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Toward a Theory of Historical Periodization

The Notion of Late Premodernity

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INTRODUCTION

The Study of Historical Periodization

What death and taxes are to people, periodization is to historiography: history has to be divided one way or another. All historians face the question of when to start and end their analysis, which means that they face questions about dividing history. Influential frameworks of periodization, such as the division into ancient, medieval, and modern periods, determine the structure of university departments, scientific journals, and research projects. And, most importantly, any notion of human history is based on a particular way of dividing it, which shapes how we understand our collective past. Periodization is something that simply cannot be avoided.

Despite this obvious fact, the subject of how history is divided into periods lacks comprehensive discussion in historiography and the social sciences. That is not to say that discussions about this topic are entirely absent. On the contrary, most general history books acknowledge and reflect on the issue of periodization. The reason is that any overview of historical developments inherently leads to the question of how those developments fit into the broader scope of human history. However, the discussion of periodization in general histories is usually restricted to a few introductory comments about a particular historical period. Brief remarks about specific examples are not conducive to a systematic analysis of any subject.

Somewhat more comprehensive studies have been conducted on the history of periodization, which represents an important part of the history of historiography. For millennia, the division of history was

primarily grounded in the narratives of religious myths, the cycles of natural phenomena, and the fates of political dynasties. Only in more recent centuries has there been a shift toward an emphasis on significant economic, social, and cultural transformations. The development of new perspectives and methodologies in historiography has changed how historians classify and divide history.[1] However, while it is undoubtedly important to be familiar with the variety of criteria that have been proposed in the past, this knowledge alone is insufficient to address contemporary challenges related to periodization.

Finally, there is a small number of scholars who reflect on how history is divided at an abstract level and attempt to draw general conclusions about this subject. The goal of meta-discussions about periodization is to critically examine the methods that historians use to divide the past.[2] In our view, the main problem of such discussions is that they do not sufficiently incorporate the heterogeneity of time into their considerations. Time is not a homogeneous entity and cannot be grasped with homogeneous notions. The result is a failure to develop the conceptual tools that are needed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of periodization.

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1 For general overviews of the history of periodization, see Luigi Cajani, "Periodization," in *The Oxford Handbook of World History*, ed. Jerry H. Bentley (Oxford University Press, 2011), 54–71; William A. Green, "Periodization in European and World History," *Journal of World History* 3, no. 1 (1992): 13–53; Krzysztof Pomian, *L'ordre du temps* (Gallimard, 1984), 101–163.

2 For recent examples of meta-discussions about periodization, see Lucian George, "Introduction: Periodization Challenges and Challenging Periodization: Interdisciplinary Reflections," in *Rethinking Period Boundaries: New Approaches to Continuity and Discontinuity in Modern European History and Culture*, eds. Lucian George and Jade McGlynn (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 1–33; Barbara Mittler, Thomas Maissen, and Pierre Monnet, "Introduction: Periodisation in a Global Context," in *Chronologics: Periodisation in a Global Context*, eds. Barbara Mittler, Thomas Maissen, and Pierre Monnet (Heidelberg University Publishing, 2022), 1–10; Daniel Woolf, "Historical Periodization: An Exploration and Defence," in *Zeiten bezeichnen / Labelling Times: Frühneuzeitliche Epochenbegriffe: europäische Geschichte und globale Gegenwart / The 'Early Modern' – European Past and Global Now*, eds. Andreas Mahler and Cornel Zwierlein (Harrassowitz Verlag, 2023), 29–56.

The main purpose of this book is to discuss dividing history into periods as an independent subject of study and to attempt to develop a general theory of periodization. We will argue that the central task of such a theory is to account for the heterogeneity of time, which is why it should be framed around the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. We will proceed to demonstrate the usefulness of our approach by addressing specific problems about dividing human history.

The Notion of Early Modernity

The focus of our analysis will be the period that spans roughly from 1450 to 1750. This era is commonly understood through the notion of Early Modernity, which originates from the division of European history into ancient, medieval, and modern periods. This tripartite framework of periodization can be traced back to 14th-century Italian humanists, who saw their age as a break with a dark "middle" period and a return to the glory of Antiquity. The Italian Renaissance later came to mark the beginning of the modern era of history.

Contemporary historiography has refined the humanist framework by recognizing the period 1450–1750 as a distinct historical era, the early part of Modernity. However, this development should not be seen as a fundamental rejection of the tripartite model, since the prevailing understanding of Early Modernity tends to emphasize the modern characteristics of the period 1450–1750. The division into Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernity has consequently remained one of the most influential frameworks for dividing history to this day.[3]

3 We explore the notion of Early Modernity in the third part of the book. For recent discussions of this concept, see Justus Nipperdey, "The Pitfalls of Terminology: Uncovering the Paradoxical Roots of Early Modern History in American Historiography," in *Chronologics: Periodisation in a Global Context*, eds. Barbara Mittler, Thomas Maissen, and Pierre Monnet (Heidelberg University Publishing, 2022), 107–118; Hamish Scott, "Introduction: 'Early Modern' Europe and

While the perspective that emphasizes modern characteristics represents the most common understanding of Early Modernity, a somewhat less conventional interpretation of this notion offers a particularly productive starting point for discussions about periodization. This approach focuses on the simultaneous existence of premodern and modern characteristics during the period 1450–1750.[4] Characteristics typically associated with Premodernity, such as the predominance of subsistence agriculture in the economic sphere, systems of power defined by rigid social hierarchies in the political sphere, and religious frameworks of understanding in the ideological sphere, coexisted with characteristics typically associated with Modernity. These include the first phase of globalization, the rise of fiscal-military states, the technological innovations of the printing press, the compass, gunpowder, and the mechanical clock, and the new currents of thought of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment.[5] It is not only the coexistence of older and newer elements, but more specifically of premodern and modern ones, that should be emphasized when defining this historical era.

The reason why this interpretation of Early Modernity is especially interesting for discussions about periodization is that it brings into focus what we view as the main challenge of dividing history, namely the heterogeneity of time. However, the problem with this approach is that it does not clearly specify the relative significance of the older and the newer characteristics, which means that it is unclear whether the premodern

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the Idea of Early Modernity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*, vol. 1, *Peoples and Place*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford University Press, 2015), 1–33; Marko Štuhec, "Klare Trennlinien oder verschwommener Berührungsraum? Zeitliche Markierungen der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Endpunkte. Und Neuanfänge: Geisteswissenschaftliche Annäherungen an die Dynamik von Zeitläuften*, eds. Sašo Jerše and Kristina Lahl (Böhlau Verlag, 2022), 85–94.

4 This framing of the early modern period is emphasized by our doctoral advisor, Marko Štuhec. For further discussion of this perspective, see Marko Štuhec, "Reformacijska gibanja v okviru evropskega 16. stoletja," *Slavia Centralis* 1, no. 1 (2008): 5–20; Štuhec, "Klare Trennlinien," 85–94.

5 Scott, "Introduction: 'Early Modern' Europe," 3.

or the modern elements are more important for understanding the period 1450–1750. If we follow the above description, this historical period could be characterized as part of Premodernity, as part of Modernity, or as a transition between the two. The place of this period in human history remains ambiguous. As a result, the very use of the term "Early Modernity" means that modern characteristics still have the more prominent role in shaping the general understanding of this historical era.

The second purpose of this book is to provide an analysis of the period 1450–1750 as a problem of periodization. We will argue that this period should be understood as the end of Premodernity rather than the beginning of Modernity, thereby presenting an alternative to the humanist tripartite framework. In order to make a persuasive argument in favor of the notion of Late Premodernity, we will first outline our general approach to dividing human history.

Time and Social Theory

The question of how to approach the periodization of the entire history of humanity inherently leads from descriptions of historical developments to explanations of social phenomena. It is much easier to provide a general account of human history if one understands the underlying mechanisms that determine continuity and change. That is to say, a comprehensive discussion about how history is divided into periods entails engaging with contemporary social theory.

Perhaps the most direct connection between social science and periodization comes from theories of history in the traditional sense. Such theories claim that human history has a clear direction that can be demonstrated and explained. Canonical historical materialism, for example, argues that history is characterized by a tendency toward the development of the forces of production and a corresponding transformation

of the relations of production. Productive capacity increases over time as humans develop technologies to meet material needs and reduce strenuous work. This tendency also drives social change, since the level of technological development constrains the possible types of social relations that can be sustained. Relations of production endure only if they are compatible with the further development of productive forces. History therefore unfolds through a particular sequence of social forms, classically presented as tribal, slave, feudal, capitalist, socialist, and communist. The development of technology is accompanied by the evolution of societies, which can serve as a framework of periodization.[6]

While it does represent an overarching interpretation of human history, this theory has been shown to have significant problems.[7] Arguably the most important development relating to this subject is the revision of the theory of social forms and the consequent revision of the typology of societies. Apart from the category of pre-class societies, the more recent approaches emphasize the differences between all pre-capitalist class societies, on the one hand, and capitalist societies, on the other. Pre-capitalist and capitalist societies can also be interpreted in temporal terms, which means that the differences between them represent central differences in the temporality of human action.[8] The implications of these

6 We discuss the Marxist theory of history in the second part of the book. For the classic formulation of this theory, see Karl Marx, "'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*," trans. Terrell Carver, in *Marx: Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 158–162.

7 Vivek Chibber, "What Is Living and What Is Dead in the Marxist Theory of History," *Historical Materialism* 19, no. 2 (2011): 60–91.

8 We discuss the typology and the temporality of societies in the second part of the book. For characterizations of social forms from different theoretical perspectives, see Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (Profile Books, 2012), 73–87; Robert Brenner, "Property and Progress: Where Adam Smith Went Wrong," in *Marxist History-Writing for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Chris Wickham (Oxford University Press, 2007), 49–111; Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 1, *Power, Property, and the State* (University of California Press, 1981), 157–169.

developments for the periodization of history seem obvious: pre-class societies correspond to the period of Prehistory, pre-capitalist societies to the period of Premodernity, and capitalist societies to the period of Modernity. The definitions of historical periods can be derived from a typology of societies rather than a theory of their evolution.

However, such an approach to dividing history has at least two significant problems. First, the transition from one social form to another does not happen everywhere at once, which means that different types of societies exist at the same time. The coexistence of pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist societies suggests that we cannot simply equate societal types with historical periods. Second, societies are composed of multiple parts and are consequently characterized by multiple temporalities. A homogeneous view of societies overlooks the differences that are internal to societies, such as those between the temporalities of pre-capitalist peasants, merchants, and lords. In other words, the direct application of the theory of social forms to the periodization of history does not sufficiently account for the heterogeneity of time.

The third purpose of this book is to examine the connection between discussions about periodization and the understanding of time in social theory. We will aim to clarify the relation between the temporality of historical periods, social forms, and social actors. To look at it from another perspective, we will argue that contemporary social science can address the central challenges of dividing human history.

The Structure of the Book

The book is divided into three parts. The first part discusses dividing history into periods at an abstract level and attempts to provide a general theory of periodization. It argues that the basis of such a theory is the shift of focus from individual temporalities to the relations between

temporalities, which leads to a reinterpretation of the notion of a historical turning point, the notions of early, middle, and late historical periods, as well as a different understanding of the time-consciousness of social actors. These reinterpretations are centered around the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.

The second part of the book argues for an approach to dividing human history that focuses on the relations between and within different types of societies. The first section of this part starts with a characterization of pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist societies. It proceeds to argue that social forms are of key importance for the periodization of history because they shape the temporality of human action. However, the definitions of historical periods should be derived from the relations between societies, not societies themselves. These relations can be interpreted in temporal terms, which results in a tripartite division of humanity's past.

The second section of this part focuses on the relations within societies. It starts with a criticism of approaches that emphasize the multiple temporalities that characterize social forms but fail to incorporate this heterogeneity into a broader framework. It proceeds to argue that the latter can be achieved by focusing on the mechanism that generates and connects the different temporalities of social actors, which is the extraction and distribution of the social surplus. The main part of this section is dedicated to developing a heterogeneous characterization of the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies, which are then compared with the temporalities of capitalism.

The third part of the book argues that the period 1450–1750 should be understood as the late premodern period. The first section of this part discusses the notions of periodization that are most important for understanding this historical era, which are Modernity, Premodernity, Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages, Old Europe, as well as an

existing interpretation of the notion of Late Premodernity. It proceeds by taking a closer look at the individual characteristics of the period that is under discussion.

The second section of this part applies the framework of periodization developed earlier to an analysis of the period 1450–1750. It attempts to show that the distribution of older and newer characteristics in this historical era can be explained by focusing on the relations between and within different types of societies. This discussion results in our definition of the notion of Late Premodernity and an explanation of why this interpretation is preferable to the alternatives.

The third section of this part addresses the question of how the period 1450–1750 differs from the long 19th century. It starts by discussing the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and their interaction in the Dual Revolution. The latter is then interpreted as the historical turning point that represents the end of Premodernity and the beginning of Modernity.

