the expansion of social security systems made possible by the high and steady economic growth during the boom phase, which was to be permanently secured through state control ('*Steuerung*') and planning.[37] The concept of 'society' plays a central role and is conceived here as a closed and relatively homogeneous group, divided by economic and class interests but united by a democratic and liberal consensus.[38] In this context, 'society' has a dual function. On the one hand, reformists view society as constructed of a politically, economically, and culturally 'modern' body of citizens while at the same time being the entity that legitimizes and controls the government. In West German political thought around 1970, liberal democratic government was defined as self-government by society in the form of parliamentary decision-making.[39] Therefore, 'society', regarding political theory and practice, was the basic unit of modernisation. We find the same perspective in the social sciences and in historiography, especially at Bielefeld. Modernity and modernisation were core concepts for a very influential group within West German historiography as well as the social-liberal government at the time. Both not only shared a specific view of history that linked the ascent of National Socialism to a deficit of political modernity in nineteenth-century Germany, but they also firmly believed in modernisation as a motor for overcoming this deficit and its terrible consequences.[40] The government's social reforms were, therefore, intended to finally repair the perceived lack of political modernisation and thereby end the 'German Sonderweg'. Their purpose was to turn Germany into a 'completely normal Western country'.[41] This policy was strongly influenced by optimistic expectations of the possibilities of state-led social reform.

'Modernisation' was cast here as a linear, directed process toward economic and political modernity. Following Wehler's definition, which in turn was based on Max Weber, this included the implementation of a highly developed industrial capitalism, followed by social stratification leading to the development of large, politically capable 'social classes'; the bureaucratised institutional nation-state; and the implementation of 'rationalisation', most obvious in the rise of science, the secularisation and 'disenchantment' of the world, and instrumental reason.[42] Social historians saw development as inherently positive, as advancement, and, most importantly, as universal. This reading of history was an integral part of centre-left German political thought between 1960 and 1990. It quickly became normalised in the sense that it did not require any explanation or justification. The concept of 'modernisation' was not confined to Germany or Europe but was cast as a universal process of transformation.[43] It also carried a lot of preconceptions and simplifications: The underlying new master narrative of modern German history was, in fact, strongly influenced by the American Modernisation theory of the 1950s and 1960s.[44]

Modernisation as a concept, thus was crucial to notions of modernity in 1970s West German historiography. Modernity appears as the time when modernisation takes place rather than as the result of modernisation. This dynamic of change – leading towards industrialisation, market

society, political classes, and liberal democracy – was not finished at the time of Wehler's writing and will likely go on indefinitely. It was also a universal process involving all humankind. History appears as a singular, universal, and directed process – a view that is rooted in historicism's beginnings around 1800. Humankind is thus divided into those who are caught up in the process of modernisation and those who are 'not-yet'. This 'not-yet' would apply to cultures (or 'societies') of the past: those of the premodern times, as well as those contemporaries who live in 'underdeveloped countries' and have so far been left behind but who sooner or later will also become part of modernity, of humankind's historical trajectory.

This basic idea of the 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' is shared by both Koselleck's conceptual history and Wehler and Kocka's perspective on nineteenth-century German history.[45] The concept of *Sattelzeit* has been instrumental in establishing a temporal and conceptual watershed between the modern and the premodern by providing basic concepts and terms for 'mega-processes' underpinning the fundamental nature of this alleged sea change in human history. But while Koselleck was aiming at a history of ideas apparent in language and notions in the decades around 1800, and more fundamentally at a historicisation of notions of time and history itself, the Bielefeld School instead took the concept of *Sattelzeit* as a factual caesura. To them, the significance of *Sattelzeit* lay in its triggering of a more or less uniform, global, and irreversible process of modernisation that continued into their present time. Even though their framework was very much national, their interpretation of the flaws and incompleteness of German nineteenth-century modernisation was set in a transnationally comparative (and, of course, highly normative) perspective of history. To understand this perspective on history and explain how *Sattelzeit* acquired a new role as an established mega-caesura in history, it is useful to take a closer look at modernisation theory, which was highly influential on Hans-Ulrich Wehler's social history writing.

