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Peter van Dam

Saving Social History from Itself

Moving on from Modernisation[*]

In 1975, a damning critique of the viability of modernisation theory for social historians saw the light of day. Modernisation theory, it stated, suggested a linear development from a point of origin towards a distinct present by introducing a fundamental dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The theory also legitimised a view of history which cemented Western hegemony. The publication observed that the theory employed the image of the United States' early post-war society as a realised utopia. Finally, the approach underestimated the importance of violence, authority and politics for historical analysis.

Despite compiling a list of fundamental shortcomings of modernisation theory, however, »Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte« did not intend to discard it.[1] On the contrary, Hans-Ulrich Wehler published it as a plea to apply it to social history. In order to achieve this application, Wehler deemed a revision of the modernisation theories of his day necessary and possible. Their shortcomings could be countered by consequently treating modernisation as a historical phenomenon, limiting its application to Western countries, and empirically testing hypotheses derived from the theory. According to Wehler, the decisive argument for employing modernisation theory in social history was that there was no plausible alternative theory available.[2]

The insistence on the need for an integrative perspective aptly anticipated the subsequent crisis of social history. As a new generation of historians enthusiastically embraced the notion of social history during the 1960s and 1970s, the divergent strains, which had been united under this common header, became more pronounced.[3] A quickly expanding body of often highly specialised research challenged the ability of social historians to critically reflect on the more general bearing of these new results and to situate their own work within the field.[4] A macro-theoretical perspective, which could account for the vast array of findings, held the promise of alleviating this crisis of plurality.

A genealogy of the attempts to adapt modernisation theories to the needs of social history allows for a more intricate analysis of the crisis of social history.[5] In a broader perspective, it also sheds light on the difficulties of historians in abandoning notions of Western

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1 *Hans-Ulrich Wehler*, Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte, Göttingen 1975, pp. 18–30.
2 Ibid., pp. 58–63; *Chris Lorenz*, Wozu noch Theorie der Geschichte? Die Krise der Gesellschaftsgeschichte im Lichte der Theorie der Geschichte, in: *Volker Depkat/Matthias Müller/Andreas Urs Sommer* (eds.), Wozu Geschichte(n)? Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie im Widerstreit, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 117–145, here: pp. 117–121.
3 *Lutz Raphael*, Geschichtswissenschaft im Zeitalter der Extreme. Theorien, Methoden, Tendenzen von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart, München 2003, pp. 173–192.
4 *Benjamin Ziemann*, Sozialgeschichte jenseits des Produktionsparadigmas. Überlegungen zu Geschichte und Perspektiven eines Forschungsfeldes, in: Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für Soziale Bewegungen, 2003, no. 28, pp. 5–35, here: pp. 5f.
5 My interpretation of a genealogical approach builds on: *Raymond Geuss*, Nietzsche and Genealogy, in: European Journal of Philosophy 2, 1994, pp. 274–292; *Mark Bevir*, What is Genealogy?, in: Journal of the Philosophy of History 2, 2008, pp. 263–275.

exceptionalism and progress. To observe the critiques of modernisation theory is to take stock of the achievements of social history and of objections brought forward from micro-historical, postmodern, and global perspectives. It thus allows for the exploration of a future agenda for social history. In the light of this genealogy, I will argue that social history should move on from applying modernisation theory, because it hampers its ability to conceptualise social change. In my view, we can continue to benefit from the legacy of modernisation theories by historicising them, thus gaining valuable insight into the ways knowledge about social change has been conceptualised in the post-war era. Second, taking stock of the critiques of modernisation, we can discern the contours of the kind of theories of the middle range social history can fruitfully pursue. At its best, social history combines the empirical precision of historical scholarship with the conceptual clarity of the social sciences. If social historians build on the critique of modernisation theory, they remain uniquely positioned to mediate between historical scholarship and the social sciences.

Long before modernisation theory was introduced to social history, the notion of modernity had become part of common vocabulary. »Being modern« has been a key element of popular self-perception and distinction.[6] Essential debates about viable social, economic, and political strategies and about the position of the West in the world have been negotiated around notions of modernisation by scholars and the public alike. Although a society which was modern by its own standards has hardly, if at all, existed, a vision of modernity has been an important frame of reference.[7] Since at least the 18th century, some Europeans peddled the idea that they had severed their ties with tradition.[8] This narrative served to designate others both near and far as backward, legitimising the views of those who were »modern« as more in tune with the present and the future than others. In the course of the 19th century, the peoples outside the West were identified as such others as part of an imperial discourse.[9]

The outside of modernity was not just found outside of the West, it could also be located within. Here, peripheral areas – especially in Eastern Europe – became associated with backwardness.[10] The idea was also applied in the Culture Wars which swept through Europe in the second half of the 19th century. While liberals and socialists presented themselves as modern against attempts at confessionalisation, Catholics and orthodox Protestants self-consciously posed as modernity's adversaries.[11] The conceptualisation and localisation of

6   *Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht*, Modern, Modernität, Moderne, in: *Reinhart Koselleck/Werner Conze/Otto Brunner* (eds.), Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch zur politisch-sozialen Sprache, vol. 4, Stuttgart 1978, pp. 93–131; *Christof Dipper*, Moderne, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 25.8.2010, URL: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Moderne> [16.8.2017].

7   *Björn Wittrock*, Modernity: One, None, or Many? European Origins and Modernity as a Global Condition, in: Daedalus 129, 2000, no. 1, pp. 31–60, here: p. 38.

8   *Wolfgang Schmale*, Moderne und Definition(en) Europas im 18. Jahrhundert, in: *Olaf Asbach* (ed.), Europa und die Moderne im langen 18. Jahrhundert, Hannover 2014, pp. 85–103, here: p. 89; *Peter Fritzsche*, Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History, Cambridge/London 2004.

9   *Kathleen Wilson*, Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities, in: *id.* (ed.), A New Imperial History. Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840, Cambridge/New York etc. 2004, pp. 1–26, here: pp. 5–10.

10 *Christof Dejung/Martin Lengwiler*, Einleitung: Ränder der Moderne. Neue Perspektiven auf die Europäische Geschichte, in: *id.* (eds.), Ränder der Moderne. Neue Perspektiven auf die Europäische Geschichte (1800–1930), Köln/Weimar etc. 2016, pp. 7–36, here: pp. 16–23.

11 *Manuel Borutta*, Genealogie der Säkularisierungstheorie. Zur Historisierung einer großen Erzählung der Moderne, in: GG 36, 2010, pp. 347–376; *Ian Hunter*, Secularization: The Birth of a Modern Combat Concept, in: Modern Intellectual History 12, 2015, pp. 1–32; Cf. *Christopher Clark/Wolfram Kaiser*, Introduction: The European Culture Wars, in: *id.* (eds.), Culture Wars. Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe, Cambridge/New York etc. 2003, pp. 1–10.

the modern thus was tied to struggles over social control from its inception. The founding fathers of the social sciences who appropriated the concept were steeped in this tradition of social and cultural criticism and integrated it into their analyses of the modern in order to oppose, doubt, or praise whatever they found to be distinguishing feats of their times in relation to the past.[12]

During the post-war era, the notion of modernity evolved from a legitimisation of bourgeois-liberal aspirations vis-à-vis others both near and far to a concept which demarcated the West from the communist East and the decolonised South. Several explicit theories of modernisation were formulated during this era to analyse and explain the transition from a traditional to a modern society. They gained prominence especially in the context of discussions about the development of countries in the global South. Formulations stemming from the United States especially stressed the connection between the rise of a free market, democracy, and the nation state.[13] Notably, these theories privileged endogenous factors in explaining how societies progressed from traditional to more modern states, thus excluding transnational influences from the analysis even as these theories guided thinking about postcolonial interventions.