The overarching claim of the book is that discussions about periodization represent a distinct perspective on human history. This claim is presented in the conclusion.[9]

9 This book is an expanded version of the article "Zgodovina skozi periodizacijo: pojem pozne predmodernosti," which was published in the journal *Zgodovinski časopis*. The English version of the text was intended for an international journal, but it became too long for an article and is therefore being published in this form instead. It should be noted that the broad range of topics covered necessarily involves certain simplifications. Nevertheless, the hope is that the book also introduces some new ideas on the subject of historical periodization. Robin Dolar, "Zgodovina skozi periodizacijo: pojem pozne predmodernosti," *Zgodovinski časopis* 78, no. 3–4 (2024): 270–326.

PART I: THE CORE NOTIONS OF HISTORICAL PERIODIZATION

Introduction

Although periodization has been a constant feature of historiography since its beginnings, it remains a highly controversial phenomenon. Historians disagree not only about which criteria should be used to divide history, but also about whether periodization serves a meaningful purpose at all.[10] Any comprehensive discussion of this subject consequently has to address the following question: What makes dividing history into periods so problematic?

Periodization is the classification of history. In the most general sense, classification is the cognitive process by which a given totality is divided into different parts. The term used for describing the results of classification is "category," which means, for example, that "chair," "music," and "Eurasia," while different in terms of their content, are all examples of categories. The specificity of individual categories is not determined solely by their intrinsic characteristics but emerges from the differences between categories. The category "chair," for example, is not defined only by its own characteristics but by how it contrasts with categories like "table."[11]

Periodization can therefore be understood as the practice of dividing history into individual categories based on characteristics that distinguish them from other categories. The category "agrarian period," for example, is based on its differences with non-agrarian periods, such as the period of hunting and gathering and the industrial period. Just

10 George, "Introduction: Periodization Challenges," 2–3; Eric Hayot, "Against Periodization; Or, on Institutional Time," *New Literary History* 42, no. 4 (2011): 739–756; Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 151–171.

11 Our discussion of classification is limited to aspects that are relevant to the present purposes. For an overview of different approaches to classification, see Michael Ramscar and Robert Port, "Categorization (Without Categories)," in *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*, eds. Ewa Dąbrowska and Dagmar Divjak (De Gruyter Mouton, 2015), 75–99.

as there is a certain continuity over the category "chair," which separates it from other categories, there is also a certain continuity over the category "agrarian period," which separates it from other categories that describe historical periods. Discussions about periodization consequently require a very broad perspective on history, one that allows for the direct comparison of different periods.

However, periodization is different from other types of classification because its subject of study is the past. The introduction of time impacts classification in significant ways.[12]

The most basic dimension of time is that it flows in only one direction, from the past to the future. In contrast to space, which allows for movement in different directions, it is not possible to go back in time. The unidirectionality of time is closely connected to the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the entropy of closed systems has an inherent tendency to increase. From this perspective, the history of the universe can be understood as a progression from the low-entropy state of the Big Bang to the high-entropy state of the present.[13] To put it in terms of classification, all categories change unidirectionally with the passing of time.

However, all categories do not change in the same way. The dimension of time that poses the greatest challenge to periodization is its inherent heterogeneity, which means two very basic things. First, different categories initially emerged at different points in the past: the technology of writing initially emerged millennia ago, industrial technology centuries ago, digital technology decades ago, etc. Second,

12 Our discussion of time is, again, limited to aspects that are relevant to the present purposes. For general overviews of concepts used to understand temporality, see Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory* (Polity Press, 1990); Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*; Jiří Šubrt, *The Sociology of Time: A Critical Overview* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

13 Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, 61–65.

different categories change in different ways and are consequently marked by distinct diachronic characteristics. That is to say, different categories have a distinct pace, rhythm, frequency, direction, etc., of continuity and change.[14] The term we use to highlight the diachronic characteristics of categories is "temporality."

The fact that time is heterogeneous therefore means that the past consists of different temporalities, which is to say categories that emerged at different points in the past and are marked by distinct diachronic characteristics. It is useful to put these basic points in the words of Fernand Braudel: "*Science, technology, political institutions, conceptual changes, civilizations* [different categories] [...] *all have their own rhythms of life and growth* [all have their own temporalities], *and the new history of conjunctures will be complete only when it has made up a whole orchestra of them all.*"[15] The different "rhythms of history," as it were, can be understood with the analogy of each temporality having its own track that is at least minimally different from other tracks.

Finally, the unidirectionality and heterogeneity of time are closely connected to the dimension of time that Reinhart Koselleck characterizes as the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.[16] This notion describes the fact that categories which initially emerged at different points in the past exist at the same time: the 17th century was marked by the coexistence of witch trials and Newtonian physics, the 19th century by the coexistence of preindustrial and industrial societies, etc. It is important to note that the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous presupposes both a heterogeneous view of time, as it assumes the

14 Helge Jordheim, "Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization," *History and Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014): 498–518.

15 Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 30.

16 Reinhart Koselleck, "History, Histories, and Formal Time Structures," trans. Keith Tribe, in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 95.

existence of multiple temporalities, as well as a homogeneous view of universal time, as it assumes that those temporalities exist "at the same time." Since the coexistence of different temporalities results from two of the most fundamental dimensions of time, it is ubiquitous across history. In other words, all historical periods are mixtures of different temporalities.

In our view, the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous should be understood as the main problem of periodization and the central reason why dividing history remains highly contested. If time were a homogeneous entity, history could be divided into a set of distinct categories that follow a linear timeline. However, the fact that time is heterogeneous means that focusing on certain temporalities necessarily results in the relative neglect of other temporalities. The most consequential issue is that the decision about which temporalities to emphasize can determine if a particular historical period is viewed as a continuation of preceding periods or as a precursor to succeeding ones. The choice of whether to emphasize the characteristics of older or newer temporalities therefore fundamentally shapes our understanding of historical periods and plays a central role in defining how they are positioned within the broader narrative of human history.[17]

The aim of the following discussion is to develop a theory of periodization that can address the problem of the coexistence of different temporalities.

17 Discussions about periodization usually revolve around a dichotomy between older and newer characteristics even though the heterogeneity of time entails the existence of multiple temporalities. The explanation of this tendency should be sought in the fact that, in the context of considering a specific period, "new" characteristics include only those that emerge during that period, while "old" characteristics include residues from various past periods.

The Basic Elements of the Theory of Periodization

A Shift of Focus

We have identified the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous as the main problem of periodization. To focus on a specific example: the 19th century was marked by the coexistence of a non-industrial China and a partially industrial Europe. China can even be said to have been re-agrarianized because its manufacturing sector collapsed during that century.[18] If we simplify somewhat, we can say that China represents a temporality that was marked by premodern characteristics, while Europe represents a temporality that was marked by modern ones. The basic question of periodization is that of which characteristics to emphasize, the older or the newer ones. Was the 19th century modern? If we focused on individual temporalities, we could say that from Europe's point of view it was, but from China's point of view it was not. If we emphasized the characteristics of one temporality, we would conclude that this period was modern, but if we emphasized the characteristics of the other, we would conclude that it was premodern.

However, the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous not only indicates that different temporalities exist at the same time, but also that they can influence each other in different ways. The re-agrarianizing of China happened *because of* the economic and military pressure of Europe, which was a result of its partial industrialization. The newer characteristics of one temporality influenced the other temporality via the synchronic relation between them.

18 Robert C. Allen, *Global Economic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 6–8.

This shift of focus, namely the shift from individual temporalities to the relations between temporalities, should be understood as the starting point of the theory of periodization. The primary focus of discussions about periodization should be on the *synchronic relations* between different temporalities. In other words, the main emphasis should not be on the older and the newer characteristics themselves, but on the relation between the old and the new. The way to decide whether there is continuity between two historical periods is to ask whether there is continuity in the relations between the characteristics of those periods, not to ask whether there is continuity in their individual characteristics viewed separately. This change of perspective is necessary due to the simple fact that focusing on the relations between temporalities inherently entails the consideration of both the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions of time, while focusing on individual temporalities only entails the consideration of the diachronic dimension of time.[19]

The answer to the question in our example, then, is that the 19th century was modern because the relation between Europe and China changed significantly during that century. The way to approach periodization in this example is to examine the long-term relation between these two regions (namely, to examine what this relation was in Antiquity, in the Middle Ages, in Early Modernity, and in the 19th and 20th centuries), and then make a determination of when the most significant change in this relation occurred (China came under significant European influence only in the mid-19th century). The focus should not be on individual temporalities and their internal changes, but on the relations between temporalities and their changes. The main

19 It should be noted that different temporalities can, of course, exist at the same time without being connected. In such cases, the initial establishment of a connection between temporalities usually represents the central development. We therefore use the term "relations between temporalities" in a simplified way for reasons of practicality.

question is not when Europe industrialized, but when Europe started to dominate China.

This is, of course, only one example. However, the point is that the problem of the coexistence of older and newer characteristics *always* comes up in discussions about periodization because the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous represents a fundamental dimension of time. Focusing on the relations between temporalities is consequently the only way to take the heterogeneity of time into account when considering historical periodization. If one chooses a specific type of change as the key criterion in advance, one approaches dividing history in the wrong way from the very start, since that type of change may have occurred only in certain temporalities while not affecting others. Reflections on periodization have to start at an abstract level, based on the realization that their subject matter is the character of the relations between different temporalities.

Historical Turning Points

This shift of focus allows us to define the notions that are important for discussing how history is divided into periods. The term "historical turning point" is typically understood to denote the boundary between two historical periods, which means that it is conceptually closely related to periodization.[20] However, a more exact definition of this notion requires additional qualifications. Following the logic of what was discussed above, we can say that historical turning points represent the

20 In our view, the main problem with existing characterizations of historical turning points, breaks, and ruptures is that they do not take the heterogeneity of time sufficiently into account. For examples of such discussions, see Randall Collins, "Turning Points, Bottlenecks, and the Fallacies of Counterfactual History," *Sociological Forum* 22, no. 3 (2007): 247–269; Roger D. Launius, "What Are Turning Points in History, and What Were They for the Space Age?," in *Societal Impact of Spaceflight*, eds. Steven J. Dick and Roger D. Launius (NASA, 2007), 19–39; Bruce Mazlish, "Ruptures in History," *Historically Speaking* 12, no. 3 (2011): 32–33.

changes in the relations between different temporalities, not changes within individual temporalities themselves. The focus when defining this notion should be on the relations between older and newer characteristics.

In the example used, we can argue that the historical turning point is not represented by the first phase of the Industrial Revolution (the phase of the rapid expansion of textile manufacture), since that phase did not lead to a significant change in the relation between Europe and China. The change that should be understood as the historical turning point in this example is the second phase of the Industrial Revolution (the phase of the steam engine), since it was only because of that phase that the relation between the two regions significantly changed.[21] The main question is not which of the two phases marked the greater transformation of Europe's economy, but which of the two phases marked the greater transformation of the relation between Europe and China.

Several other qualifications are needed to define the notion of a historical turning point. The boundaries between historical periods have to be shorter than the periods themselves, which means that historical turning points have to occur in a short period of time. The notion of "short" should not be understood in absolute terms, which would mean a certain number of days, years, or decades. Instead, this notion should be understood in relative terms, which means that a short period can only be defined in relation to longer periods. For example, the phrase "changes around 1500" refers to different changes that took place in the decades around that year (the discovery of America, the Reformation, the beginning of the long 16th century, etc.), which is a short period of time relative to the centuries that characterize the Middle Ages, on the one hand, and Early Modernity, on the other. Historical turning points

21 Jack Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500–1850* (McGraw-Hill, 2009), 52–70.

should therefore be understood as changes in the relations between temporalities that occur in a relatively short period of time.[22]

This definition is still too broad because it can be used to describe changes of very different intensities and changes that happen in very different contexts. A narrower focus can be achieved by using the notion of "comparable historical turning points." This notion describes changes that are comparable in terms of (1) the degree of discontinuity they represent and (2) the spatial and thematic contexts in which they occur. Examples of comparable historical turning points include the agricultural and industrial revolutions in world history, the Newtonian and Einsteinian revolutions in the history of physics, and both world wars in the history of the 20th century. All these changes can be characterized as historical turning points, but only some of them are comparable. Determinations of which historical turning points can be understood to be comparable are up for debate, as the term itself suggests, but they are necessary if this notion is to be used systematically.[23]

Following this logic, we can say, for example, that the answer to the question of whether the changes around 1500 can be characterized as a historical turning point is not simply "yes" or "no." Instead, we can say that while the changes around 1500 do represent a historical turning point, it is (arguably) not comparable to the historical turning point represented by the Industrial Revolution. The changes around 1500 and the Industrial Revolution can both be characterized as historical

22 This qualification represents the basic difference between historical turning points and historical transitions. A historical transition is not a boundary between two periods in the same sense as a historical turning point because it does not necessarily happen in a short period of time. Transitional periods can be the subject of analysis in the same sense as non-transitional periods, which means that they also have to be demarcated from the preceding and succeeding periods. We first discussed this qualification in our master's thesis. Robin Dolar, "Kaj je zgodovinski prelom?" (master's thesis, University of Ljubljana, 2020), 30–31.