2. Modernisation theory and the postcolonial world: the premodern other in space and time

The roots of the concept of modernisation are found in the United States between 1945 and roughly 1960, in the age of the early Cold War and the beginnings of decolonisation. As Wolfgang Knöbl has recently argued, American Social Scientists tried to contribute to the containment of communism not only in Europe but also in non-Western countries, especially during the process of decolonisation and postcolonial state-building.[46] Beginning with the European Recovery program, and based upon the interpretation of the rise of National Socialism valid at that time, these social scientists argued that economic prosperity was the key instrument against communist takeover in the 'Third World'. Economic and political development – understood as 'social change' – were crucial to US national security policies.[47] Development policy followed this line of thought. But how does one enact social change in 'traditional societies'? This is the practical question behind modernisation theory. In the early 1950s, sociologists, economists, and geographers at MIT, Harvard, and Chicago formulated a general macro-theory of social change, whose task it was to theorise macro-social processes of change and make suggestions for the practical implementation of these processes. They built upon the works of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Talcott Parsons to formulate an alternative concept to Marx's Historical Materialism that offered an ersatz template for societal development. The basic idea was that economic change, or rather development, would bring about political modernity and, thus, democracy. The result was what was later called modernisation theory.[48]

In 1960, Walt Whitman Rostow, economist and former political adviser to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, published an attempt at 'generalizing the sweep of modern history'.[49] He is probably the most influential proponent of – or at least, perfect source material for – modernisation theory. Rostow argued that there are five stages of economic growth that take a society first from the traditional stage to maturity and, finally, to high mass consumption. His aim was to alert the US government to Third World poverty and expound a mechanism to bring about economic

development – in other words, a 'take-off' into modernity. By this 'take off', he meant the moment when traditional agricultural societies begin the process of modernisation until self-sustaining economic growth sets in. He used a chart to compare these moments of take-off, which included European and non-European countries, and depicted the relations between 'societal maturity' and the onset of growth. The idea was not only that economic modernisation was the mainspring of political and social modernisation but also that if they could trigger the development process, modernisation would follow.

Generally, Rostow and his followers see modernisation as a linear development that is universal and irreversible. Humanity shares a universal history, defined by a common direction of development, measured by national economic growth, and can be instigated by turning the correct switches. It is a global process that began with the Industrial Revolution in Britain and spread first to Europe before spreading across the world. The concept is intensely teleological, depicting a common historical path for all humankind, the aim and future outcome of which is the present status of Western societies, especially the United States. The world's societies are situated on different rungs of a ladder leading into the future, with the West leading the way. The agent, as well as the object of this process, are 'societies', which are conceived of as closed-off, coherent units organised as nation-states and national economies. This somewhat simplistic version of modernisation theory imagines the world as an ensemble of nation-states, some already industrialised, some still agrarian.[50] Against the backdrop of decolonisation, it takes the process of nation-building for granted and assumes that this will automatically lead to the kind of society imagined in Western political theory. Moreover, modernisation theorists quite naturally assumed that this process of 'historical development' will lead from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' state.[51] Rostow defines a traditional society as follows: 'A traditional society is one whose structure is developed within limited productive functions, based on pre-Newtonian science and technology, and on pre-Newtonian attitudes towards the physical world'.[52] He explains his choice of Newton as a yardstick: 'Newton is here used as a symbol for that watershed in history when men came widely to believe that the external world was subject to a few knowable laws, and was systematically capable of productive manipulation'.[53]

Modernisation theory thus posits a sharp and fundamental antithesis between the traditional and the modern. The traditional is a fundamental other, or, as Wolfgang Knöbl has put it, a residual category for everything not modern, be it Egypt in the time of Ramses II or Great Britain shortly before the Industrial Revolution, before 'take-off'. This take-off is the essential watershed, thereby 'dichotomizing the historical process'.[54] According to this view, traditional societies are held back by their morals and values, but most of all, by their refusal to adapt and begin the process of modernisation. This is, in fact, a crucial assumption underlying the whole concept of modernisation: that social change as such is tantamount to modernity, while stasis is, per se, a trait of the traditional world. Thereby, 'underdevelopment' becomes 'backwardness' and is thereby historicised and turned into a temporal difference rather than an economic one. Modernisation theory, in this respect, is used to delineate spatial differences: 'Underdeveloped' African countries, for instance. But this coeval divergence is rendered as a difference in historical time: as 'not-yet' or 'behind' on humankind's march through history to an ever more prosperous future. Thus, poorer, especially post-colonial countries, are described not only as economically backward but also as 'still' behind in the field of political modernity. Reinhart Koselleck, who framed the pertinent term of the 'simultaneity of the non-simultaneous', argued 'that we still have contemporaries who are living in the Stone Age'.[55]