Even though social scientists and policymakers from the United States played a prominent role in formulating these post-war theories, they were by no means an exclusively American export product. Similar perspectives were formulated in European states and in decolonised states across the globe. Modernisation theories thus evolved into global claim-making concepts, which implicated the ways in which history was presented, the present was analysed, and the future was mapped.[14] Even though most historiographical attention has been devoted to the ways in which modernisation theories impacted relations between the North and the South, they also had a lasting impact on the internal perspectives of Europe and the United States, especially regarding the role of religion. The rise of the post-war welfare state was presented as a history of the gradual establishment of secular provisions against the claims of religious institutions.[15] Similarly, the decline of confessional networks during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was presented as an expected and necessary outcome of ongoing modernisation.[16] Such observations were not simply analyses of historical trajectories but also provided directions for policy. During 1960s, the idea of a politics which could guide society as a whole through an inevitable process of modernisation became popular among political elites across the world.[17]

As a new generation of historians mustered theoretical insights from the social sciences to devise new histories of society during the 1970s, modernisation theory presented itself

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12 *Detlev J. K. Peukert*, Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne, Göttingen 1989, pp. 6f.

13 *Michael E. Latham*, Modernization as Ideology. American Social Science and »Nation-Building« in the Kennedy Era, Chapel Hill 2000, pp. 3f.; *David Ekbladh*, The Great American Mission. Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order, Princeton 2011, pp. 153–189.

14 *David C. Engerman/Corinna R. Unger*, Introduction: Towards a Global History of Modernization, in: Diplomatic History 33, 2009, pp. 375–385, here: pp. 377f.; *Frederick Cooper*, Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History, Berkeley/Los Angeles etc. 2005, pp. 146f.; *Lynn M. Thomas*, Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts, in: AHR 116, 2011, pp. 727–740, here: p. 736.

15 *Robert Wuthnow*, Saving America? Faith-Based Services and the Future of Civil Society, Princeton/Woodstock 2004, pp. 10f.

16 *Jo Egbert Ellemers*, Modernisering, macht, migratie. Opstellen over maatschappij en beleid, Amsterdam 1995, pp. 57–74; Cf. *Peter van Dam*, Constructing a Modern Society through »Depillarization«. Understanding Post-War History as Gradual Change, in: Journal of Historical Sociology 28, 2015, pp. 291–313.

17 *Anselm Doering-Manteuffel/Lutz Raphael*, Nach dem Boom. Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970, Göttingen 2010 (first published 2008), pp. 41f.

as a framework which could account for a wide variety of social phenomena and thus integrate the disparate results of social history. Historians looking for an approach which could underwrite their attempts to distance themselves from political history and relate their research to the social sciences found a viable alternative to a traditional Marxist perspective.[18] In hindsight, it was all the more attractive to historians in Western Europa and the United States within the context of the Cold War and decolonisation because it stressed the unity and the exceptionality of ›the West‹ as a region shaped by democratic capitalism whilst accounting for the aberrations of its history by presenting these as resulting from a lack of modernisation. This was especially pronounced in West-German historiography, where the notion of a German *Sonderweg* served to establish the development of the American, French, and British societies as models for the German past and present, and a warning for the dangers of lagging modernisation.[19]

I. REVISING MODERNISATION

The integration of modernisation theories into the research of social historians took place at a time when these theories were increasingly criticised for failing to provide an effective rationale for societal development, which was apparent both in the faltering attempts at development in the South and in the criticism of attempts at steering change in the North.[20] As Wehler's plea for the application of modernisation theory in historical research indicated, historians were well aware of its critiques. As a result, they took the conceptual deficiencies and the normative implications of these theories into account as they formulated the versions of modernisation theory they aimed to apply.[21] The resulting approaches are indicative of the possibilities and limitations of modernisation theory and of the evolution of social history. In the following, I will therefore subsume six objections against modernisation theory and subsequently discuss some of the attempts to resolve each of them:

- The concept is a mirage which suggests rather than proves an association between processes of social transformation.
- Modernisation theory integrates the past, the present, and the future within a teleological framework.
- It constructs an opposition between homogenous images of premodern and modern epochs.

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18 *Wehler*, Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte, pp. 51–57; *Christoph Cornelißen*, Ein ständiges Ärgernis? Die Moderne in der (west-)deutschen Geschichtsschreibung, in: *Lutz Raphael/Ute Schneider* (eds.), Dimensionen der Moderne. Festschrift für Christof Dipper, Frankfurt am Main/Berlin etc. 2008, pp. 235–248, here: pp. 235–241.
19 *Chris Lorenz*, Beyond Good and Evil? The German Empire of 1871 and Modern German Historiography, in: JCH 30, 1995, pp. 729–766; *Paul Nolte*, Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine »lange Generation«, in: Merkur 53, 1999, pp. 413–432; *Thomas Welskopp*, Westbindung auf dem »Sonderweg«. Die deutsche Sozialgeschichte vom Appendix der Wirtschaftsgeschichte zur historischen Sozialwissenschaft, in: *Wolfgang Küttler/Jörn Rüsen/Ernst Schulin* (eds.), Geschichtsdiskurs, vol. 5: Globale Konflikte, Erinnerungsarbeit und Neuorientierungen seit 1945, Frankfurt am Main 1999, pp. 191–237.
20 *Hubertus Büschel/Daniel Speich*, Einleitung – Konjunkturen, Probleme und Perspektiven der Globalgeschichte von Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, in: *id.* (eds.), Entwicklungswelten. Globalgeschichte der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2009, pp. 7–29, here: pp. 14–20; *Dirk van Laak*, Planung, Planbarkeit und Planungseuphorie, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 16.2.2010, URL: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Planung> [16.8.2017].
21 *Axel Schildt*, Modernisierung, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 11.2.2010, URL: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Modernisierung> [16.8.2017].

- Modernisation theory reifies ›the West‹ and cements claims of its global predominance.
- It presents heterogeneity within ›the West‹ as a problem by constructing a hierarchy between progressive and backward phenomena.
- Historians reinforce a blind spot for the constitutive role of history and the social sciences in constructing an ideal image of a »modern society« by employing modernisation theory.

Any objection raised against modernisation theory can be sure to be countered by the argument that the critique is addressing some older, different, or less refined version than the one which said proponent is adhering to. This points to a pitfall of the theory, which is constituted by its wide range of competing definitions. These have turned the concept into a mirage. First of all, the disorientation stemmed from the coexistence of refined scholarly uses of the term alongside colloquial connotations of the modern as that which befits the (Western) present. Among scholars, the misunderstanding was furthered by disagreement over which processes are essential parts of modernisation. Third, the relation between processes of modernisation and an era designated as »modern« has added to the confusion.[22] Meaningful scholarly conversation about modernisation became a daunting challenge as a result.