23 *Ibid.*, 35–36.

turning points, but they are not comparable.[24] Existing frameworks of periodization inherently imply such an approach: the tripartite division into ancient, medieval, and modern periods implies that the changes around 1000 and 1300 (the inner boundaries of the Middle Ages) are not comparable to the changes around 500 and 1500 (its outer boundaries). The notion of comparable historical turning points therefore makes explicit what is already implied in existing approaches to dividing history.

These considerations represent our attempt to define the notion of a historical turning point. It is useful to make a comparison with analogous notions. For example, Gaston Bachelard defines the notion of the epistemological break as a shift in thinking in which previously held beliefs are discarded in favor of a new epistemological outlook. In this characterization, the emphasis is on the radical change that happened within one temporality, which offers an effective approach to analyzing epistemological breakthroughs.[25] The main advantage of our definition of a *historical* turning point is that it emphasizes the heterogeneity of time, which is why changes within individual temporalities are only understood to be relevant if they are connected to changes in the relations between temporalities, not by themselves. To put it differently: the notion of "historical" entails time, which entails multiple temporalities, which entails the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, which entails focusing on synchronic relations, which entails that historical turning points represent changes in the relations between temporalities, not changes within individual temporalities themselves.

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24 *Ibid.*, 66–67.

25 Gaston Bachelard, *The Formation of the Scientific Mind: A Contribution to a Psychoanalysis of Objective Knowledge*, trans. Mary McAllester Jones (Clinamen, 2002).

A Digression on Events

Events have traditionally been of central importance to periodization because they represent clearly identifiable points that can separate two historical periods.[26] Gradually, however, historians have started to use the phrase "changes around the year X" instead of focusing on individual events. This development corresponds to the relative decline in the significance of diplomatic and political history and the rise in the significance of economic and social history in 20th century historiography.[27] Contemporary scholarship has made it increasingly apparent that even such major events as the fall of Rome and the discovery of America did not fundamentally change the economic and social structures of premodern societies. The use of the phrases "changes around 500" and "changes around 1500" thus reflects a relativization of the importance of individual events and indicates that the boundaries between historical periods are not entirely clear.

This "turn of events" is perfectly logical, but not without reservations. In some cases, individual events did have such an important impact that it makes sense to highlight the events themselves. For example, the two world wars significantly reduced income and wealth inequality in Western societies, which had been at a relatively constant level during the 19th century.[28] The major events of the 20th century have more generally led to changes in many economic and social structures in ways that events in earlier periods did not. The primary explanation for this phenomenon should be sought in the consequences of

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26 For a description of the notion of an event as it is typically used by historians, see Reinhart Koselleck, "Representation, Event, and Structure," trans. Keith Tribe, in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 105–114. For a brief overview of the history of this notion, see Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*, 7–36.

27 Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929–89* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

28 Thomas Piketty, *A Brief History of Equality*, trans. Steven Rendall (Harvard University Press, 2022), 30–47.

modernization: the capacity of modern state power is far greater than that of premodern state power; modern wars have unprecedented destructive potential; the modern world is more interconnected than ever; etc.[29] These developments changed the potential effects of events. The fall of Rome and the discovery of America *could not* have transformed basic societal structures in the way that the two world wars did.

The question of the significance of events should therefore be historicized because their impact on human life changed over time. Broadly speaking, we can say that the changes related to modernization made events in recent centuries more important than they were in the more distant past. This development is reflected in the increased use of the phrase "changes around the year X" when referring to historical turning points in older periods, but when it comes to the periodization of the 20th century, most historians continue to emphasize the two world wars and the fall of the Soviet Union. The reason is that these three events have a completely different significance than events of older historical eras.

Early, Middle, and Late Periods

The shift of focus from individual temporalities to the relations between temporalities also enables a reinterpretation of the notions of early, middle, and late historical periods.

Late historical periods, which are especially important for the purposes of this book, are in the most basic sense defined by their continuity with the characteristics of the preceding period, even if these characteristics take on a somewhat different form.[30] The problem with

29 We discuss various aspects of modernization in the second and third parts of the book.

30 In our view, the main problem with existing discussions about the character of late periods is that they do not sufficiently account for the heterogeneity of time. For an overview of different approaches to late periods, see Birger Vanwesenbeeck, "Huizinga, Theorist of Lateness?," in *Rereading Huizinga: Autumn of the Middle Ages, a Century Later*, eds. Peter Arnade, Martha Howell, and Anton van der Lem (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 245–258.

focusing on this continuity is that certain characteristics associated with the succeeding period already begin to emerge in late periods, which raises the question of whether the older or the newer elements should be emphasized. To take the example of the European Late Middle Ages: the older characteristics of this period include the continuation of the Malthusian pattern of economic development, the relatively high degree of power of independent feudal lords, and the predominance of medieval mentalities, such as scholasticism, while the newer characteristics of this period include the introduction of gunpowder in warfare, the first phase of European maritime explorations, and the Italian Renaissance.[31] Should we think about the period 1300–1500 as medieval or as early modern? In *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Johan Huizinga famously argues that this era should be understood as the decline of the Middle Ages, not as the start of a new age. His argumentation includes minimizing the significance of the newer characteristics of the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly of the Italian Renaissance.[32]

The Late Middle Ages are not exceptional in this sense, as we can find a similar mixture of older and newer elements in the decline of every period. The period of Late Antiquity already contained certain characteristics that became predominant in the Early Middle Ages, the late 19th century already contained certain characteristics that became predominant in the 20th century, etc. That is to say, every autumn is already a forecast for the coming winter. This problem can only be resolved by interpreting historical periods as mixtures of different temporalities, which implies that the characteristics of the succeeding

31 For general overviews of developments in the European Late Middle Ages, see Warren C. Hollister and Judith M. Bennett, *Medieval Europe: A Short History*, 9th ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2002), 323–384; Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe* (Yale University Press, 2016), 210–251.

32 Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzch (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 39–42, 73–77, 382–396.

period represent an *internal part* of late periods. The focus when defining historical periods at an abstract level should be on the relation between older and newer elements: late historical periods are periods in which the characteristics of the preceding period are still predominant, but the characteristics of the succeeding period are also present in a limited form. This type of mixture, namely the predominance of older characteristics and the simultaneous limited emergence of newer ones, is what defines late historical periods.[33]

If we focus on the example of the European Late Middle Ages, we can argue that the newer characteristics of this period were limited in various ways: the Renaissance was primarily confined to Italy, while older mentalities remained predominant throughout most of Europe; the consequences of the Portuguese and Spanish explorations had not yet come to fruition; despite the introduction of gunpowder in warfare, older technologies remained more important in the major wars of the 14th and 15th centuries; etc.[34] The newer characteristics were limited, while the older ones remained predominant. Our interpretation therefore indicates that the limited emergence of certain characteristics of the succeeding period represents an argument *in favor of* the lateness of the period 1300–1500. Following this logic, we can even say that Huizinga does himself a disservice when he attempts to minimize the novelty of the Italian Renaissance, since the limited emergence of mentalities that became predominant in Early Modernity actually supports his argument about the Late Middle Ages.

Early historical periods are marked by the partial endurance of the characteristics of the preceding period and the partial emergence of

33 The term "limited," as opposed to "general," simply describes less important parts of categories. Krzysztof Pomian uses the terms "local" and "global" in a somewhat similar way. Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*, 92–99.

34 Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 1, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, rev. ed., trans. Siân Reynolds (Collins, 1981), 385–397.

the characteristics of the succeeding period. However, both the older and newer elements are relatively limited (the example in what follows is the European Early Middle Ages, discussed in a very simplified way to make a specific point).[35] In early periods, the characteristics of the preceding period are no longer predominant (the collapse of the Roman Empire), but they leave certain traces behind (the partial endurance of slavery). At the same time, some characteristics of the succeeding period emerge in a limited way (the beginnings of serfdom), while other characteristics of that period are not yet developed (the system of guilds). In other words, early periods are marked by the limited presence of certain older and newer characteristics, while others are "missing." This interpretation also explains why early periods are often labelled as historical transitions, since they are precisely the types of periods in which neither the characteristics of the preceding nor the succeeding periods are predominant.

The basic difference between early and late historical periods, then, is that in early periods the characteristics of the preceding period are no longer predominant, while late periods are defined precisely by the predominance of older characteristics. Both types of historical periods are a mixture of older and newer elements, but the relation between these elements is different.

Middle historical periods are often used as templates for characterizing historical eras in their entirety. These periods combine characteristics of early and late periods, which is why they are not particularly interesting for discussions about periodization. The main point to emphasize is that historical periods should be understood as mixtures of different temporalities and not as temporally homogeneous entities.

35 For general overviews of developments in the European Early Middle Ages, see Hollister and Bennett, *Medieval Europe*, 5–154; Wickham, *Medieval Europe*, 22–98.

The Time-Consciousness of Social Actors

The history of time is also the history of the subjective understanding of time: we all have certain daily rhythms, certain plans for the course of our lives, certain notions of our place in history. Any discussion about time therefore has to include a discussion about time-consciousness, which is to say a discussion about how time is conceived by social actors.

Time-consciousness does not exist in a vacuum, since social actors' understanding of time is conditioned by the temporality of the environmental and social context in which they are embedded.[36] Medieval craftsmen's understanding of time, for example, is closely connected to their daily tasks: the time it takes to make a specific product represents one temporal unit. Industrial workers' understanding of time, on the other hand, is independent of the temporality of any specific task: one hour is always and everywhere exactly sixty minutes. The abstract understanding of time may seem self-evident to modern social actors, but it is in fact a consequence of both the technologies that enable precise time measurement and the institutions through which social actors internalize a particular understanding of time, such as schools and factories. Two different historical contexts therefore result in two radically different time-consciousnesses.[37]

Following the general thread of what has been emphasized thus far, it should be clear that each historical context consists of different

36 The relation between the time-consciousness of social actors and the temporality of their social contexts can be understood as the temporal expression of the agent-structure relation. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys (Columbia University Press, 2015), 4–13.

37 For discussions about the differences between the premodern and the modern understanding of time, see Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, 104–126; Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 289–321; E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* 38 (1967): 56–70.

temporalities, which means that this heterogeneity is also reflected within social actors. Indeed, there is no complete discontinuity between the premodern qualitative understanding of time and the modern abstract understanding of time. While the basic temporal framework of industrial workers is defined by the working day, which follows the principles of abstract time (9 to 5), their afternoon time is generally much more relaxed. They may meet with acquaintances for an imprecise amount of time (a few hours) and decide to end socializing whenever they please (they go home not at a specific time, but when they can no longer bear listening to their colleagues' personal problems). If we simplify somewhat, we can say that the working part of the day is organized primarily according to the principles of abstract time, while the non-working part of the day is organized primarily according to the principles of qualitative time, even if the latter is present in a different form than it was in premodern historical eras. This duality can be understood as a mixture of different temporalities within social actors: in contemporary societies, we all use the principles of the premodern and modern conceptions of time, the characteristics of both coexist within each person.

This mixture is yet another example of the basic problem of periodization, which means that we have to once again look at the relations between different temporalities. In this case, we can argue that industrial workers' understanding of time is modern because it is primarily structured by the working day, which sets limits and determines the role of the more relaxed afternoon time. One way of understanding time is subordinate to the other. This type of relation, namely the modern characteristics defining the basic framework within which premodern characteristics are also present, can be understood as modern time-consciousness. The modern understanding of time therefore inherently contains characteristics of both abstract and qualitative time.

Reprise

In the article "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," Helge Jordheim explores a tension in how Koselleck's work has been interpreted. While Koselleck is often associated with defining Modernity as a homogeneous historical era, Jordheim argues that his theoretical framework actually undermines the logic of periodization. Through his conception of multiple temporalities, Koselleck challenges the idea of history as a sequence of clearly delimited periods. Jordheim therefore argues that a holistic reading of Koselleck's work lends itself to the position "against periodization," that is, a position that favors a layered and complex view of historical time.[38]

The problem of temporal homogeneity arises not only in discussions about Koselleck's account of Modernity, but also in broader challenges to traditional models of periodization. In defining historical periods of all kinds, there seems to be a growing tendency to question established perspectives. This trend can be observed in interpretations of Early Modernity,[39] the Reformation,[40] the Scientific Revolution,[41] and the long 19th century,[42] to name just a few examples. Contemporary historiography has revealed the limitations of simplistic and unidimensional characterizations of historical periods.

This tendency is hardly surprising given the inherent heterogeneity of time: the rhythms of history cannot be grasped with homogeneous notions. However, emphasizing this obvious fact does not mean that

38 Jordheim, "Against Periodization," 151–171.

39 Štuhec, "Klare Trennlinien," 85–94; Štuhec, "Reformacijska gibanja," 5–20.