This notion of historical backwardness is neither new nor confined to the twentieth century.[56] The English 'primitivists' of the 17th and early 18th centuries, like the French philosophes, saw 'noble savages' as members of an ideal free and equal society that lived in harmony with itself and nature and within which material demands, social inequality, and oppression were unknown.[57] The theories of the Scottish Enlightenment turned against such utopias directed at the present. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, they, primarily David Hume and Edward Gibbon, developed a

stage theory of human development in which the degree of civilisation could be determined based on the economic system and existing political institutions. For Gibbon, civilisation began at the stage of agriculture.[58] David Hume, in contrast, emphasised the beneficent and civilising influence of trade and commerce, and Adam Smith saw 'commercial society' as the proof of civilisation. Accordingly, he developed 'a historical theory of economic modernity'.[59]

Their perspective had to do with cultural contact in the context of European imperial expansion, especially in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, with the formation of world trade, global missionary intervention, the propagation of European legal and societal norms, and colonisation. Contact led to observation, description, and judgment, which in turn led to intervention in the name of 'bettering' and a 'civilising mission'. Facing resistance, colonisers resorted to disciplining wayward 'natives' and punishing them for being unwilling to reform. A member of the London Missionary Society working on Tahiti boasted in 1829 of having 'transformed the barbarous, cruel, indolent, and idolatrous inhabitants of Tahiti, and the neighbouring islands, into a comparatively civilised, humane, industrious, and Christian people'.[60] Key to this process of transformation were European law and economics. The underlying worldview was universalist: Imperial agents such as missionaries, navy officers, or staff of the East India Company were acting in the interest of humankind, aiding the indigenous populations in their realm on their way into history, helping them 'to become partakers of that civilization, that innocent commerce, that knowledge and that faith with which it has pleased a gracious Providence to bless our own country'.[61] Readiness to be 'civilised' and compliance with the colonial power's re-ordering of rules, values, and practices were seen as proof of progressiveness.

According to Englishmen in the early nineteenth century, for instance, piracy was a symptom of a people's backwardness and lack of civilisation. To officers of the Royal Navy and employees of the East India Company, it provided a glimpse into the uncivilised European past. British observers generally took piracy as evidence of backwardness. Overcoming piracy, therefore, was an essential step on the road to civilisation.[62] Piracy was a 'phenomenon of the early days'. It was characteristic of a way of being that would automatically disappear with rising development and growing 'civilisation'.[63] 'Uncivilised' cultures overseas were thus regarded as members of an earlier stage of human development, which the British had long surpassed. Christopher Bayly has called this 'the idea that cultures attained 'civilisation' by stages of moral awakening and material endeavour'.[64] If, however, the pirates persisted in this practice despite all attempts at their 'civilising' or 'bettering' by British intervention, this was interpreted as a rejection not only of the community of civilised nations but of progress itself.[65] Moreover, refusing to be civilised was held to be proof of 'timelessness', of being a people 'without history'.[66]

These notions still echoed in the 1970s and 1980s, when non-European peoples were also thought to be *geschichtslos* – without history. In these circumstances, their societies and cultures were cases not for historiography or sociology but for anthropology.[67] As seemingly static, non-changing societies, their lack of development itself was what made them 'not-yet-modern'. Traditional societies, be they hunter-gatherer or peasants, seemed to resemble those traditional societies of the premodern times. This is indeed, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, a 'denial of coevalness':

> 'Historicism thus posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance […] that was assumed to exist between the West and the non-West. In the colonies, it legitimated the idea of civilization. In Europe itself, it made possible completely internalist histories of Europe in which Europe was described as the site of the first occurrence of capitalism, modernity, or Enlightenment. […] The inhabitants of the colonies, on the other hand, were assigned a place 'elsewhere' in the 'first in Europe and then elsewhere' structure of time. This move of historicism is what Johannes Fabian has called 'the denial of coevalness.' […] Historicism – and even the modern, European idea of history – one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else'.[68]