Any concept in wide use suffers from a certain measure of confusion about its definition. The common reaction to such confusion has been to specify the processes on which the investigation is focused. For example, many studies on the history of religion have invoked the notion of modernisation to refer to a process of rationalisation, the rise of an empiricist worldview, a process of differentiation which separates religion from other social spheres, or a privatisation of religion.[23] Many of these studies left the relation of the specified process to a wider notion of modernisation unaccounted for. Scholars who have specified the concept of modernisation have moved in two opposite directions. Sociologists such as Hartmut Rosa and Detlef Pollack defined a processual core that drives modernisation. According to Rosa, a process of acceleration lies at the heart of modernisation, transforming the way contemporaries regard the present and the future and accordingly lead their lives. Although this process of acceleration also has external drivers such as economic incentives, cultural expectations, and the differentiation of social functions, this process of acceleration also decisively drives itself.[24] Pollack has a similar ambition to redefine modernisation as a comprehensive process, positioning functional differentiation at its core. This differentiation leads to a competition by different social spheres over acceptance and autonomy, resulting in an image similar to the one Rosa paints: a society which is in constant flux because of attempts to transcend present accomplishments.[25]

In contrast to such expansive visions of modernisation, historians such as John Breuilly have attempted to specify the concept by limiting its scope to specific areas, timeframes, and social phenomena. Taking up the tradition of relating modernity to functional differentiation, Breuilly proposes to regard it as a specific transition from corporate to functionally specialised institutions. He contends that such a transformation can be observed in the history of the German lands in the period from around 1800 until about 1880. Although this was not an inevitable process, Breuilly does regard it as the result of social evolution, which made certain outcomes more likely than others within the specific context of the history of these German lands. Crucially, he contends that this process of modernisation as func-

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22 *Cornelißen*, Ein ständiges Ärgernis?, pp. 235f.
23 Cf. *Karel Dobbelaere*, Secularization. A Multi-Dimensional Concept, London 1981; *José Casanova*, Public Religions in the Modern World, Chicago/London 1994.
24 *Hartmut Rosa*, Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 24–32.
25 *Detlef Pollack*, Modernisierungstheorie – revised: Entwurf einer Theorie moderner Gesellschaften, in: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 45, 2016, pp. 219–240.

tional differentiation cannot be regarded as the project of a specific group of actors. Instead, it was the unintended result of the actions of many different groups of actors over the span of several generations.[26]

Attempts to clarify the status of the many different interpretations of modernisation have identified two different strands in the debates about the concept since the 1990s: modernisation as a process and as a frame of reference. In an analysis of the related historiography, Thomas Mergel, for example, discerns empirical-sociological modernisation theories alongside a historical-philosophical »theory of modernity«. According to Mergel, the criticism of modernisation theory was in fact primarily directed at optimistic philosophical notions of a Western modernity. Therefore, sociologically informed empirical descriptions of modernisation remain useful, even more so because the concept had been modified to accommodate different historical trajectories and objectives. Because recent scholarship had also paid increasing attention to the ways historical actors had conceptualised modernity and pursued modernisation accordingly, questions relating to the theory of modernity had also gained relevance. Such questions could contribute to an understanding of the unique trajectory which Europe and North America had followed according to this theory.[27] Some years later, Björn Wittrock followed up on this line of thinking, noting that modernity should be regarded as a set of »promissory notes« which had become the dominant framework for discussing the direction of social change rather than an existing ensemble of institutions of structures.[28] These attempts at clarification thus resulted in a threefold distinction, separating empirical observations about processes of modernisation, the notions of modernity held by historical actors, and the historical-philosophical notion about modernity which researchers themselves hold.

The reference to a teleological framework was a second problem which modernisation presented to social history. Many versions of the theory integrated perspectives on the past, the present, and the future as stages in a linear progression from tradition towards modernity. This posed a double challenge to social history. On the one hand, its focus on linear development undermined the capability to account for historical contingency. On the other, it introduced normativity into the temporal structure through the association of the modern with the contemporary as well as with a higher stage of development.

As theories of modernisation were formulated during the early post-war era, linearity and normativity went hand in hand. During its first heyday in the 1960s, American post-war society served as the image of the highest stage of modernity, which was realised in the present. Up until the 1970s, US-propaganda aiming at promoting the American model of democratic capitalism abroad explicitly presented contemporary US society as the telos of modernisation.[29] The present and the future converged into a blueprint of society which other parts of the world could and should achieve by concerted interventions.[30] However, the attempts at achieving modernisation through interventions failed to produce the envisaged results. Meanwhile, the ideal image of the United States lost much of its persuasiveness in the wake of the Vietnam War, the struggles over racial equality, and the economic

26 *John Breuilly*, Modernisation as Social Evolution. The German Case, c. 1800–1880, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 15, 2005, pp. 117–147.
27 *Thomas Mergel*, Geht es weiter voran? Die Modernisierungstheorie auf dem Weg zu einer Theorie der Moderne, in: *id./Thomas Welskopp* (eds.), Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte, München 1997, pp. 203–232.
28 *Wittrock*, Modernity, pp. 32–38.
29 *Laura Belmonte*, Selling Capitalism: Modernization and U.S. Overseas Propaganda, 1945–1959, in: *David C. Engerman/Nils Gilman/Mark H. Haefele* et al. (eds.), Staging Growth. Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War, Amherst 2003, pp. 107–128.
30 *Nils Gilman*, Modernization Theory, the Highest Stage of American Intellectual History, in: ibid., pp. 47–80; *Belmonte*, Selling Capitalism.

crises of the 1970s. A similar convergence of the present and the telos of modernisation briefly reappeared during the 1990s, as the apparent triumph of free market democracy caused some observers to present it as a final stage of history.[31] Where such a convergence was stated, the task for historians was understood to be twofold: to explain how some societies had achieved this highest stage of development and to diagnose why other parts of the world had not achieved a similar condition.

Where modernity was presented as the telos of a welcome historical development, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity pitted the historical points of departure and termination against each other as a negative against a positive. The advance from the past to the future was presented as a progressive movement from a primitive to a more desirable state. Where modernity appeared less attractive, it could not serve as a self-evident »end of history« in the same way. Thus, since the disenchantment with the American model during the 1960s and 1970s, the present and the future often diverged in analyses of modernisation. The initial reaction was to aim for a better modernity. The utopian vanishing point remained in place, but the project of modernisation gained new urgency by its loss of self-evidence. Modernity had to be achieved, historical analysis could provide insight as to where and how modernisation had at least partially succeeded, and which forces were hampering it. This view made regression or devolution a distinct possibility. As the negative connotation of both terms indicate, within the framework of the theory such instances were presented as unexpected and undesirable aberrations.[32]

This normativity was confronted especially during 1980s by scholars taking up a tradition of criticism which they traced back to the originators of theories of modernity. Max Weber in particular had voiced reservations about modernity, talking of a »shell hard as steel« in which capitalism trapped modern humans. Scholars like Detlev Peukert likewise painted a picture of modernity devoid of affirmation. Here, the transition from tradition to modernity was not equated with a progressive movement but rather with a deeply ambivalent development. The onset of modern rationality among other things enabled a radicalisation of a racist utopia which would result in the attempted annihilation of the European Jews by the National Socialists.[33] Authors like Michel Foucault took this criticism one step further, presenting modernity not as a welcome telos of historical development but as a dystopian situation.[34] In a similar vein, recent studies of colonialism have presented systems of colonial rule as distinctly modern phenomena.[35]

These objections against the normative associations of modernisation were closely related to questions about the supposed progressive movement from the traditional to the modern. Colloquially, the modern is equated with the present. Historians have habitually argued for a contingent view of modernisation which disbands this equation. Although contingency challenges the account of any processual development, it poses distinct problems when confronted modernisation theory. As democratisation signifies a movement from less to more democracy, so industrialisation describes a motion towards more industry. In this sense, the mere suggestion of linearity cannot be held against the notion of moderni-

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31 *Peter Fritzsche*, Founding Fictions: History, Myth, and the Modern Age, in: International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 12, 1998, pp. 205–220, here: pp. 205f.