40 Peter G. Wallace, *The Long European Reformation: Religion, Political Conflict, and the Search for Conformity, 1350–1750*, 2nd ed. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

41 Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

42 Arno J. Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (Verso, 2010).

we should simply argue against periodization (which is not possible, as classification represents one of the most fundamental cognitive processes), but it means that we should change our understanding of how history is divided into periods. While it is true that Koselleck emphasizes the heterogeneity of time, he also places a great deal of significance on the notion that can help us account for that heterogeneity. In other words, the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous should be understood as the central notion of the theory of periodization.

The main takeaways thus far can be summarized as follows. The basic shift of focus required to discuss historical periodization is the shift from individual temporalities to the relations between temporalities (in the example used, this means that the focus should not be on Europe or China, but on the relation between them). Historical turning points are significant changes in the relations between temporalities that occur in a relatively short period of time (in the example used, this means that the historical turning point is the mid-19th century, when Europe started to dominate China). Early, middle, and late periods are different mixtures of older and newer temporalities (which means that the limited emergence of the characteristics of the succeeding period represents an intrinsic part of late periods). Finally, social actors' subjective understanding of time is also inherently temporally heterogeneous (which means that modern time-consciousness contains characteristics of both abstract and qualitative time).

These definitions place the heterogeneity of time at the center of discussions about historical periodization. Their usefulness will be shown in the second and third parts of the book.

PART II: THE TEMPORALITIES OF HUMAN HISTORY

Introduction

How should we divide human history if we look at it from a bird's eye view? The answer surely has to do with identifying the most significant changes in humanity's past. But how do we decide what those are?

One approach to this question is to emphasize the aspects of human activities that are understood to be particularly important. For example, one could focus on the development of science, in which case the Scientific Revolution of the 17th century comes to mind as a significant historical turning point.[43] Other options include highlighting the changes in politics, culture, etc.

Another possibility is to focus on the different types of societies that have existed throughout history, since societies are supposed to encompass human activities in a holistic manner. Theories that claim to explain how societies change over time are especially relevant for periodization because they inherently imply a particular division of human history.[44]

Yet another option is to highlight the relations between societies rather than societies themselves. If the emphasis is on the way that different groups of humans related to each other in various historical eras, the discovery of America is sure to be regarded as an important development.[45]

Finally, one could focus on the changes in the character of time itself. This approach is most famously proposed by Koselleck, who argues that the temporality of Modernity is structurally different from the temporality of previous historical periods. From this point of view, the German expression "Neuzeit," literally meaning "New Time," is especially appropriate.[46]

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43 Green, "Periodization in European and World History," 38.

44 *Ibid.*, 35–36.

45 *Ibid.*, 41–42.

46 Reinhart Koselleck, "The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity," trans. Todd Samuel Presner, in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford University Press, 2002), 154–169.

The choice of criterion determines how historians classify and divide history.[47] In our view, the main problem with existing frameworks of periodization is that they fail to sufficiently account for the heterogeneity of time. The following discussion will argue that the various forms of society that have existed in the past should play a central role in how history is divided into periods. However, rather than focusing on societies themselves, the emphasis of our approach will be on (1) the relations between societies and (2) the relations within societies. We will argue that these relations determine the most significant temporal characteristics of historical periods.

The Temporal Relations Between Societies

The Theory of Social Forms

In order to explain why societies are of key importance for the periodization of human history, we first have to establish what they are. Robert Brenner defines societies in terms of "social property relations," which are the relations that determine how material resources are distributed among social actors. More specifically, these relations determine the access of social actors to land, tools, work, and the social product itself.[48] Class societies are characterized by structural inequality in the distribution of property, which divides social actors into two groups: the direct producers of the social product, who constitute the lower class, and the expropriators of the social product, who constitute the upper class. The vertical class relation is determined by the fact that social actors of the

47 The approaches mentioned represent only some of the main ways of dividing human history. For comprehensive accounts of the history of periodization, see Cajani, "Periodization," 54–71; Green, "Periodization in European and World History," 13–53; Pomian, *L'ordre du temps*, 101–163.

48 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 58.

upper class, such as lords and capitalists, extract surplus from social actors of the lower class, such as peasants and workers. The notion of "surplus" therefore means "*that which one class manages to extract from another*."[49] In addition to the vertical dimension, Brenner emphasizes the importance of horizontal class relations. These are the relations internal to the lower class, such as those among peasants and among workers, on the one hand, and the relations internal to the upper class, such as those among lords and among capitalists, on the other. Taken together, the vertical and horizontal class relations form the basic structure of societies.[50]

Social property relations are important because they determine the "individual rules for reproduction," which are different strategies social actors pursue to sustain their material and social existence. These strategies can be understood as the micro-sociological side of macro-sociological structures. Finally, if individual rules for reproduction are viewed in the aggregate, they result in different "developmental patterns" of social action. These patterns represent the macro-economic trends of societies, which also correspond to different types of societal crises. The three dimensions are, of course, connected: "*So, the causal chain runs from historically specific, politically reproduced social property relations to individual rules for reproduction to aggregate developmental patterns to society-wide forms of crisis*."[51]

With this framework in mind, we can distinguish between three basic types of societies: pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist. There is significant variation within each of these types, but the differences

49 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 111.

50 The significance of vertical class relations is one of the reasons why Brenner prefers the broader term "social property relations" to the narrower term "relations of production." Brenner, "Property and Progress," 58.

51 *Ibid.*, 59.

between them are more important. Only the most fundamental characteristics of each type will be discussed here.[52]

Pre-class societies are characterized by the absence of structural inequality in the distribution of material resources. Contemporary scholarship has challenged many traditional assumptions about these societies, such as the notion that they are primitive, homogeneous, and wholly egalitarian. In fact, pre-class societies exhibit considerable internal diversity, ranging from varied hunter-gatherer communities to settled agricultural villages. Furthermore, phenomena such as monumental architecture, elaborate trading practices, and cities can all be found in prehistoric contexts.[53] What pre-class societies lack, however, is a structural asymmetry of power grounded in an unequal distribution of property. To put it differently, pre-class societies are not divided into stratified groups of direct producers and exploiters as class societies are.[54]

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52 Our discussion of social forms requires a few qualifications. First, following Brenner, we use feudal social relations as a template for describing the basic characteristics of all pre-capitalist societies. Second, we do not discuss the socialist societies of the 20th century, as their emergence does not fundamentally alter our approach to dividing history. Third, while we primarily follow Brenner's descriptions, it is important to note that Anthony Giddens's distinction between class-divided and class societies, as well as Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson's distinction between extractive and inclusive institutions, roughly correspond to Brenner's distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. The typology of societies we use is therefore shared, at least in broad terms, by the central proponents of Political Marxism, Neo-Weberian historical sociology, and New Institutional Economics. However, there are also significant differences between these approaches. An important distinction is that Marxists insist upon the causal primacy of class relations and put greater emphasis on the role of exploitation. For characterizations of social forms from these three theoretical perspectives, see Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 73–87; Brenner, "Property and Progress," 59–84; Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 157–169. For Marxist critiques of Weberian epistemological pluralism, see Tibor Rutar, *Sodobni zagovor historičnega materializma: sociologija, filozofija, zgodovina* (Sophia, 2016), 239–263; Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and Elliott Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism: Essays on Explanation and the Theory of History* (Verso, 1992), 61–88.

53 David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Allen Lane, 2021).

54 For characterizations of pre-class societies, see Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 160–162; Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, *A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760*, new ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 34–72.

Pre-capitalist societies are characterized by (1) direct producers having access to the means of subsistence and (2) exploiters having direct control over the means of coercion.[55] Peasants possess the material resources they need to sustain themselves and are consequently not dependent on the market. Lords possess the armed power they need to subordinate and dominate the peasants. These social property relations represent the conditions for "extra-economic" surplus extraction, that is, the extraction of surplus outside of the production process: the exploiters take part of what the direct producers have made independently. While there are many different forms of such extraction, including direct appropriation of produce, compulsory labor obligations, and court fines, they all fundamentally depend on the use or the threat of violence. Simply put, the basic structure of pre-capitalist societies, whatever their political form, is defined by the fact that military superiority enables lords to extract surplus from peasants.[56]

The individual rules for reproduction of direct producers are characterized by "safety-first" strategies, which include diversifying production, having large families, and dividing landholdings. Peasants aim to be as safe as possible in their farming practices in order to increase their chance of survival.[57] The individual rules for reproduction of exploiters are characterized by the strategy of "political accumulation," i.e., the consolidation and expansion of political and military power. Lords aim to strengthen their political and military might in order to dominate the peasants and to fight rival lords. The pursuit of these strategies results in the social surplus primarily being invested in military technology and luxury consumption. Lords generally use what they extracted

55 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 63–66.

56 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 163–164.

57 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 66–70.

from peasants to buy weapons and expensive objects. While the reasons for investment in the military are obvious, it should be emphasized that luxury consumption also has a significant social role. Expensive objects are important for maintaining relations within the upper class, which happens in the form of compensation for warfare, gifts at weddings, etc. Without having access to these kinds of objects, lords may be at risk of losing their status and power.[58]

The developmental patterns of pre-capitalist societies primarily result from the lack of systematic investment of surplus in the advancement of productive forces. Lords generally do not use what they extracted from peasants to improve farming tools and techniques. Such investment does happen, but it does not happen systematically, which is why innovations in the sphere of production only happen sporadically, at irregular intervals. The largely unproductive investment of surplus results in low levels of labor productivity, low levels of economic growth, and an economy that is predominantly characterized by the agricultural sector.[59] The type of societal crisis that corresponds to these developmental patterns is a cyclical Malthusian crisis. Malthusian crises occur because demographic growth leads to an excessive population relative to the availability of land, which results in a decline in labor productivity, real wages, and living standards, which in turn triggers the population checks of famine, disease, and war. To put it differently, the low level of technological development represents a structural limitation on the growth of both the non-agricultural sector of society and the population as a whole.[60]

Capitalist societies are characterized by (1) direct producers lacking access to the means of subsistence and (2) exploiters lacking direct

58 *Ibid.*, 70–71.

59 *Ibid.*, 72–80.

60 *Ibid.*, 81–82.

control over the means of coercion.[61] Workers do not have sufficient access to the material resources they need to sustain themselves and are consequently dependent on the market. Capitalists do not have the ability to extract surplus by extra-economic means because the capitalist state holds a monopoly on the means of violence. These social property relations represent the conditions for "economic" surplus extraction, that is, the extraction of surplus in the production process itself. Workers sell their capacity to work on the labor market, for which they are compensated in the form of a wage. The wage represents the market value of labor for a predetermined amount of time, but it is not a direct expression of the value that workers produce during that time. If capitalists make effective use of working time, they can extract surplus from the production process: the part of the value produced by workers that exceeds the market value of their labor. Simply put, the value that workers produce is higher than what they are compensated for it. The most important factor that enables economic surplus extraction is the unequal bargaining power between workers and capitalists, which arises from the unequal distribution of property in capitalist societies.[62]

The individual rules for reproduction in capitalism are determined by the competitive constraint, which pressures social actors to pursue the strategies of specialization, profit maximization, and the continual introduction of new technologies.[63] Workers have to compete with other workers for jobs, which compels them to develop the skills necessary

61 *Ibid.*, 60.

62 It is important to note that explaining economic surplus extraction does not necessitate adherence to the labor theory of value. For a brief overview of how capitalist exploitation is understood in mainstream economics, see Tibor Rutar, *Capitalism for Realists: Virtues and Vices of the Modern Economy* (Routledge, 2023), 61–69. For a contemporary defense of the labor theory of value, see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's* Capital, trans. Alexander Locascio (Monthly Review Press, 2012), 39–98.

63 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 62.

to secure a position in the labor market. Capitalists have to compete with other capitalists in selling their products, which compels them to reduce production costs or risk being forced out of the market. Efficiency of production can be increased in two main ways. The first is by maximizing labor effort through making producers work faster, harder, and more effectively. This dynamic represents a central source of conflict between capital and labor. The second is by introducing new technologies that enhance productivity. The pursuit of this strategy results in surplus being primarily invested in the sphere of production in capitalist societies. Simply put, capitalists are pressured into using their profits to develop machinery that economizes labor in order to stay competitive with rival capitalists. Such investment does not end after a certain period but recurs continuously, as no level of productivity marks an endpoint to capitalism. Economic competition is therefore the central mechanism that explains the *systematic* development of productive forces in capitalist societies.[64]

The resulting developmental patterns include sustained increases in labor productivity, sustained economic expansion, and a diversified economic structure in which the agricultural sector no longer plays a dominant role. In other words, capitalist social property relations are closely connected to the empirical phenomenon of modern economic growth.[65]

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64 For characterizations of the capitalist production process, see Vivek Chibber, *Confronting Capitalism: How the World Works and How to Change It* (Verso, 2022), 5–50; Heinrich, *An Introduction*, 99–129; Primož Krašovec, *Tujost kapitala* (Sophia, 2021), 20–40.