Chakrabarty's critique centres on historicism, the nineteenth-century notion of historicity as fundamental to every human endeavour and all knowledge and of history as benevolent, universal, and

linear.[69] But Chakrabarty's critique goes even further: He points out the problematic role of underlying key concepts such as political modernity, which are indispensable to modern history writing, but at the same time are Eurocentric since they are based on Max Weber and his world. Therefore, they are of little help in analysing the path to nationhood and democracy in India, a case he argues firmly using the example of the 'peasant' as a force and voter in Indian democracy.[70] Of course, the sheer Eurocentricity of such categories and notions has long been the object of criticism, derision, and historicisation in Western contexts as well. The reception of the cultural turn and postcolonial studies in historiography and, more recently, the writing of global history have contributed to new perspectives and narratives.[71] Less emphasis has been put on historicising the role of historiography as a factor in establishing and perpetuating a 'fundamental opposition between the modern West and its past, and between the modern West and the non-West'.[72]

3. *Sattelzeit*, modernisation, and the ordering of time

Sattelzeit, the proposition of an epochal watershed between the traditional and the modern world, has been a tremendously successful feat of periodisation in modern historiography. This success had little to do with Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history ('*Begriffsgeschichte*'), which was concerned with historical change in the usage of language and the meaning of terms in the decades around 1800. Rather, the success of the concept lay in its plainer meaning as a factual caesura delineating a fundamental transformation from static, pre-industrial societies to highly dynamic modern ones. This dichotomy became even more meaningful as it blended in with older notions of contemporaneous difference between 'traditional' or 'underdeveloped' societies and 'modern', 'developed' ones. In so doing, differences of economic and political order became temporalised.

The concept of modernity was prevalent in West German departments of modern social history and sociology in the 1970s and 1980s. Thinking in terms of modernisation seemed self-evident, functioning as the 'unquestioned starting point for all further analyses'.[73] Hans-Ulrich Wehler's seminal, five-volume work on German social history identifies the dual revolution as the starting point of a historiographical trajectory spanning two centuries. The political revolutions of the 1770s and 1780s in the United States and France and the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain catalysed 'anonymous, supra-personal processes' that shaped German history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These processes united political and economic change. Wehler described this as 'an irrepressible dynamism not only of the political energies that broke through the resistance of the states in 1830 and then in 1848, but also of a socioeconomic development of secular significance: the rise of industrial capitalism, the further advance of agrarian capitalism, and the formation of ever larger market-driven social classes, driven silently but irresistibly by these capitalist market economies'.[74] Here, the basic categories of 1950s modernisation theory are applied to define a 'take-off' moment in European and German history, with the emergence of 'market-related classes' as the main actors reshaping the political order of the German-speaking realm. Therefore, political modernisation is closely entwined with economic change, just as it is in the field of Western development policies toward the Third World.[75] Another example would be the attempt to explain the rise of National Socialism as a consequence of a deficit in political modernisation during the *Deutsche Kaiserreich*. The underlying assumption is that economic modernisation would need to be accompanied by political modernisation; the failure to do so is read as deviance from the norm.[76]

In the 1970s, '*Sozialgeschichtsschreibung*' at Bielefeld and West German sociology argued that the notion of 'modernisation' functioned as a master process encompassing all other classic processes, such as industrialisation, rationalisation, individualisation, or democratisation. It had become the 'canonized explanatory model of the Western world'.[77] Modernity had become a crucial tenet of these German historians' self-conception as belonging to a Western, democratic, rational, and prosperous world. On the other hand, history was meaningful in that it was a universal process leading to progress. And progress was amenable to intervention and reform, and able to be governed by rational agents. These notions of history and the pertinent practices of historiography were built

upon the alterity between the premodern and the modern. *Sattelzeit*, therefore, was never only a description of a period of change around 1800; it was an act of ordering time and thereby defining oneself by distinction from others in the past and the present.

This act of establishing alterity combined two factors. First, it established the concept of historical time as coherent, unilinear, and universal. It created an understanding of history 'in the singular', as opposed to multiple, parallel, or even contradictory or incompatible 'histories'.[78] Unifying historical time, establishing a common historicity, and possibly even a common meaning, aim, and direction was necessary for a sense of the role of the West and its place in the world. The second factor comprises categories, notions, and terms, such as modernity, society, culture, state, freedom, nation, religion, history, progress, or development. These are all singular, unifying, or even homogenising terms, some of which tend to depict macro-processes, thereby 'creating the conditions for an evolutionary model that claimed to cover human history as a whole'.[79] These terms and the universalising and explanatory ambitions stem from the decades around 1800. Both factors are, in fact, common to historiography, or in a broader sense, the worldviews and self-images of the decades around 1800 as well as of the 1970s in the West. Seen this way, there is a European epoch lasting from roughly 1800 to the 1970s or 1980s. This epoch was neither the universal other of the traditional, premodern world nor the global south. Rather, it was a time when Western European and American academia and governments were united by common notions, beliefs, and perspectives, which, in turn, were made coherent and meaningful by creating an 'other'. Today, these notions and terms no longer go unquestioned; they are no longer canonised. 'Modernity' has itself become history.