32 *Charles Tilly*, Clio und Minerva, in: *Hans-Ulrich Wehler* (ed.), Geschichte und Soziologie, Köln 1972, pp. 97–131.

33 *Peukert*, Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne, pp. 102–121.

34 *Michel Foucault*, Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison, New York 1977 (first published in French 1975).

35 Cf. *Frederick Cooper*, Writing the History of Development, in: JMEH 8, 2010, pp. 5–23, here: pp. 20f.; *Vasant Kaiwar*, The Postcolonial Orient. The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincialising Europe, Leiden 2014, pp. 103–155.

sation. Notably, however, the colloquial understanding of the modern as the contemporary reinforces the assumption that the present is more modern than the past. This link between the descriptive process and a particular position of the observer on its timeline separates modernisation from many other processual notions. In this sense, modernisation exacerbates the problem of contingency which is habitually presented to historical research in its attempts to combine the paradoxical notions of the open character of historical development with the closed nature of its empirical material.

Two main approaches were developed to incorporate the notion of historical contingency into modernisation theories: deploying it as a descriptive grid and presuming different trajectories. In his formidable volumes on the history of German society, for example, Hans-Ulrich Wehler employed his dimensions of modernisation – rule, economy, culture, and social inequality – to present a comprehensive view of German social history in the 19th and 20th century. Measuring social development along the lines of these indicators, Wehler was able to draw on a remarkable breadth of material in registering progress and regression.[36] The difficulty of avoiding a linear perspective through a descriptive approach became clear, however, as Wehler proposed to explain the catastrophic history of Germany in the first half of the 20th century by pointing out imbalances across the different indicators of modernisation.[37]

The sensibility to the relevance of contingency was reinforced by the sudden collapse of communism in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s and by the disenchantment with the prognostic capabilities of social scientific models. This resulted in a more nuanced approach to contingency in processes of social evolution, which did not conceive of historical development as the logic result of a process of modernisation. Instead, it understood processual evolutions in terms of more or less likely results. As Thomas Mergel explained, this presented modernisation as a process which could regress, stagnate, or progress, where regressions were less likely because of the former »transaction costs« a society had invested.[38] This conceptualisation favoured a notion of multiple trajectories of modernisation. Such approaches had been pioneered by historical sociologists Barrington Moore, Jr. and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt from very different directions. Moore discerned the liberal democratic, fascist and communist systems as different outcomes of a transition from a traditional to a modern society and explained these different trajectories by differences in social structure and the timing of industrialisation.[39] Eisenstadt highlighted cultural traditions to explain the appearance of »multiple modernities« across the world. He stressed the ability of modern societies to cope with change based on self-criticism to account for their contingent evolution.[40] Similarly, Peter Wagner has proposed to regard modernisation as an open-ended process which develops along multiple trajectories in reaction to specific historical experiences.[41] Such references to different trajectories also occurred in historiography. Debating African history around the concept of modernity, for example, historians

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36 *John Breuilly*, Wehler's Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte Project, in: NPL 55, 2010, pp. 197–212.

37 *Chris Lorenz*, »Won't you Tell Me, Where Have All the Good Times Gone?« On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Modernization Theory for Historical Study, in: *Q. Edward Wang/Franz L. Fillafer* (eds.), The Many Faces of Clio. Cross-cultural Approaches to Historiography, New York/Oxford 2007, pp. 104–127.

38 *Mergel*, Geht es weiter voran?, pp. 212f.

39 *Barrington Moore, Jr.*, Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World, Boston 1967.

40 *Shmuel N. Eisenstadt*, Multiple Modernities, in: Daedalus 129, 2000, no. 1, pp. 1–30.

41 *Peter Wagner*, Modernity as Experience and Interpretation. A New Sociology of Modernity, Cambridge/Malden 2008, p. 4; Cf. *Wolfgang Knöbl*, Die Kontingenz der Moderne. Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2007, pp. 190–207.

distinguished different varieties of modernity in Africa and in Europe, thus discerning different historical trajectories without labelling some as »modern« next to non-modern, presumably backward alternatives.[42]

The dichotomy between tradition and modernity also posed a challenge to historical periodisation. It suggests a homogenous and static starting point to the history of modernisation. A »flat« image of premodern societies is invoked by collectively labelling them as »traditional« and assigning a fixed set of characteristics to them.[43] The perspective has caused similar problems in analysing modern history itself, because it imposes the notion that the »modern« era has to be regarded as a uniform period which therefore should exhibit certain stable features. Finally, historical inquiry across the border between pre-modern and modern history is also impaired by the presupposed divide. The division between a pre-modern and a modern period presupposes a progressive movement from pre-modern to modern phenomena. Continuity between a premodern and a modern era or cyclical development across these ages are thus deemed unlikely beforehand. A second problem caused by the distinction of a modern and a premodern era relates to locating the process of modernisation within this grid. Is the modern era the final result of processes of modernisation which predate it? Or is the modern era distinguished from its predecessor precisely because it features such processes?

Because no historian could accept this schematic understanding of the periods before and after the turn of the 19th century, historians have developed both pragmatic and conceptual solutions to this problem. The practical answer has been to nuance the distinction and highlight the dynamic character of both the premodern and the modern era. Instead of labelling anything predating 1800 traditional, modern and traditional features have been assigned flexibly across historical periods, based on more specific definitions of what modern feature is being examined. As a result, the notion of a modern era and the distribution of modern phenomena increasingly drifted apart. Moreover, the very presumption of traditional counterparts to modern phenomena could prove hard to maintain. The historiography on the »birth of modern consumer society« provides a telling example of this trend. As historians during the 1980s and 1990s attempted to determine when a modern consumer society came into existence, they ended up continually predating it. Scholars were hard-pressed to come up with a clear distinction between pre-modern and modern modes of consumption. Reviewing the results of the search for the origins of modern consumption in 2003, John Brewer concluded that by presupposing modern consumption to be fundamentally different from premodern varieties, historians had framed their initial question erroneously.[44]

Conceptually, the aforementioned distinction between processes of modernisation and a specific era of modernity has been the primary answer to the problem of the suggested temporal dichotomy. This, however, did not dispel the reservations about contrasting a static tradition with modernising processes. Even if processes of modernisation could be observed in an accordingly more dynamic view of premodern times, this approach continued to regard history before the 19th century through the lens of processes which were originally associated with the modern era. Similar objections were raised regarding the analysis of the 19th and 20th century, because the processes observed in this timeframe too could hardly be reduced to a coherent and recurring set of modernising processes. The key innovation in this regard was related to the notion of a dynamic understanding of the

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42 *Thomas*, Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts, pp. 731f.
43 *Wehler*, Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte, pp. 21f.; *Carol Symes*, When We Talk about Modernity, in: AHR 116, 2011, pp. 715–726.
44 *John Brewer*, The Error of Our Ways: Historians and the Birth of Consumer Society, 2004, URL: <http://www.consume.bbk.ac.uk/working_papers/Brewer%20talk.doc> [15.9.2017].

process of modernisation itself. Among sociologists, the most prominent example of this line of thinking was exemplified by debates about the »modernisation of modernity«. According to sociologists like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, Western modernity had reached a new stage in the late 20th century, in which the initial impetus of modernisation was questioned and redeveloped against the background of an increasing awareness of the shortcomings of the original project.[45] Among historians, this trend was visible in proposed periodisations of history in which different phases of modernity were distinguished, such as Ulrich Herbert's suggestion to regard European history between 1890 and 1980 as a unified era of »high modernity«.[46] Reflections on the shortcomings of a schematic periodisation thus resulted in a double movement which has also been observed in reaction to aforementioned challenges: the process was at once generalised to be applicable beyond a specific modern era and then applied in specialised versions.