65 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 62. The causes of sustained economic growth are, of course, highly contested. While we assign the primary explanatory role to the structure of social property relations, this view does not imply that other factors are unimportant. For a general overview of the various approaches to this subject, see Mark Koyama and Jared Rubin, *How the World Became Rich: The Historical Origins of Economic Growth* (Polity Press, 2022), 19–125. For criticisms of other paradigms explaining modern economic growth, see Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 45–69; Spencer Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism in England, 1400–1600* (Haymarket Books, 2015), 34–232; Rutar, *Capitalism for Realists*, 23–33; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (Verso, 2003), 116–150.

Capitalist societies are also characterized by periodic economic crises, but these crises are structurally different from the pre-capitalist Malthusian dynamic.[66]

It is evident even from these short descriptions that pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist societies are radically different in terms of their structural characteristics and developmental patterns. Particularly important is the fact that pre-capitalist and capitalist societies represent the opposite of each other in many central respects, a contrast that will be our main focus going forward.[67] There is also an obvious historical sequence of when these societies first emerged: pre-class societies predate pre-capitalist societies, which predate capitalism.

The Temporality of Societies

This characterization of social forms still leaves us with the question of why we should focus on societies when dividing human history. The main reason is that societies determine the most important aspects of the temporality of human action, which includes the pace of social change. Societies are structures that determine incentives, which determine the temporality of human action on the micro-level, which in the aggregate determines the temporality of human action on the macro-level. The temporal dimension of societies that is particularly significant is the pace of social change, since it captures the rate at which changes of all kinds occur.[68] The point, then, is that pre-capitalist incentives result in a relatively slow pace of social change compared with capitalist incentives, which result in a much faster pace of social

66 For an overview of the different Marxist theories of capitalist crises, see Heinrich, *An Introduction*, 169–178.

67 For a comprehensive account of this contrast, see Krašovec, *Tujost kapitala*, 11–40.

68 Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 108–119, 289–292.

change. When we compare pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, we are not talking about one specific type of change, but the change of the pace of change itself. The main theoretical difference between analyses that emphasize incentives and those that emphasize technological development itself is that the former provide the mechanisms that explain social change, while the latter do not.[69]

While focusing on the pace of social change is the simplest way to understand why societies are important for dividing human history, there are many different dimensions to the temporality of societies.[70] The mechanisms that explain the temporal differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies are best captured by the distinction between "adaptive stabilization" and "dynamic stabilization." Pre-capitalist societies are characterized by adaptive stabilization, which means that they primarily change due to exogenous reasons. In pre-capitalist societies, "*growth, acceleration or innovations can and do occur, but they are either accidental or adaptive, i.e., they are reactions to changes in the environment*."[71] Capitalist societies, on the other hand, are characterized by dynamic stabilization, which means that they constantly change due to endogenous reasons. Capitalism is the type of society that "*systematically requires growth, innovation, and acceleration for its structural reproduction and in order to maintain its socio-economic and institutional*

69 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 121–122.

70 In this subsection, we attribute the structural changes in social time that are emphasized by Hartmut Rosa to different types of societies. The theoretical justification for this attribution is that societies determine the most important aspects of the temporality of human action. The empirical justification for this attribution is that the most important structural changes in social time correspond to the differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist developmental patterns. In our view, then, Rosa is simply describing the temporal aspects of the differences between the Malthusian dynamic and sustained economic growth. For a summary of Rosa's descriptions, see Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 290.

71 Hartmut Rosa, "Dynamic Stabilization, the Triple A. Approach to the Good Life, and the Resonance Conception," *Questions de communication* 31 (2017): 442.

status quo."[72] In other words, capitalism has a built-in mechanism for continual change.

Closely connected with different types of stabilization is the distinction between societies with an intergenerational rate of social change, on the one hand, and societies with a generational or intragenerational rate of social change, on the other. The problem with identifying the pace of social change as an important criterion is that it has been constantly evolving throughout history and is therefore difficult to describe in any detail. One way to get around this problem is to emphasize the general distinction between societies in which the transformation of basic social and cultural structures happens above the level of three to four generations, the central indication of which is that occupational and familial structures remain intergenerationally stable, and societies in which these transformations happen below the level of three to four generations, the central indication of which is that occupational and familial structures change at an (intra)generational level.[73] To put it differently, an intergenerational pace of social change means that the basic way of life is passed on from generation to generation, while an (intra)generational pace of social change means that the basic way of life transforms with each generation or even within a single generation.

This distinction is important because it strongly influences the time-consciousness of social actors. Since an intergenerational pace of social change means that there are no major differences in the social and cultural structures between generations that exist at the same time, it lends itself to a view of temporality in which the future is primarily understood in terms of past experiences. The basic continuity between the past and the future is also linked to either a static or a cyclical

72 *Ibid.*, 439.

73 Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 108–119, 289–292.

conception of historical time. By contrast, an (intra)generational pace of social change lends itself to a view of temporality in which the future is conceptually separated from the past, which suggests that it is open to change. The basic discontinuity between the past and the future is also linked to either a linear or a fragmented conception of historical time.[74] According to the view we follow here, then, the time-consciousness of social actors is strongly shaped by the temporality of the social structures in which they are embedded, which is why analyzing these structures has priority over analyzing changes in the subjective understanding of time itself.

The most important differences in the temporality of societies can be summarized as follows: pre-capitalist societies are characterized by adaptive stabilization, an intergenerational pace of social change, and the type of time-consciousness in which the future is primarily understood in terms of past experiences, while capitalist societies are characterized by dynamic stabilization, an (intra)generational pace of social change, and the type of time-consciousness in which the future is conceptually separated from the past. The reason for the relative stasis of pre-capitalist societies and the relative dynamism of capitalism is, again, that the structures of these societies provide different incentives for social actors, which results in a different temporality of human action.

The Relations Between Societies

If we followed the logic of everything that has been discussed thus far, we would come to a simple tripartite division of human history, with each period corresponding to a specific societal type and therefore to a specific pace of social change. Pre-class societies would correspond to

74 *Ibid*. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity Press, 1990), 36–45.

the period of Prehistory, pre-capitalist societies to the period of Premodernity, and capitalist societies to the period of Modernity. However, as we have already explained, the problem with this approach is that the transition from one social form to another does not happen everywhere at once, which means that different types of societies exist at the same time. The advent of pre-capitalist societies did not eradicate pre-class societies, and the advent of capitalism did not eradicate either pre-class or pre-capitalist societies, at least not immediately. How can we decide which type of society to focus on when defining historical periods?

This is an example of the main problem of periodization that was discussed in the first part of the book, namely the coexistence of older and newer temporalities, which in this case means the coexistence of societies that initially emerged at different points in the past and are marked by distinct developmental patterns. We argued that the answer to this problem is to focus on the relations between temporalities, which in this case means that we have to examine the historical development of the relations between societies.

The character of the relations between societies is, of course, very complex: warfare, trade, and the exchange of ideas have shaped human interactions throughout history. An extended analysis of these relations is beyond the scope of the present discussion, which is why a narrower focus is required. We will attempt to explain which type of relation between societies is most important for dividing human history by summarizing some of the main developments of the historical materialist debate about Marx's theory of history.[75]

75 Our discussion of this debate is limited to aspects that are relevant for the present purposes. Notable contributions include G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, exp. ed. (Princeton University Press, 2001); Wright, Levine, and Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism*; Alan Carling, "Analytical Marxism and Historical Materialism: The Debate on Social Evolution," *Science & Society* 57, no. 1 (1993): 31–65; Chibber, "What Is Living," 60–91.

Canonical historical materialism, as famously presented by G. A. Cohen, rests on two central claims: (1) the development thesis, which holds that human history is characterized by a tendency toward the continual development of the forces of production, and (2) the primacy thesis, which holds that the relations of production are selected based on their functional role of facilitating that development. Productive capacity increases throughout history because social actors strive to avoid strenuous work, which leads them to develop technologies that make work easier. This tendency results in the transformation of societies because the level of technological development constrains the possible social relations that can be sustained. In periods of transition, new relations of production are selected only if they are optimal for (in the stronger version of the argument) or conducive to (in the weaker version of the argument) further improvement of technological capacity. Taken together, these two theses suggest that there is a transhistorical tendency toward the development of productive forces and a corresponding evolution of societies.[76]

With this basic framework established by Cohen, the ensuing debate among historical materialists turned to the question of identifying a functional mechanism that could explain how the forces of production select the relations of production. This selection process has to be grounded in a clear causal explanation. Alan Carling responds to this problem by proposing competition between different types of societies, most importantly military conflict, as that mechanism. His main argument is that "more advanced" types of societies, both in terms of the forces and relations of production, hold a structural military advantage against "less advanced" types of societies, which explains why "more

76 For a characterization of the canonical framework, see Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 28–62, 134–174; Wright, Levine, and Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism*, 13–46; Chibber, "What Is Living," 69–73.

advanced" types of social relations prevail and spread over time. Capitalist societies are more economically productive, which is why they win wars against non-capitalist societies, which is how capitalism becomes global. This proposal represents an elegant solution to one of the main problems of the canonical framework.[77]

However, this solution has a very important limitation. Carling is focused on the example of capitalist societies, which indeed have a decisive geopolitical edge over non-capitalist societies due to their economic productivity. But capitalism is a unique type of society in human history, one that is unusually productive. In contrast, the differences in the level of technological development between pre-capitalist societies are not significant enough to consistently serve as the decisive factor in military conflict. Wars between pre-capitalist societies are mostly determined by other factors, such as military strategy, ideological motivations, etc. Carling's revision, therefore, holds only for the part of history in which capitalism exists.[78] To connect this conclusion to our broader discussion: geopolitical competition is the most important type of relation between societies for the periodization of history because it represents the main mechanism by which older types of societies are forced out of existence and newer types of societies spread around the world. Crucially, however, this reason primarily applies to one specific historical period.

After criticizing various attempts to salvage canonical historical materialism, Vivek Chibber settles on a "minimalist" version of the theory. Minimalist historical materialism holds that the forces of production select against relations of production that would hinder the further advancement of technological capacity. That is to say, the selected social

77 Carling, "Analytical Marxism," 44–56.

78 Chibber, "What Is Living," 73–78.

relations will keep the level of technological development at least intact. While this version is defensible, it represents a step back from Cohen's framework in at least two ways. First, the transitions between social forms are primarily explained by the contingencies of class struggle, not the level of technological development. Second, this version assumes a tendency of non-regression rather than of constant development, which means that it is compatible with long periods of economic stagnation. As Chibber points out, the assertion that technological regressions are historical exceptions is non-trivial, but it is accepted by other frameworks and is therefore not sufficient to uphold a uniquely Marxist theory of history.[79]

The Three Eras of Human History

We have discussed the typology of societies, the temporality of societies, and the corresponding relations between societies. This brings us, finally, to the tripartite division of human history we want to propose.

The first period, Prehistory, was the period of the sole existence of one type of society. While pre-class societies do change over time, their rate of change is the lowest of all societal types.

The second period, Premodernity, was the period of the long-term coexistence of different types of societies. The relations between societies in this period were characterized by weak geopolitical pressure because the level of technological development of all societies was relatively low. A result of the limited effect of military conflict was that pre-class and pre-capitalist societies coexisted for most of human history. Different types of pre-capitalist political formations, such as empires (in various forms), city-states, and feudal monarchies, also

79 *Ibid.*, 83–90; Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, 518–541. We discuss the class-centered theory of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies in the third part of the book.

coexisted over long periods without one type of formation dominating the others. Premodernity was therefore characterized by the kind of relations between societies that resulted in a heterogeneous societal and political map.

If we attempt to describe Premodernity in temporal terms, we can say that different societal and political formations represent different temporalities. The temporalities that existed in Premodernity were marked by adaptive stabilization (and the corresponding temporal characteristics), which means that the differences in dynamism between them were relatively small. The result was the long-term coexistence of older and newer temporalities: hunter-gatherer societies, which originated in Prehistory, the Chinese Empire, which originated in Antiquity, feudal monarchies, which originated in the Middle Ages, etc., coexisted over long periods without the newer temporalities eradicating the older ones. A consequence of this dynamic was that the pace of change in Premodernity was relatively slow.[80]

The third period, Modernity, is the period of the domination of one type of society. The relations between societies in this period are characterized by the strong geopolitical pressure that capitalist societies put on other societies. Non-capitalist societies respond to this pressure in different ways, not necessarily by making the transition to capitalism right away. The variety of possible responses, which include

80 It is important to address two possible objections to this characterization of Premodernity. First, while our approach implies that this period began with the emergence of pre-capitalist societies, many authors emphasize the differences between hunter-gatherer and settled agricultural societies. If one follows that view, then the long-term coexistence of different social formations can be said to have begun with the Neolithic Revolution. Second, many authors note that different types of societies coexisted for most of human history. However, they do not directly connect this observation to periodization, explain why the relations between societies are central for dividing history, or describe these relations in temporal terms. We would therefore argue that these two objections do not undermine the merits or the specificity of our framework. For illustrative examples, see Carlo M. Cipolla, *The Economic History of World Population*, 7th ed. (Penguin Books, 1979); Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 168–169.

conservative attempts to preserve existing social structures, means that different types of societies exist in Modernity as well. However, as pre-class and pre-capitalist societies are not geopolitically competitive with capitalism, there is no *long-term* coexistence of different societal types. In other words, the spread of capitalism and the nation-state (the political formation that capitalism first appeared in) leads to the eradication of most pre-class and pre-capitalist societies. Modernity is therefore characterized by the kind of relations between societies that result in a strong tendency toward societal and political homogenization.[81]

If we attempt to describe Modernity in temporal terms, we can say that it is marked by the coexistence of temporalities that are characterized by both adaptive and dynamic stabilization (and the corresponding temporal characteristics). This mixture means that the differences in dynamism between temporalities are significant enough that they cannot coexist in the long term. The result is a strong tendency toward the spread of newer temporalities and the eradication of older ones, which is how the dynamism of newer temporalities spreads around the world and translates into the dynamism of the historical period as a whole. A consequence of this dynamic is that the pace of change in Modernity is relatively fast.