Notes

1. Zwierlein, 'Frühe Neuzeit', 393; Gumbrecht and Link-Heer, *Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen*.
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. 'Modernity'. Cf. Gumbrecht, 'Modern, Modernität, Moderne', 1–131; See also Wittrock, 'Modernity', 31–60; Knöbl, 'Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne', 63–78.
3. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.
4. Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*; Beck, *Reflexive Moderne*; id., *Die Erfindung des Politischen*; Scott, *Seeing Like a State*; Raphael, 'Ordnungsmuster der "Hochmoderne"?', 73–91.
5. Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities', 1–29; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Stråth and Wagner, *European Modernity*. For a discussion of this concept and its impact on historiography see also Dipper, 'Moderne'.
6. Esposito, *Zeitenwandel*.
7. Kohl and Patzold, 'Vormoderne – Moderne – Postmoderne?', 23–42; Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 5.
8. 'Als Vormoderne gilt dem Zentrum jene Zeitspanne von der Antike bis in die "Sattelzeit" der Jahre um 1800, in der die Fundamente gelegt wurden, auf denen die Kulturen Europas bis heute aufruhen'. Universität Tübingen, Zentrum Vormodernes Europa.
9. Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, eds., introduction to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, xiii–xxvii.
10. See also Eskildsen, *Modern Historiography in the Making*.
11. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 20; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
12. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. The term 'denial of coevalness' was coined by Johannes Fabian, cf. Fabian, *Time and the Other*; and quoted by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7–9.
13. Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*.
14. For Koselleck's cavalier attitude in this choice of a name see Fulda, 'Sattelzeit', 2–3.
15. Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, introduction to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, xiii–xxvii.
16. Dipper, 'Die "Geschichtlichen Grundbegriffe"', 281–308; id., 'Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft', 37–62; Brunner, Conze, and Koselleck, introduction to *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*; Koselleck, 'Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft', 302–3.
17. Hoffmann, *Riss*; Jureit, *Erinnern als Überschritt*; Hettling and Schieder, eds., *Reinhart Koselleck als Historiker*; Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch', 62–92; Jordheim, 'Against Periodization', 151–71, 165. This topic is dealt with by Fernando Esposito's article in this volume.
18. For a recent and critical view on Koselleck's notions see Pernau, 'Can Koselleck Travel?', 24–45.
19. Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*.
20. Dipper, 'Die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und die Moderne', 41.
21. Jaser, Lotz-Heumann, and Pohlig, introduction to Alteuropa – Vormoderne – Neue Zeit, 9–24.