A similar tendency came to the fore in reaction to the critique of the Western bias of the concept. For modernisation theory has not only set apart a singular modern period, it also singled out ›the West‹ as its distinct geographical birthplace.[47] It reified ›the West‹ through a circular argument stating at once that the history of the West has been shaped by modernisation and that a phenomenon could only be modern if it has occurred in the West. As the concept of modernisation was introduced into social history, this focus on the West was not deemed unwarranted, because Wehler and likeminded historians intended to apply the concept to Western history first and foremost. For a historiographical tradition as sensitive to political agendas as social history, this was a remarkable resolution. The justification, however, became overtly problematic over time, as it was seen to reinforce a presupposed singularity of the West as a »modern« part of the world. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, Western rule across the globe has been legitimised by the claim that the whole world is moving into the direction of »the modern«, but that those ahead in this process of modernisation have different rights from those who are lagging behind.[48]

The concerns about the Western bias of the concept became overt as social scientists and historians increasingly developed perspectives which looked beyond the West. If the traditional notion of modernisation was upheld, other regions could only be included into the general narrative if their cases demonstrated either similarity to or influence by the West. This became apparent in early versions of globalisation theory, which set out to expand the range of inquiry beyond the traditional reach of modernisation theory. By regarding globalisation as a global expansion of Western modernity and by placing the West squarely at the centre of the global history of the 19th and 20th, it replicated the shortcomings of modernisation theory.[49] The critique of reification, however, in part impeded the design of viable alternatives. Rejecting modernity as a concept with a Western bias, the underlying assumption of modernisation as a singularly Western combination of processes was often

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45 *Ulrich Beck/Wolfgang Bonß/Christoph Lau*, Theorie reflexiver Modernisierung – Fragestellungen, Hypothesen, Forschungsprogramme, in: *Ulrich Beck/Wolfgang Bonß* (eds.), Die Modernisierung der Moderne, Frankfurt am Main 2001, pp. 11–59, here: pp. 11–14; Cf. *Ulrich Beck/ Anthony Giddens/Scott Lash*, Reflexive Modernisierung. Eine Kontroverse, Frankfurt am Main 1996.

46 *Ulrich Herbert*, Europe in High Modernity. Reflections on a Theory of the 20th Century, in: JMEH 5, 2007, pp. 5–21.

47 *Gurminder K. Bhambra*, Rethinking Modernity. Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination, Basingstoke/New York 2007, pp. 1–8.

48 *Dipesh Chakrabarty*, Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton/Woodstock 2000, pp. 8f.

49 *Angelika Epple*, Globalisierung/en, in: Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte, 11.6.2012, URL: <http:// docupedia.de/zg/Globalisierung> [16.8.2017]; *Knöbl*, Die Kontingenz der Moderne, pp. 54–59.

kept intact.[50] Other critics disbanded the theory only to invoke an inverted alternative notion of linear Western development.[51]

This line of criticism has reinforced the tendency to combine a disavowal of the affirmation of modernisation with the generalisation of the concept in regard of its temporal and spatial application. Eisenstadt's notion of multiple modernities presented a comprehensive program to overcome the Western bias of modernisation theory. By allowing for multiple trajectories of modernisation, the program attempted to reconsider the Western trajectory not as a yardstick of modernisation but simply as one possible line of development next to equal alternatives. However, this approach has not been able to account for the interdependency shaping the development of different regions of the world and thus failed to confront the essentialising view of civilisations which underpinned earlier versions of modernisation theory.[52] In reaction to these shortcomings, approaches such as Wagner's notion of several paths of modernisation as reactions to specific historical experiences and Rosa's concept of acceleration have defined modernisation as a process which is not principally tied to any specific region.

Whereas many critics have stressed the difference which was constituted between »the West« and »the rest« by modernisation theories, the construction of asynchronicity was also applied to the West internally. Just as these theories were referred to in order to legitimise Western predominance in relation to other parts of the world, it was also an important argument in debates about the future within Western societies themselves. For instance, Dutch political elites during the late 1960s typically argued for cautiously implementing »progressive« reforms by stating that »going along with the times« was as inevitable as the flow of these times themselves.[53] This line of reasoning can also be observed within religious communities in the 1960s and 1970s. Here, a push for reforms was often presented as a necessary reaction to the objective advance of modernisation. Religious groups could either adapt or perish.[54]

Discerning between progressive and backward phenomenon within the West, modernisation was invoked to frame heterogeneity as fundamentally problematic and often untenable in the long run. The history and historiography of Catholicism in the 19th and 20th century are especially instructive in this respect. In the history of Catholicism, the position in regard of »modernity« had long been a staple of fierce debate following the condemnation of »modern« ideas by the Vatican and the ensuing internal conflicts about »modern« theology and distinction from the »modern« world outside of the church. Supporters and opponents of the Catholic attack on the modern world shared a basic understanding of singular Western history, in which a fundamental opposition between Catholicism and »the Western world« evolved.[55]

The contemporary perception of a conflict between modernity and Catholicism as its Other has continued to inform analyses of the history of Catholicism. For instance, the analysis of the transformation of the Catholic milieu in the Netherlands has been critically influenced by notions of modernisation. Whereas the formation of a well-organised and

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50 *Cooper*, Colonialism in Question, pp. 132f.; *Kaiwar*, The Postcolonial Orient, pp. 103–124.
51 *Pollack*, Modernisierungstheorie – revised, pp. 221f.
52 *Bhambra*, Rethinking Modernity, p. 7; *Knöbl*, Die Kontingenz der Moderne, pp. 107–110.
53 *James C. Kennedy*, Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de jaren zestig, Leiden 2007.
54 *Jonathan C.D. Clark*, Secularization and Modernization. The Failure of a ›Grand Narrative‹, in: The Historical Journal 55, 2012, pp. 161–195; *Peter van Dam*, Das Feindbild als Selbstdeutung. Zur Genealogie von Versäulung und Entsäulung, in: *id./Friso Wielenga* (eds.), Religion als Zündstoff. Gesellschaftliches und politisches Engagement in den Niederlanden seit 1945, Münster/New York 2014, pp. 15–34.
55 *Christopher Clark*, The New Catholicism and the European Culture Wars, in: *id./Kaiser*, Culture Wars, pp. 11–46, here: pp. 12f.

socially isolated Catholic community was deemed a reaction to »modern« plurality in the late 19th century, the transformation of the milieu was caused by ongoing modernisation, which made it untenable to retain the milieu during the 1960s and 1970s.[56] A similar perspective has been applied to the transformation of religious communities in other countries. Thus, Wilfred Loth has diagnosed the Catholic milieu in Germany to have been a »transitory phenomenon«, a »problematic, but probably inevitable« trajectory for different Catholic groups to eventually arrive and participate in modernity.[57]

The myth of European unity has probably been the least examined flaw the concept has introduced into historiography.[58] By the time it was scrutinised, the solutions developed in reaction to other strains of criticism could be mustered to confront it. The normative framing of heterogeneity requited the disavowal of affirmation which had been promoted by Peukert and likeminded scholars. The suggested spatial uniformity had already been undermined by the assumption of several trajectories of modernisation, popularised by the likes of Barrington Moore and Eisenstadt, and culminating in the aforementioned principally deterritorialised conceptions of modernisation.