The only two comparable turning points in human history, then, are the establishment of the kind of relations between societies in which different types of societies can coexist in the long term, which is what defines the period of Premodernity, and the establishment of the kind of relations between societies in which one type of society dominates the others, which is what defines the period of Modernity. The criterion that differentiates between Prehistory, Premodernity, and Modernity is the character of the relations between societies, not the character of

81 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 168–169.

societies themselves. These relations are important because they determine both the pace of change and the relation between older and newer temporalities in different historical eras.

It is useful to contrast our framework of periodization with other approaches to dividing history. As we have already explained, our view is that other authors fail to adequately account for the heterogeneity of time. We will attempt to demonstrate this point by criticizing two alternative conceptions of Modernity.

In parallel with our approach, Hartmut Rosa also focuses on the structural changes in the temporality of human action in his understanding of social forms and historical periods. He emphasizes dynamic stabilization as the key notion that defines modern societies, and a generational pace of social change as the key notion that defines Modernity. However, he does not explain the relation between the temporality of social forms and that of historical eras. His framework for dividing history simply equates historical periods with different paces of social change.[82] The problem with this view is that many societies with a relatively slow pace of social change clearly exist in Modernity as well.

Our approach contrasts with Rosa's framework on two central points. First, we attribute the most important changes in social time to different types of societies, not to historical periods. We therefore view dynamic stabilization and a generational pace of social change as two temporal dimensions of one type of society, capitalism. Second, we define historical periods by the relations between different temporalities, not by homogeneous temporal characteristics. We therefore define Modernity by the effect that the dynamism of capitalism has on other societies. In the long term, this effect results in a strong tendency toward the spread of capitalist societies around the world. But in the

82 Rosa, "Dynamic Stabilization," 439–442; Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 290.

short term, the dynamism of capitalism expresses itself in the sense that other societies are forced to respond to it. In other words, our approach holds that non-capitalist societies exist in Modernity as well, but they are under significant pressure from capitalist societies. The clarification of the relation between social forms and historical periods is the reason our approach can account for the different temporalities that exist in Modernity.

While the main issue with Rosa's framework is a homogeneous view of historical periods, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt famously advocates for a heterogeneous conception of Modernity. His central argument is that the Western model of modernization, which is linked to industrial capitalism, liberal democracy, and secularization, represents only one possible path to modernization. Other societies often pursue developmental strategies that are strongly shaped by their unique traditions and values, which do not necessarily align with the West. For example, India's modernization reflects its distinct historical experiences and religious frameworks, resulting in a form of development that differs from European models. The variety of cultural and institutional patterns across the modern world is captured by the notion of "Multiple Modernities."[83] There are three criticisms of this approach that are worth highlighting.

First, Eisenstadt underestimates the extent of the homogenizing effect brought about by the spread of capitalism. It is true, of course, that a variety of cultural and institutional forms persist in Modernity, since the transition to capitalism does not entail the transformation of every aspect of social life. However, the globalization of capitalist social property relations means that key dimensions of societies, namely the organization of production and exchange, become broadly similar

83 Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," in *Multiple Modernities*, ed. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Routledge, 2017), 1–29.

across different cultures. The proliferation of capitalist wage-labor in particular represents a homogenization of arguably the most significant aspect of everyday life. To put it differently, while the spread of capitalism does not eliminate local variation, it does impose a universal logic on some of the most important dimensions of societies.[84]

Second, non-Western modernizations did not emerge independently but developed in relation to the West. Eisenstadt himself recognizes this point: "[Different societies] *developed distinctly modern dynamics and modes of interpretation, for which the original Western project constituted the crucial (and usually ambivalent) reference point*. […] *Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others*."[85] We would argue that it is precisely this commonality, namely that non-Western modernizations developed in response to Western pressures, that should be emphasized when it comes to the definition of Modernity. It follows that there is only one Modernity, even if it is heterogeneous in certain dimensions.

Finally, while Eisenstadt's construal highlights the variety of possible developmental strategies, these strategies nevertheless share a core framework involving the reinterpretation of the past and a future-oriented outlook. Non-Western paths to modernization may be strongly influenced by their distinct traditions, but they are still paths to modernization. Our approach emphasizes that the conservative response to Modernity should be interpreted as an inherently modern phenomenon. The attempt to preserve existing institutional structures, which represented the most common initial reaction to the pressure

84 Chibber develops this point in his critique of Postcolonial Theory. Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (Verso, 2013), 101–129. See also Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (Verso, 2002), 1–13.

85 Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," 2–3.

of modernization across Europe, should be understood as an integral part of Modernity. In this sense, Modernity is *more* heterogeneous than the notion of Multiple Modernities suggests. We will elaborate on this point in the third part of the book.

The main advantage of our approach, then, is that it offers a heterogeneous interpretation of historical periods, but one in which this heterogeneity is integrated into a unified framework of periodization. The central point to emphasize is that this approach accounts for the fact that different types of societies exist at the same time, which is to say that it accounts for the inherent heterogeneity of time.[86]

It is also important to note that many authors argue that the contemporary era can no longer be understood as part of Modernity. While an extended discussion of Postmodernity is beyond the scope of this book, our framework does offer two simple reasons why the changes of the past half century do not represent a fundamental break with Modernity. First, the relations between societies in this period are characterized by the enduring domination of one type of society. The spread of capitalism that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union therefore represents an intensification of the basic tendency of Modernity. Second, the changes that occurred across the Western world from the 1970s onward represent

86 We contend that the presented criticisms also apply to other approaches, which will not be discussed here. We outline the most common interpretations of Modernity and Premodernity in the third part of the book. For a range of discussions of these notions, see Almuth Ebke and Christoph Haack, "Periodisation and Modernity: An Introduction," *History of European Ideas* 51, no. 2 (2025): 307–320; Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge University Press, 1971); Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*; Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*; Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Environmental Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, 4th ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020); Koselleck, "The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity," 154–169; Klaus Ridder and Steffen Patzold, eds., *Die Aktualität der Vormoderne: Epochenentwürfe zwischen Alterität und Kontinuität* (Akademie Verlag, 2013); Rosa, *Social Acceleration*; Tibor Rutar, *Od klasične sociologije k mednarodni historični sociologiji: izvori in narava modernosti* (Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2017); Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Polity Press, 2012).

changes within capitalism and not the transition to a new type of society. The resulting differences are consequently less important than the differences between various types of pre-capitalist societies, on the one hand, and various types of capitalist societies, on the other. This conclusion stems from the fact that pre-capitalist and capitalist societies are marked by fundamentally different temporalities.[87]

The Temporal Relations Within Societies

Braudel's Multiple Temporalities

There is an obvious problem with notions that characterize the temporality of societies in a holistic manner, namely that societies are not homogeneous entities. While the differences between pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist societies correspond to the most important changes in the temporality of human action, there are also significant differences that are internal to societies, such as those between the temporalities of pre-capitalist peasants, merchants, and lords.

One of the schools of historiography that developed a heterogeneous conception of historical time is the French Annales School, most famously represented by Fernand Braudel.[88] In *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, Braudel outlines the multiple levels of temporality that serve as the overall framework for his analysis. He describes his main emphasis as follows:

87 For a range of discussions on Postmodernity, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Blackwell, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 1991); Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 211–322; Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Modernity, Postmodernity or Capitalism?," *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (1997): 539–560.

88 Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*.

> *To my mind, the fundamental characteristic of the preindustrial economy is the coexistence of the inflexibility, inertia, and slow motion characteristic of an economy that was still primitive, alongside trends – limited and in the minority, yet active and powerful – that were characteristic of modern growth. On the one hand, peasants lived in their villages in an almost autonomous way, virtually in an autarchy; on the other hand, a market-oriented economy and an expanding capitalism began to spread out, gradually creating the very world in which we live, and, at that early date, prefiguring our world. Thus we have two universes, two ways of life foreign to each other, yet whose respective wholes explain one another.*[89]

Different parts of the economy correspond to different temporal dynamics, which is reflected in the use of terms such as "slow motion." Braudel thus begins by identifying various levels of temporality, which he proceeds to analyze separately, one after another. The heterogeneity of time is also emphasized by other prominent members of the Annales School.[90]

Although Braudel's approach marks an important step forward in historians' understanding of temporality, it also has its shortcomings. In our view, the main problem is that this approach fails to adequately explain how the different temporal levels are generated and connected. While Braudel does maintain that there is a connection between the temporalities of his framework, it is noteworthy that in the several places where he addresses this issue directly, he does not provide a mechanism that would account for that connection.[91] The heterogeneity of time is therefore not addressed in a satisfactory manner.

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89 Fernand Braudel, *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 5–6.

90 Jacques Le Goff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time in the Middle Ages," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 29–42.

91 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 23–29; Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, vol. 2, *The Wheels of Commerce*, trans. Siân Reynolds (Book Club Associates, 1983), 21–23, 455–457.

This basic methodological problem manifests in two additional shortcomings of *Civilization and Capitalism* that are relevant to the present purposes. First, the way Braudel conceives of time in this work is primarily based on the internal dynamics of economic processes understood in a specific way. This conception is made clear when he discusses the three temporal levels that constitute his framework, which can roughly be described as the level of material life, the level of regular trade, and the level of long-distance trade.[92] As a result, Braudel pays significantly less attention to the temporality of human activities that are not part of his understanding of the economic sphere, such as politics and ideology. The problem with this approach is that the relative neglect of certain social spheres undermines a holistic account of how the different temporalities of societies are interconnected. We will argue, additionally, that this interconnectedness is central to understanding the relation between time and power.

Second, even if we accept the scope of Braudel's framework, we would argue that the basic structure of *Civilization and Capitalism* is inherently inconsistent. Braudel begins his analysis with a discussion of material life, which refers primarily to everyday objects such as food, clothing, and furniture. This part of the economy represents the floor of the different temporal levels, the part that changes very slowly. He then proceeds to analyze various aspects of market exchange, which represent a much more dynamic part of the economy, particularly in the case of long-distance trade. The basic structure of the work therefore separates everyday objects from long-distance trading practices.[93] However, this separation needs to be reconsidered because the objects

92 Braudel draws a sharp distinction between the kind of trade that is transparent, routine, and local, and the kind that is speculative, irregular, and long-distance. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, 455–457.

93 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 23–29.

that constitute material life and those that are traded on the market are one and the same. In pre-capitalist societies, market exchange is dominated by the consumption habits of the upper class, which means that it is military and luxury objects in particular that circulate quite frequently.[94] The dichotomy between the relative stasis of material life and the relative dynamism of long-distance trade is therefore complicated by the fact that the latter implies a relative dynamism of the material life of the upper class. The temporality of long-distance trade and that of military and luxury objects "go together," as it were.

Braudel is, of course, not blind to the fact that there is an important distinction to be made between the material life of the lower class and the upper class. He even relates this distinction to temporality by acknowledging that newer objects generally become available to the upper class before they become available to the lower class: "*Luxury does not only represent rarity and vanity, but also social success, fascination, the dream that one day becomes reality for the poor, and in so doing immediately loses its old glamour.* […] *The rich are thus doomed to prepare the future life of the poor*."[95] However, the differentiation between the objects of the lower class and the upper class is only made within the part of the work that discusses material life, which is analytically separated from the part that discusses long-distance trade. The implication of the quoted statement, which is that the material life of the upper class is relatively dynamic, is therefore not sufficiently accounted for in Braudel's approach.

The purpose of the following discussion is to propose a framework for characterizing the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies that can address the problems that were just outlined.

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94 If we assume the definition of capitalism as a specific type of social property relations, then we can say that Braudel is describing the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies. We discuss the temporalities of capitalist societies in the subsection "Comparison with Capitalism."

95 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 184.