22. For example: Horkheimer and Adorno, 'Dialektik der Aufklärung.', 6 and chap. 5; Diner, introduction to *Zivilisationsbruch*, 8.
23. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*.
24. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*. Dipesh Chakrabarty has famously pointed out the difficulties of writing history with and without Eurocentric concepts such as 'political modernity' and the underlying problem of historicism: Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. See also Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities'.
25. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.
26. The American anthropologist James C. Scott has argued that a crucial aspect of 'high modernism', a pervasive mind set between roughly 1870 and 1970, was a 'rational design of social order commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws'. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.
27. For a concise overview see Iggers, *Historiography*.
28. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* 1: 6 (my translation, J.A.).
29. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*.
30. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* 1: 6–31; id., 'Historische Sozialwissenschaft', 142–53, 144 (my translation, J. A.).
31. Hoffmann, *Riss*, 255. See especially Wehler, *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich*.
32. For an overview: Iggers, *Historiography*; for the early programme and self-perception: Wehler, *Geschichte als Historische Sozialwissenschaft*; Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*; id., 'Theorien in der Sozial- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte', 9–42; for some examples: Kocka, *Arbeitsverhältnisse*; id., *Bürgertum*; more recent: id., *Kampf um die Moderne*; Schissler, *Preußische Agrargesellschaft*; Tilly, *Kapital*; id., *Vom Zollverein zum Industriestaat*.
33. Wehler, 'Historische Sozialwissenschaft'; Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, 27.
34. Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft*; Faulenbach, '„Deutscher Sonderweg"', 3–21; Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*.
35. Moses, 'The Forty-Fivers', 94–126; Müller, *Another Country*.
36. Angster, *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie*; id., '„Safe By Democracy"', 557–72; Doering-Manteuffel, 'Westernisierung', 311–41.
37. Metzler, 'Geborgenheit', 777–97; Hockerts, *Geschichte der Sozialpolitik*; Angster, 'Das Ende des Konsensliberalismus', 189–213; id., *Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie*.
38. Bielefeld, *Nation und Gesellschaft*; Tenbruck, 'Emile Durkheim', 333–50.
39. Fraenkel, 'Deutschland und die westlichen Demokratien', 48–67; for the term 'Selbststeuerung': Habermas, 'Die postnationale Konstellation', 91–169, 93–4.
40. For the role of the social sciences in the outlook of government in this context, see Raphael, 'Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen', 165–93.
41. Habermas, interview by Barbara Freitag [1989], 99–113.
42. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte* 1: 14; for a differentiated and also critical discussion of modernisation theory, see id., *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte*.
43. See for instance: McDougall, 'Modernity in "Antique Lands"', 1–17.
44. Deuerlein, *Das Zeitalter der Interdependenz*, 84–90; Knöbl, 'Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne'; Mergel, 'Geht es weiterhin voran?', 203–32.
45. Lorenz, 'Der letzte Fetisch', 79–80; Koselleck, *Zeitschichten*.
46. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 139–68; see also Knöbl, 'Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne'. For these social scientists, Knöbl cites Marion J. Levy, Walt W. Rostow, Seymour Martin Lipset, Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba and Edward Shils: Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 146.
47. Maier, 'The Politics of Productivity', 121–52.
48. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 144–52.
49. Rostow, *Stages*, 1.
50. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 144–46.
51. Ibid., 146.
52. Rostow, *Stages*, 4.
53. Ibid.
54. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 146, 151–52.
55. Koselleck, 'Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft', 307, quoted in Landwehr, 'Von der "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen"', 18. Achim Landwehr warns of 'the tendentially Eurocentric problems one incurs by talking of "non-simultaneity," especially from a comparative cultural perspective' (ibid., 5), aiming at Koselleck, *Zeitschichten*, 9.
56. Angster, *Erdbeeren*, 206–7; Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 47.
57. Fink-Eitel, *Die Philosophie und die Wilden*; Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, 286.
58. Osterhammel, 'Nation und Zivilisation', 137.
59. Ibid., 125 (Hume), 129 (Smith), 130 (Locke, Pufendorf), 137 (Gibbon); Allan, *Making British Culture*.
60. Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 11.
61. Commons Committee Report 1837, 102.
62. Angster, *Erdbeeren*.

63. Stamford Raffles, 'Discourse', 100–1.
64. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 7.
65. For these examples and the main argument, see Angster, *Erdbeeren*, 193–282. See also Layton, 'Discourses of Piracy', 81–97.
66. Osterhammel, '"Peoples without History"', 265–87.
67. Wolf, *Europe*.
68. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7–8; see also Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
69. Jaeger and Rüsen, *Geschichte des Historismus*.
70. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7–8.
71. Most influential probably Said, *Orientalism*; see also Conrad, Eckert, and Freitag, *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen.*
72. Pommeranz, *The Great Divergence,* 5.
73. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 157, 160.
74. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, 2: 4 (my translation, JA).
75. For two balanced and differentiated reflections on the use of modernization theory in social historiography, see also Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, esp. 27–8; Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie.*
76. See Kocka, *Sozialgeschichte*, 27.
77. Knöbl, *Soziologie*, 151, 167 (for quotation).
78. 'Aus den erzählten Geschichten der Vormoderne, die tendenziell im Plural vorkommen, wird in der Moderne die "Geschichte schlechthin", die\sowohl transzendenten als auch transzendentalen Charakter hat'. Koselleck, 'Geschichte, Geschichten und formale Zeitstrukturen', 130–1, quoted in Koschorke, *Hegel und wir*, 82–3, quotation 83.
79. Koschorke, *Hegel und wir*, 82–3 (my translation, JA).

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