A final critique of modernisation theory has pointed out that by taking up modernisation theory as an implicit or explicit frame of reference, historians reinforce a »blind spot« for the constitutive role that the social scientists and historians have played in constructing ideal images of a modern society and their commitment to the socio-political agendas of modernisation which were connected to these images.[59] Returning to the aforementioned debates about the necessity of reforms within religious communities during the 1960s and 1970s, the participation of social scientists in particular in debates about the future of religious practices and organisation is striking. As »experts«, the advice of these scholars was sought out by church leaders and the boards of many religious civic organisations to map a successful course towards »modernisation«.[60]

This claim of expertise regarding the process of modernisation is an important element in the history of what Lutz Raphael has labelled »scientification«. During the course of the 20th century, experts of »human sciences« successfully claimed their place in the circles of policymakers and government, companies, and civic organisations. From this position, the knowledge they generated was pivotal in the construction of the self-images of Western societies. The relation to religious authority, Raphael points out, was more far-reaching, because academic knowledge also served to displace religious authority.[61] Concepts such as modernisation, which scholars constructed and distributed, became important points of reference in debates about how to react to the challenges of the present. Morten Reitmayer has noted how the intended societal uses of this knowledge also introduced a fundamental

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56 *Cees P. Middendorp*, Ontzuiling, politisering en restauratie in Nederland. Progressiviteit en conservatisme in de jaren 60 en 70, Meppel 1979; *Ellemers*, Modernisering, macht, migratie, pp. 58–66; *Erik H. Bax*, Modernization and Cleavage in Dutch Society. A Study of Long Term Economic and Social Change, Aldershot/Brookfield etc. 1990.

57 *Wilfried Loth*, Politischer Katholizismus in Deutschland: Entstehung, Antriebskräfte, Verfall, in: *Franz-Xaver Kaufmann/Arnold Zingerle* (eds.), Vatikanum II und Modernisierung. Historische, theologische und soziologische Perspektiven, Paderborn/München etc. 1996, pp. 35–52, here: p. 50.

58 *Bhambra*, Rethinking Modernity, pp. 83–144; *Kaiwar*, The Postcolonial Orient, p. 117.

59 *Niklas Luhmann*, Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt am Main 1997, p. 426.

60 Cf. the special issue: Pastoral Sociology in Western Europe, 1940–1970, ed. by *Chris Dols/Herman Paul*, Journal of Religion in Europe 9, 2016; *Chris Dols*, Fact Factory. Sociological Expertise and Episcopal Decisionmaking in the Netherlands, 1946–1972, Nijmegen 2015.

61 *Lutz Raphael*, Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: GG 22, 1996, pp. 165–193, here: pp. 167–183.

vagueness into the concepts these scholars employed. If they were to be of any use out-side of the walls of academic institutions, they had to be open to the experiences and ex-pectations of those ›outside‹ who were interested in the knowledge.[62]

The objection to the continuation of the complicity between social history and moderni-sation as a legitimising concept resonates with the suggestion by Mergel and Wittrock to regard modernity as a specific frame of reference, which has been employed by historical actors to shape the world around them. In a broader sense, this can be regarded as a re-sponse to the lack of historical agency in earlier versions of modernisation theory. Intro-ducing agency into the history of modernisation, these theories appeared as concepts which historical actors referred to in trying to impose order on their environment. Modernity then appears as an era which was marked by people attempting to create an explicitly »modern« environment.[63] This resulted in a shift from applying modernisation theory as an analytic tool in writing social history to regarding it primarily as a concept guiding the action of historical actors. Konrad Jarausch recently underlined this trend, stating that the critiques of modernisation had turned it into an »intellectual problem«. To resolve it, he proposed to employ modernisation as a point of access to European history. By »deconstructing its shifting meaning according to the time, place, and speaker behind it«, modernisation could shed light on competing political agendas and the ways in which Europeans positioned themselves in the world.[64]

II. MOVING ON

The concept of modernisation has been pronounced dead as often as it has been resurrected. In the context of German historiography, the demise of modernisation theory seemed de-finitive during the late 1990s, as both Wehler and Jürgen Kocka, as well as their prominent students Thomas Welskopp and Paul Nolte, assigned its popularity to a certain period of West-German history in which the normative foundations of the theory had been especial-ly attractive. Chris Lorenz concluded in 2007 that modernisation theory had become prob-lematic because the normative assumptions underpinning modernisation theory had lost their persuasiveness, as the historicizing of the concept by its founding fathers underlined. Moreover, its inability to conceptualise contingency, the cultural production of social struc-tures, and its one-sided emphasis on social structures had gotten the better of it.[65]

As the ongoing attempts to adapt modernisation theories to their insistent criticism demonstrate, these theories have retained their attraction for social historians nonetheless. They continue to hold the promise of an overarching perspective for the ever-expanding body of specialised studies. Despite criticism, the concept has remained in continuous use as an explicit framework and has provided an implicit frame of reference for many more

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62 *Morten Reitmayer*, Politisch-soziale Ordnungsentwürfe und Meinungswissen über die Gesell-schaft in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert – eine Skizze, in: *Lutz Raphael* (ed.), Theorien und Expe-rimente der Moderne. Europas Gesellschaften im 20. Jahrhundert, Köln/Weimar etc. 2012, pp. 37–63, here: p. 40.
63 Cf. *Thomas Etzemüller* (ed.), Die Ordnung der Moderne. Social Engineering im 20. Jahrhun-dert, Bielefeld 2009; *Kerstin Brückweh/Dirk Schumann/Richard F. Wetzell* et al. (eds.), Engi-neering Society. The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1980, Basingstoke/New York 2012; *Raphael*, Theorien und Experimente der Moderne.
64 *Konrad H. Jarausch*, Out of Ashes. A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century, Prince-ton/Woodstock 2015, pp. 5f.
65 *Lorenz*, »Won't you Tell Me, Where Have All the Good Times Gone?«, pp. 174–180 and 190–194.

scholarly works.[66] Even astute critics have often been reluctant to relinquish the concept altogether.[67] In part, this reluctance can be traced to the long-standing tradition of reflecting on Western history as a history of modernity. Being modern has been a crucial element of Western self-imaging throughout the 20th century.[68] Because many of the most common observations on the development of Western societies have been framed within this theory, historians often continued to subsume their specific findings within this framework without much further reflection on modernisation as an overarching notion. At the same time, they provided a connection between scholarly and public discourse. To talk about the modern was to talk about what was relevant to society today.