A Closer Look at Pre-Capitalist and Capitalist Societies

In order to develop such a framework, we first have to provide a somewhat more detailed account of pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. To recapitulate, pre-capitalist social property relations are characterized by direct producers having access to the means of subsistence and by exploiters having direct control over the means of coercion, which results in extra-economic surplus extraction. To put it in simple terms, military superiority enables lords to extract surplus from subsistence peasants. The individual rules for reproduction of peasants are determined by safety-first strategies, while those of lords are determined by the accumulation of political and military power. The pursuit of these strategies results in the social surplus being primarily invested in military purposes and luxury consumption, not in improving economic productivity. The corresponding developmental patterns include relative economic stagnation and cyclical Malthusian crises.[96]

This basic structure leads to the development of a multifaceted sphere of pre-capitalist societies that is inherently connected to the exploiter class. Military technology and luxury objects have to be produced, which is the primary incentive for the development of urban manufacture, and they have to be circulated among the lords, which is the primary incentive for the development of long-distance trade.[97] Pre-capitalist manufacturing and trade are connected to political and military power in a different sense as well, since they operate based on "privileges," that is, politically enforced monopolies which determine that only certain artisans have the right to produce particular objects and that only certain merchants have the right to trade in particular regions. The social position of pre-capitalist craftsmen and merchants

96 See above, the subsection "The Theory of Social Forms."

97 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 75–80.

is therefore a result of political privileges, not of economic success.[98] The support of political and military power is also central to the sphere of knowledge production, which is monopolized by segments of the pre-capitalist upper class (priests, lawyers, officials, etc.) and has the social role of both enabling administrative operations and providing the ideological legitimization for the existing social structure. While the production of knowledge is concentrated in elite hands, its ideological effects are felt throughout society.[99]

The spheres of manufacturing, trade, and knowledge production should therefore be understood as integral parts of pre-capitalist societies because they are both supported by political and military power and have the social role of reproducing the existing class structure. The reproduction of the pre-capitalist class structure entails the reproduction of extra-economic surplus extraction, upon which these parts of society ultimately rest. To put it differently: the primary motor of social change in pre-capitalist societies is closely connected to the interests of the lords, but these interests are expressed in the development of not only the politico-military sphere, but also of the manufacturing, trade, and ideological spheres, all of which are both dependent upon and have the social role of maintaining extra-economic surplus extraction.

Keeping this dynamic in mind, the assumption going forward will be that the most basic division within pre-capitalist societies is between the "lower sphere," which is composed of social actors who engage in

98 Political Marxists make a sharp distinction between pre-capitalist markets, which are based on political monopolies that limit economic competition, and capitalist markets, which are based precisely on economic competition. Monopolies exist in capitalism as well, of course, but they are a result of the capitalist production process and therefore structurally different from pre-capitalist monopolies. For discussions of this point, see Krašovec, *Tujost kapitala*, 20–40; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 197–214; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (Verso, 2017), 73–94.

99 Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, vol. 2, *The Nation-State and Violence* (Polity Press, 1985), 71–78.

subsistence production, and the "upper sphere," which is composed of social actors who are dependent on surplus. The latter includes the political, military, ideological, manufacturing, and trade spheres. The dichotomy of subsistence and surplus is a result of the pre-capitalist class structure, but it differs from the class division in the sense that some of the direct producers, namely the urban manufacturers, are understood as being part of the upper sphere due to their connection to surplus. Subsistence peasants and urban manufacturers represent two different parts of pre-capitalist societies because they are on different sides of the subsistence and surplus dichotomy.[100]

In contrast to pre-capitalist societies, the basic structure of capitalist societies is characterized by direct producers lacking access to the means of subsistence and by exploiters lacking direct control over the means of coercion. That is to say, workers do not have sufficient access to the material resources they need to survive and are therefore dependent on the market, while capitalists do not have the ability to extract surplus extra-economically because the means of violence are monopolized by the capitalist state. These social property relations result in economic surplus extraction, i.e., the extraction of surplus within the production process itself.[101]

The condition for economic surplus extraction is the formal separation of the political and economic spheres. This institutional differentiation means, on the one hand, that the basic role of political power is no longer that of surplus extraction because politicians receive publicly assigned incomes, and, on the other, that economic processes start to follow the logic of production for profit because they become subject

100 This distinction is corroborated by the fact that Brenner discusses subsistence peasants and urban manufacturers in different parts of his characterization of pre-capitalist societies. Brenner, "Property and Progress," 66–70, 75–77.

101 See above, the subsection "The Theory of Social Forms."

to the competitive constraint. However, the formal separation of these two spheres does not entail their *de facto* separation, since the state plays a key role in upholding the protection of private property, which represents a core tenet of capitalist social property relations. This separation means that, in capitalist societies, economic power enables the extraction of surplus in a direct way, while political power enables the extraction of surplus in an indirect way, by creating the conditions for economic surplus extraction. In other words, the economic and political spheres are closely interconnected in both pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, but the way in which they are interconnected is fundamentally different.[102]

The economic sphere is primarily determined by the competitive constraint, which pressures social actors to undertake the strategies of specialization, profit maximization, and the continual introduction of new technologies. The pursuit of these strategies results in the systematic investment of surplus in the sphere of production, which generates both sustained economic growth and periodic crises. One of the consequences of the modern economic dynamic is the expansion of discretionary consumption among a broader segment of the population. Although access to non-essential goods remains uneven, their broader availability across social groups marks a fundamental transformation of the sphere of consumption.[103] Competitive markets are also the site of the capitalist wage-labor contract, which is made between formally (but not economically) equal social actors, and of the capitalist class struggle, which is

102 Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Separation of the 'Economic' and the 'Political' in Capitalism," in *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Verso, 2016), 19–48. It is worth noting that Acemoglu and Robinson also emphasize the interconnectedness of the political and economic spheres, and offer a similar interpretation of how these two spheres interact in extractive institutions, on the one hand, and in inclusive institutions, on the other. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 83–87.

103 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 62.

enabled by the fact that workers in advanced capitalist societies generally have the legal right to withhold their labor. However, the formal rights of workers do not inherently translate into collective resistance, as the capitalist class structure incentivizes individual resistance by raising the cost of collective action. This difficulty in class formation represents the main source of stability in capitalist societies.[104]

While the political sphere is formally separated from the economic sphere, it is nevertheless structurally dependent on it, since taxation represents the main source of revenue for capitalist states. States in advanced capitalist societies are characterized by the centralization of the means of violence in the public institutions of the police and army, the guarantee of the legal equality of all citizens, the maintenance of the physical and social infrastructure (roads, electricity, healthcare, education, etc.), and the existence of a democratic political system.[105] These institutions should not be understood as "obstacles" to the capitalist production process, but precisely as institutions that enable its long-term reproduction: physical infrastructure enables businesses to operate, social infrastructure ensures the reproduction of the workforce, etc. Capitalist states also pursue deliberate industrial policies and provide systematic funding for scientific and technological research, which represents an important part of modern economic development.[106]

We can conclude that pre-capitalist and capitalist societies are fundamentally different not only in their developmental patterns but also in their internal structures.

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104 Chibber, *Confronting Capitalism*, 95–134; Vivek Chibber, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory After the Cultural Turn* (Harvard University Press, 2022); Rutar, *Sodobni zagovor historičnega materializma*, 278–282.

105 For characterizations of the capitalist state, see Chibber, *Confronting Capitalism*, 51–93; Heinrich, *An Introduction*, 199–213; Rutar, *Sodobni zagovor historičnega materializma*, 183–194.

106 Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*, rev. ed. (Anthem Press, 2014).

The Inherent Temporality of Subsistence and Surplus

This somewhat more detailed account of pre-capitalist and capitalist societies does not answer the question of why these characteristics are important in the context of discussing the different temporalities of societies. The basic reason is very simple: the dichotomy of subsistence and surplus represents the basic dichotomy of the relatively static and the relatively dynamic parts of societies, which is why it is central to understanding their internal temporal differentiation. We will briefly explore this point due to its importance for our present purposes.

Subsistence production is inherently related to stasis because the amount of time spent on the satisfaction of basic human needs constrains the possibility of substantially transforming the environment. The more time social actors have to allocate for mere survival, the less time they have to affect changes to their surroundings. Access to surplus, on the other hand, is inherently related to dynamism because it provides the resources that greatly expand the possibility of transformation. To put it differently: surplus is related to power, which is related to the transformation capacity, which is related to dynamism.[107] The way that surplus is distributed consequently represents the main division of societies into relatively static and relatively dynamic parts. Additionally, the extraction of surplus represents the main mechanism that connects the different social actors of a society together, since the reason why certain social actors do not have to spend time on subsistence production is that they live based on what was produced by others. The way that surplus is extracted and distributed is therefore central to determining both the division of and the connection between the temporalities of different social actors.

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107 For schematic definitions of power, see Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 49–58; Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, 4–6.

The identification of mechanisms that explain the temporality of human action is the way we characterized the temporality of different types of societies in the previous section of the book. What is different about the extraction and distribution of surplus is that it is a mechanism that inherently generates multiple temporalities that are distinct, and yet interconnected. The dichotomy of subsistence and surplus ensures that two different temporalities will be continuously reproduced over time. Taking this mechanism as the starting point for characterizing the temporalities of societies can be understood as a way to move beyond the dichotomy between, on the one hand, homogeneous characterizations of the temporality of human action, which view societal time in a holistic manner, and, on the other, heterogeneous, but insufficiently integrated, characterizations of the temporality of human action, which emphasize that societies are composed of different temporalities, but fail to explain how these temporalities are generated and connected. In other words, societies, which are structures that determine the way surplus is extracted and distributed, can be understood as ways of dividing time among social actors.[108]

Dynamism, Time-Space Distanciation, and Time-Consciousness

As a result of these considerations, the extraction and distribution of surplus represents the basis of our framework for characterizing the

108 Immanuel Wallerstein's theory includes an account of the different temporalities that characterize world-systems. However, this approach has significant theoretical and empirical problems that have been known for a long time. For discussions of how this theory conceptualizes temporality, see Rastko Močnik, *Svetovno gospodarstvo in revolucionarna politika* (Založba /*cf., 2006), 93–110; Šubrt, *The Sociology of Time*, 84–89. For criticisms of this approach, see Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* I/104 (1977): 25–92; Theda Skocpol, "Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique," *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 5 (1977): 1075–1090; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 129–139.

different temporalities of societies. The next step in our discussion involves identifying the notions that are best suited to describe the temporalities that are specific to certain parts of societies. In what follows, we will use three main notions: dynamism, time-space distanciation, and time-consciousness.

The first notion we will use is dynamism, which addresses the question of how fast different parts of societies change. This notion requires two clarifications. First, it includes both the qualitative dimension, which marks the emergence of new characteristics, and the quantitative dimension, which marks changes to already existing characteristics. However, these two dimensions are closely connected: qualitative innovations often enable greater quantitative dynamism, which in turn provides greater access to qualitative innovations. For example, technological innovations in the sphere of travel enable faster circulation of goods, which enables greater access to innovations developed in distant places. The connection between the two dimensions is the reason why the term "dynamism" will be used in both senses going forward. Second, this notion will be used in a simple relational sense, as an illustration of the fact that some parts of societies change faster than others. While these simplifications may be problematic in other contexts, they are useful for describing the different temporalities of societies.

The second notion we will use is Anthony Giddens's notion of "time-space distanciation," which addresses the relation between time, space, and power.[109] This notion describes the way in which social actors "bind" time and space, which determines how presence and absence are organized in different types of societies. In societies with a low level

109 For discussions of this notion, see Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 90–108; Derek Gregory, "Presences and Absences: Time-Space Relations and Structuration Theory," in *Social Theory of Modern Societies: Anthony Giddens and His Critics*, eds. David Held and John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 185–214; Wright, Levine, and Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism*, 61–88.

of time-space distanciation, social actors largely operate in the same temporal and spatial context and therefore mostly interact face-to-face. Any departure from such a situation marks the distanciation of time or space, for example with the "stretching" of time enabled by the medium of writing or the "stretching" of space enabled by the medium of market exchange, both of which represent contact with social actors that are not directly present. The greater the removal from the immediate temporal and spatial context, the greater the level of time-space distanciation. According to Giddens, societies exist on a continuum from the low level of time-space distanciation characteristic of pre-class societies, on the one hand, to the high level of time-space distanciation characteristic of capitalist societies, on the other.[110]

Understood in this way, it would make sense to group the notion of time-space distanciation together with notions that describe the temporality of societies in a holistic manner. However, Giddens also relates time-space distanciation to storage capacity, which, in turn, is linked to power. Time-space distanciation enables the storage of material goods, which is central to controlling the natural environment, and it enables the storage of information, which is central to controlling people.[111] The connection between time and power is important because it helps explain how a particular division of time is reproduced over time. It is not only that time is divided among social actors, but also that this division plays a significant role in the reproduction of social systems (as discussed below).

In our view, there is a clear tension in Giddens's account, which is that he ascribes a certain level of time-space distanciation to societies understood in a holistic manner, while at the same time using

110 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 157–164.