The efforts to devise better versions of the theory resulted in the double movement of specification and generalisation described above. As the relating processes were specified and more precisely located in time and space, modernisation was disassociated from the West and its »modern« era to constitute a general process. In response to critiques of modernisation as a desirable process, social historians distanced themselves from a naïve affirmation of the normative implications of the theory. Accounting for historical contingency, they stressed the possibilities of stagnation and reversibility and highlighted the descriptive perspective which these theories provided. In presenting modernisation as a contingent process, the notion of multiple trajectories of modernisation also became viable. The Western bias which traditionally accompanied these theories and the tendency to homogenise the West were countered by presenting modernisation as a process which could occur in any place. Concrete inquiries into modernisation accordingly had to be limited to specific areas. Similarly, the association of a process of modernisation with a distinct »modern« era was analytically severed: not only could traditional societies be modernised, modern societies could also modernise themselves. In principal, modernisation could take place at any time and did not take place all the time during the »modern« period. Finally, by stressing the experience of modernity, the notion of modernisation was both historicised and connected to the agency of specific historical actors.

This twofold development, however, has undermined the viability of these theories for social history. By specifying their notions of modernisation, no compelling reason to maintain it remains: modernisation can be substituted by the more specific term in question. In stating the process at hand more clearly, the suggestion of an association between the process under discussion and other processes regularly subsumed under the header of modernisation can effectively be avoided. At best, this association is indeed proposed, in which case it deserves a clear definition. At worst, its suggestion is invoked to claim a broader relevance which remains undemonstrated. Whichever the case, it is possible and desirable to substitute references to a vague notion of modernisation by more specific terms.

On the other hand, the generalisation of these theories has removed them from the original intent of applying them as theories of the middle range. In the classic definition of Robert K. Merton, such theories »lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day to day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social change«.[69] Theories of the middle range are attractive to historians, because they do not present a perspective which has to fit all the insights

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66 *Thomas*, Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts, pp. 729–733.
67 AHR Roundtable, Historians and the Question of »Modernity«. Introduction, in: AHR 116, 2011, pp. 631–637.
68 *Jarausch*, Out of Ashes, pp. 3–5; *Bruno Latour*, We Have Never Been Modern, New York 1993 (first published in French 1991).
69 *Robert K. Merton*, Social Theory and Social Structure, enl. ed., New York/London 1968 (first published 1949), p. 39.

which are generated from empirical research. Instead, they enable a constant dialogue between empirical research and conceptualisation to enhance an understanding of the interrelation between findings from different strands of research.[70] The resulting cycle of empirical and conceptual analysis continually generates new conceptual challenges and questions for empirical research.[71] Such an approach is especially attractive to social historians, who – aiming to discern broader patterns – measure the value of concepts and theories above all by relating them to specific empirical results. Although an integrative perspective thus remains viable, the history of a process like urbanisation can be enough of a »grand« perspective to satisfy the tastes of most historians. Such an approach has the added benefit of being more geographically and temporally flexible.[72] The attraction of modernisation theories to social historians in the 1970s lays partly in their envisaged applicability as such theories of the middle range. Devised as approaches to analyse a supposedly distinct trajectory during a distinct era, they lacked the all-encompassing pretences of alternative approaches popular at the time.[73] Generalisation diminished this advantage for historical research.

The evolution of modernisation theories has also produced a growing rift between scholarly and public notions of the modern. While social historians take up specific processes of modernisation in any specific part of the world in any period, the colloquial understanding of the modern remains tied to the general development of the contemporary Western world. The continued interlocution between public and scholarly interpretation of the modern impedes attempts to separate empirical theories of modernisation from philosophical considerations about a theory of modernity. This doubt is reinforced by the methodological problem of separating a theory of modernity from empirical observations based on the categories of this theory.

The viability of modernisation theory as an integrative perspective has been further undermined by its inability to incorporate key results of historical scholarship which have come to the fore since the 1970s. Studies informed by the approach of microhistory cast doubt upon the supposed opposition of traditional and modern phenomena, the coherence between processes subsumed under the header of modernisation, and underlined the ambiguity inherent to such processes.[74] As the work of historians such as Carlo Ginzburg, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Zemon Davis and Edward P. Thompson demonstrated, microhistorical approaches could generate insights into structural developments without neglecting individual perspectives and opposing trends.[75] Modernisation theory was similarly unsuited to incorporate perspectives gained from global history. Although initial theories of globalisation were heavily influenced by modernisation, such approaches were subsequently countered by historical research which rejected the presupposition of unique Western trajectory primarily determined by endogenous factors as well as the necessity of integrating historical research from an overarching macro-theoretical perspective.[76] Instead, global histories could be more convincingly constructed along the lines of more specific themes, such as the empires on which Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper focused

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70 Ibid., pp. 39–68.
71 *Id*., The Bearing of Empirical Research upon the Development of Social Theory, in: American Sociological Review 13, 1948, pp. 505–515, here: p. 505.
72 *Jürgen Osterhammel*, Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, München 2009, pp. 14–19.
73 *Mergel*, Geht es weiter voran?, p. 207.
74 *Cornelißen*, Ein ständiges Ärgernis?, pp. 242–244.
75 *Matti Peltonen*, Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research, in: History and Theory 40, 2001, pp. 347–359.
76 *Epple*, Globalisierung/en.

their inquiry, or the imposing panoramas presented by Jürgen Osterhammel in his global history of the 19th century.[77]

   Because of the pivotal position of modernisation theories in the evolution of social history since the 1970s, their critiques align with the challenges which the so-called cultural turn presented to social history. Over the 1980s, social history's empiricism, neglect of cultural mediation, focus on abstract processes in favour of the perspectives of historical actors, and disdain of diversity met with growing resistance.[78] Therefore, this inventory of the shortcomings of modernisation theory not only informs the countless inquiries explicitly or implicitly referring to modernisation theory but holds significance for any attempt at advancing social history. As Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt insisted, social historians can benefit from their critics by developing new and better forms of knowledge, which account for the blind spots they have uncovered, even if this entails giving up on an overarching theoretical framework for the time being.[79] Instead of staying aboard a sinking ship because swimming in the cold water doesn't seem to promise salvation, I suggest we take the plunge. Historians have all the reason to trust their swimming skills, which have never depended on the floatability of macro theories. Moreover, among the wreckage of modernisation theory, there are several pieces of flotsam which promise to support the swimmers. Abandoning the overarching frameworks frees up the structures and processes which had been subsumed under the header of modernisation for application in social history.[80]

   Taking stock of the crisis of social history, Patrick Joyce has noted that despite the fundamental doubt about the nature of »the social«, social historians by and large continue to agree on the agenda of social history[81], which Jürgen Kocka has aptly characterised:

»They reject all forms of strict methodological individualism. They are not primarily interested in single biographies and specific events, but rather in collective phenomena. They try to reconstruct ›the social‹ including social inequality. They do not accept that the past can sufficiently be understood as a context of perceptions, experiences, discourses, actions and meanings, alone. They insist that conditions and consequences, structures and processes have to be taken seriously and brought back in. They try to combine understanding and explanation. Faced by the increasing ›Balkanization‹, i.e. fragmentation, of the discipline and of historical reconstructions, they stress the need for context and interrelation.«[82]

Even if this consensus may serve as a vantage point for social historians, contemporary social history has learned valuable lessons from its crisis, as epitomised by the failure of modernisation theory. Attempts to discern emergent structures can productively be traced from the relations between historical actors. Thus, the social is not conceptualised as a synonym for (national) society.[83] Social historians have similarly benefited from the sceptical approach to grand narratives and the ways in which knowledge has been constructed. Taking seriously the cultural production of knowledge, we have scrutinised our core con-

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77 *Jane Burbank/Frederick Cooper*, Empires in World History. Power and the Politics of Difference, Princeton/Woodstock 2010; *Osterhammel*, Die Verwandlung der Welt.

78 *Victoria E. Bonnell/Lynn Hunt*, Introduction, in: *id*. (eds.), Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture, Berkeley/Los Angeles etc. 1999, pp. 1–32, here: pp. 1–10; *Hans-Ulrich Wehler*, Historische Sozialwissenschaft. Eine Zwischenbilanz nach dreißig Jahren, in: *id*. (ed.), Die Herausforderung der Kulturgeschichte, München 1998, pp. 142–153.

79 *Bonnell/Hunt*, Introduction, p. 25.

80 Cf. *Thomas*, Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts.

81 *Patrick Joyce*, What is the Social in Social History?, in: Past & Present, 2010, no. 206, pp. 213–248, here: p. 246.

82 *Jürgen Kocka*, Losses, Gains and Opportunities: Social History Today, in: Journal of Social History 37, 2003, pp. 21–28, here: p. 26.

83 *Ute Daniel*, »Kultur« und »Gesellschaft«. Überlegungen zum Gegenstandsbereich der Sozialgeschichte, in: GG 19, 1993, pp. 69–99; Cf. *Joyce*, What Is the Social in Social History?

cepts and revised them in many instances. The increasing importance of the sciences for the conceptualisation of the social during the 20th century and the relationship between scholarly and public discourse have likewise been evaluated.[84] The historical entanglement of the sciences and humanities with the colonial project as well as the increasing attention to the political functions of the knowledge they have produced for use within the West reinforce the importance of revaluation.[85]

In this light, the genealogical analysis of modernisation theory is not merely promising but had indeed become necessary. Not only does it provide valuable insights into the ways in which social change has been understood both in the past and the present. Such an analysis also brings the explicit and implicit influence of concepts of modernisation in society and the academy to the fore. By pointing out these influences and the inadequacies they have imported into the concepts of social history, it may help to avoid the dead end to which modernisation theory as a blind spot has led social history. Without explicitly addressing the ways in which the notion has influenced our view of history, the present, and the future, it will continue to function as an explicit and implicit frame of reference for scholarly inquiry and societal self-fashioning.

The interplay between scholarly and popular discourse deserves particular attention in this regard. The analysis of modernisation has often been reduced to an inquiry into its scholarly incarnations. In such investigations, public conceptions of the modern appear as separate interpretations which at times might interfere with the serious discussions about modernisation within the walls of academia. If social history is to be a history of relations instead of isolated groups and societies, this is unsatisfactory. As the provided genealogy shows, the integration of modernisation theories into social history was motivated by scholarly as well as political agendas, as was its subsequent demise. This points towards a reciprocal relationship between scholarly and public conceptions of the social which deserves closer investigation. It seems worthwhile to study the continuities as well as the transformations and disconnects appearing in the course of these transplants in more detail and beyond the domain of historiography. In fact, in further exploring the genealogy of modernisation, it might be more plausible to set out outside of academic circles, only to investigate how conceptions of progress and Western exceptionalism then migrated into scholarly discussions. This exploration can also shed light on instances where academic experts attempted to assert societal influence, but failed, and thus on the limits of scientification.

As has been apparent in the history of modernisation theories, a critical view of our own concepts has allowed historians to revaluate the relevant categories of time and space for their respective objects of research. Rather than taking a linear development for granted, a conscious decision to doubt narratives of modernisation has opened up the possibilities of circular movements and conjunctures. The conventional analyses of modernisation had tied related processes firmly to the nation-state within the framework of the Western world. Once challenged, instead of presupposing a fixed spatial setting for the object of analysis, the relevant spatial markers had to be deduced from the subject at hand.[86]

84 *Lutz Raphael*, Embedding the Human and Social Sciences in Western Societies, 1880–1980. Reflections on Trends and Methods of Current Research, in: *Brückweh/Schumann/Wetzell* et al., Engineering Society, pp. 41–56.

85 Cf. *Frederick Cooper/Randall M. Packard* (eds.), International Development and the Social Sciences. Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge, Berkeley/Los Angeles etc. 1997; *Benjamin Ziemann*, Die Soziologie der Gesellschaft. Selbstverständnis, Traditionen und Wirkungen einer Disziplin, in: NPL 50, 2005, pp. 43–67; *Daniel T. Rodgers*, Age of Fracture, Cambridge/London 2011.

86 Cf. *Angelika Epple*, Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen, in: Historische Anthropologie 21, 2013, pp. 4–25; *Peter van Dam*, Vervlochten geschiedenis. Hoe histoire croisée de natiestaat bedwingt, in: Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis 125, 2012, pp. 97–109.

A genealogical approach to modernisation theories at the same time establishes the critical distance needed to salvage the many fruitful insights which can be won from the tradition of social history. Without examination, these processes would continue to be framed as parts of an overarching ›modernisation‹, providing them with a presupposed direction, relation to the West, and association to other processes. Once they are liberated from this stranglehold, processes such as structural differentiation, bureaucratisation, and scientification can be evaluated against the backdrop of historical empirical investigation. Individually, the applicability of the concept and the direction of its development may be assessed in separate cases. Instead of stating an a priori association with other processes, the relation of one of these processes to other structural developments has to be proven from instance to instance. This call to reassess the applicability of individual processes and their interdependency has the potential to reinvigorate social history.

The confrontation with the cultural turn on the other hand sets the indispensable elements within tradition of social history apart. As Kocka points out, these include the commitment to a view of the social which includes but does not limit itself to cultural mediation. The traditional emphasis on relating disparate insights from historical and social scientific scholarship remains just as appealing. Above all, the tradition of social history entails a focus on structures and processes which exceed individual experience and elude the ability of individual actors to direct or shape them. As Osterhammel has stated, the critique of master narratives has not made such narratives obsolete but rather calls for a more reflexive approach to narrating them.[87] Looking specifically to the legacy of modernisation theory, this understanding on emergent structures has been expanded to account for social evolution in terms of more and less likely paths of development. As recent reflections on the possibilities of a »Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart« have demonstrated, modernisation's orientation towards explaining present phenomena can also continue to play a productive role.[88]

Moving on from applying modernisation in social history will certainly make demands on the methodological and rhetorical restraint of social historians at first. In the light of the agenda of social history, the ambition to define the kind of overarching perspectives such a theory provided remains alive. In the long run, social history will be suited to pursue this ambition if it does not apply an insurmountably flawed theory. This restraint will reinforce the critical interrogation between the social sciences and history, the sense of open-ended inquiry, the ambition to determine structural developments, and the desire to find explanations for how we have arrived in the present on these waves. Reacting to the crisis of modernisation history by mining its historiographical tradition whilst returning to the moderate ambition of identifying and applying theories of the middle range, social history can reclaim the middle ground between the social sciences and history with a renewed vigour.

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87 *Osterhammel*, Die Verwandlung der Welt, p. 19.
88 *Hans Günter Hockerts*, Zeitgeschichte in Deutschland. Begriff, Methoden, Themenfelder, in: Historisches Jahrbuch 113, 1993, pp. 98–127; *Doering-Manteuffel/Raphael*, Nach dem Boom; *Anselm Doering-Manteuffel/Lutz Raphael/Thomas Schlemmer* (eds.), Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart. Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom, Göttingen 2016.