111 *Ibid.*, 49–58, 90–108.

this notion to describe the connection between time and power. The problem is that, at least in the dimension that is most relevant for the present discussion, power is exercised by certain social actors over others. If all social actors had equal access to the mechanisms that enable time-space distanciation, the ability of some social actors to exercise power and domination over others would not be possible. Accordingly, the assumption going forward will be that only by understanding societies as ways of dividing time among social actors, and therefore by specifying the different levels of time-space distanciation that characterize different parts of societies, can the connection between time and power be properly understood.[112]

The third notion we will use is time-consciousness, which addresses the question of how time is conceived by social actors. As we have already explained, social actors' understanding of time is strongly influenced by the environmental and social contexts in which they are embedded.[113]

The notions of dynamism, time-space distanciation, and time-consciousness are closely connected, which should become clear in what follows.

The Temporal Relations Within Pre-Capitalist Societies

We have discussed the internal structures of pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, the role these structures play in the temporal differentiation of societies, and the notions we will use to describe the temporality

112 It is important to address an inconsistency in our approach, namely that the creation and storage of surplus itself represents a form of distanciation. We use surplus as the central category because it enables the simplest way to characterize the temporalities of social actors. This approach does not necessarily conflict with Giddens's framework.

113 See above, the subsections "The Time-Consciousness of Social Actors" and "The Temporality of Societies."

of different parts of societies. This brings us, finally, to our framework for characterizing the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies. Our approach is divided into discussions of (1) the temporality of the relation between the lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies, (2) the temporality of the reproduction of the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies, and (3) the ways in which the separation between the two spheres is incomplete. Since our focus is on the interconnectedness of different temporalities, the descriptions of individual temporalities are less important than how they are understood to be embedded in the societal totality.

The Relation Between the Lower Sphere and the Upper Sphere

Our starting point is as follows. The lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies represent two distinct but interdependent temporalities that are connected by the extraction of surplus: the temporality of the lower sphere is the other side of the temporality of the upper sphere.

The lower sphere is composed of social actors who engage in subsistence production, that is, subsistence peasants.[114] The temporality of this sphere is characterized by relative stasis, a low level of time-space distanciation, and the relative homogeneity of time-consciousness.

The relative stasis of the lower sphere is primarily a result of its separation from surplus. Peasants have to spend most of their time securing basic subsistence, which constrains their ability to substantially transform the environment. A low degree of change is thus virtually written into the DNA of the lower sphere of pre-capitalist societies.

114 We discussed the basic characteristics of pre-capitalist societies in the subsections "The Theory of Social Forms" and "A Closer Look at Pre-Capitalist and Capitalist Societies."

This relative stasis is closely connected to the low level of time-space distanciation that is inherent in the lower sphere. Social actors practicing subsistence production mostly operate on the limited land they cultivate and are primarily oriented toward the present and near future. The "here and now" character of peasants' everyday life means that the temporally and spatially absent phenomena only have a limited impact on them, which can be understood as a kind of "protection" against changes that occur outside of their immediate environment.

The relative homogeneity of the time-consciousness of the lower sphere results from the fact that subsistence production entails carrying out broadly similar activities. The specificity of peasants' understanding of time is shaped by the requirements of agriculture and animal husbandry: the rhythms of harvests represent important temporal milestones for agriculture, the tides for fishing, the needs of animals in animal husbandry, etc. Peasants understand time through these activities: time *is* the harvest cycles, the changing of the tides, the needs of animals, etc.[115]

These temporal dynamics characterize the majority of social actors in all pre-capitalist societies.

The upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies is composed of social actors who are dependent on surplus, encompassing the political, military, ideological, manufacturing, and trade spheres. The temporality of this sphere is characterized by relative dynamism, a high level of time-space distanciation, and the relative heterogeneity of time-consciousness.

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115 Jacques Le Goff, "Labor Time in the 'Crisis' of the Fourteenth Century: From Medieval Time to Modern Time," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 44; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 58–60.

The relative dynamism of the upper sphere primarily results from its connection to surplus, which greatly expands the possibility of substantially transforming the environment. Surplus is used in various ways, but the resulting differentiation is mostly internal to the upper sphere.

The high level of time-space distanciation of this sphere also results from its connection to surplus, which represents the main source of the development of the technologies and social practices that make that distanciation possible. There are, again, different ways of "stretching" time and space, but most of them are internal to the upper sphere.

The relative heterogeneity of the time-consciousness of the upper sphere primarily results from the fact that its social actors do not have to spend time securing basic subsistence, which enables a wider variety of activities with different temporal dynamics.

With this basic characterization of temporalities in mind, we can revisit the proposed starting point. The lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies represent two distinct but interdependent temporalities that are connected by the extraction of surplus: the temporality of the lower sphere, which is characterized by relative stasis, a low level of time-space distanciation, and the relative homogeneity of time-consciousness, is the other side of the temporality of the upper sphere, which is characterized by relative dynamism, a high level of time-space distanciation, and the relative heterogeneity of time-consciousness.

This relation can also be expressed in spatial terms. Populated parts of pre-capitalist societies can be divided into two areas, the first of which consists of relatively unconnected regions of subsistence agriculture, such as villages and independent arable lands, while the second consists of relatively interconnected regions that

are dependent on surplus, such as castles, monasteries, and cities.[116] The relation between these two areas can be understood with the analogy of the relation between a desert, which represents subsistence production, and an interconnected network of oases, which represents surplus. These two areas therefore represent two distinct but interdependent temporalities that are connected by the extraction of surplus: the desert of relative stasis, low levels of time-space distanciation, and the relative homogeneity of time-consciousness is the other side of the interconnected oases of relative dynamism, high levels of time-space distanciation, and the relative heterogeneity of time-consciousness.

The relation between the sphere of subsistence and the sphere of surplus represents the basic division of time within pre-capitalist societies. It is important to note that it is also a relation of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, since it is based on a division of dynamism: characteristics that originate in older periods are generally connected to the lower sphere, while characteristics that originate in more recent periods are generally connected to the upper sphere. The simultaneity of the non-simultaneous is inscribed into the very structure of subsistence and surplus. To put it differently, the relation between the lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies, if understood in temporal terms, can be said to determine the distribution of older and newer characteristics among social actors.

116 Giddens argues that the basic spatial division within pre-capitalist societies is between the city and the countryside. He emphasizes that pre-capitalist cities not only play important economic roles but also serve as spaces in which political power is concentrated. Considering the interconnectedness of different social spheres (as discussed above), we would argue that the basic spatial division within pre-capitalist societies is between areas of subsistence and areas of surplus. The latter include not only cities but also rural castles, rural monasteries, rural parts of trade networks, etc., and they combine the political, military, ideological, manufacturing, and trade spheres. For Giddens's account of the relation between the city and the countryside, see Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 140–150; Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 2, 35–41, 192–197.

The Reproduction of the Upper Sphere

Its connection to surplus means that the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies is significantly more complex than the lower sphere and consequently requires further discussion. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the temporality of this sphere represents the temporality of power. Our interpretation of the temporality of power in pre-capitalist societies is as follows: access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism and the high level of time-space distanciation of the upper sphere, which enables the exercise of power, which enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic. Our characterization of the temporality of the reproduction of the upper sphere is divided into discussions of the politico-military, ideological, and market spheres, all of which are interconnected.

Political and military power is the foundation of the pre-capitalist upper class, since the threat of violence represents the *sine qua non* of systematic extra-economic surplus extraction. Access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism of this sphere, which includes innovations that enable improvements in the speed of travel and communication. The long history of speed increases involves both technological innovations, such as navigational instruments and various military devices, and institutional transformations, such as the development of secure roads and interconnected systems of post stations. The latter allow passengers to continually switch the animals they use for travel, which bypasses the exhaustion of specific animals and therefore represents an increase in speed that is not a result of a technological innovation.[117]

This relative dynamism is closely connected to the high level of time-space distanciation that is inherent in the politico-military sphere,

117 Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 323–330.

since the exercise of power requires control over absent social actors. In pre-capitalist societies, this control primarily centers on the ability to collect surplus and defend against external threats. It therefore includes the physical collection of dues and taxes, the exercise of legal authority, the suppression of peasant revolts, the waging of wars with rival lords, etc. These activities require the ability to operate across expansive territories in a coordinated way, such as the ability to suppress peasant revolts that happen in multiple places at the same time or to fight external enemies on multiple fronts, which is conditioned by the speed of travel and communication. This kind of exercise of power enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic.[118]

The specificity of lords' time-consciousness is shaped by military activities such as daily training, tournaments, and wars. Lords understand time through these activities: time *is* daily military training, the period until the next war, etc.[119]

The production of knowledge is a monopoly held by segments of the pre-capitalist upper class and plays a central role in administrative operations and the legitimization of the existing social structure. Access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism of this sphere, which includes innovations that enable the recording of information and the measurement of time. The greatest revolution in this context was undoubtedly the invention of writing, which represented a major improvement in the ability to transmit and store information. The emergence of writing was often accompanied by timekeeping technologies, such as early clocks and calendars, which,

118 The relation between speed and power is emphasized in the work of Paul Virilio. However, Virilio's analyses are not grounded in a comprehensive social theory. Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (Semiotext(e), 2006).

119 Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400–1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Blackwell, 1988), 180.

of course, represented advancements in the organization and rationalization of time.[120]

This relative dynamism is closely connected to the high level of time-space distanciation that is inherent in the sphere of knowledge production, which is to a significant extent based on contact with absent social actors. While speech requires direct face-to-face interaction, writing represents both temporal and spatial distanciation: when we read a text, we are in contact with the time and space in which it was first written. Such distanciation enables the storage of information, which in turn enables detailed knowledge of the population, the efficient coordination of tasks, the permanent enforcement of legal codes, etc., all of which enable administrative operations. Clocks and calendars can also be understood as administrative tools, since the organization of time (the setting of beginnings and ends, durations, and sequences of activities) represents a way of regulating and controlling people's behavior.[121] This kind of exercise of power enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic.

Many of the specificities of the time-consciousness of pre-capitalist "intellectuals" reflect the characteristics of writing, which serves to extend social actors' temporal horizons. Writing also necessitates following letters, words, sentences, paragraphs, etc., from beginning to end in a pre-determined sequence and is therefore connected to a certain mode of thinking, namely to the diachronic, cause-and-effect thinking of linear time. Hence the linear temporal pattern has, at least in this sense, existed for millennia.[122]

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120 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 2, 41–49; Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

121 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 2, 41–49.

122 For a discussion of the linear dimension of writing, see Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (University of Minnesota Press, 2011). See also Krašovec, *Tujost kapitala*, 137–151.

Markets are structurally limited parts of pre-capitalist societies that are closely connected to political and military power. Access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism of this sphere, which includes innovations that increase the speed of the production and circulation of objects traded on the market. Innovations in the manufacturing sphere are related to the technological and institutional changes that enable a particular organization of production, innovations in the trading sphere to the methods of accounting and finance that enable more efficient organization of trade, and innovations of produced objects themselves to the needs of the upper class, i.e., to military equipment and luxury consumption.[123] The relative dynamism of the material life of the upper class is therefore a result of the connection between the pre-capitalist market sphere and surplus, which enables the relatively dynamic production, circulation, and consumption of military and luxury objects (while the material life of the lower class changes much more slowly because of its separation from surplus).

This relative dynamism is closely connected to the high level of time-space distanciation that is inherent in the market sphere, since trade entails contact with absent social actors. The spatial distanciation of markets is a result of the circulation of objects between separated areas, which is related to power in the sense that it allows lords to access the resources they need to maintain their rule. The temporal distanciation of markets is primarily a result of financial instruments such as debt and credit, which enable the "deferral" of time, allowing resources to be allocated in the present based on expectations of value that will be produced in the future. In other words, temporal deferral is a way of extending beyond the immediate circumstances by relying

123 For a characterization of these spheres, see Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vols. 1 and 2.

on anticipated outcomes of future events.[124] This capacity can be utilized in the service of political and military power, the most obvious example of which is that pre-capitalist states often borrow money from merchants. The sphere of manufacturing is connected to these types of distanciation to the extent that raw materials are brought to producers from distant places and to the extent that temporal deferral is used in the service of production. The market sphere is therefore also connected to power, albeit in somewhat indirect ways, which, again, enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic.

The specificity of the time-consciousness of social actors in the market sphere is shaped by the temporality of trade, manufacturing, and luxury consumption. Merchants' understanding of time reflects the circulation of capital and goods, which includes the planning of long-distance journeys, the coordination between traders and suppliers in each trade chain, and the calculation of the amount of money worth investing within a certain timespan.[125] Manufacturers' understanding of time is shaped by, among other things, the sequence of stages that need to be followed to make a specific object. This sequence can be understood as another example of the linear temporal pattern in pre-capitalist societies. The time-consciousness of the social actors who buy luxury objects, which primarily involves the lords and the wealthier bourgeoisie, reflects the temporality of fashion: "*Fashion is also a search for a new language to discredit the old, a way in which each generation can repudiate its immediate predecessor and distinguish itself from it*."[126] The rejection of the past has, at least in this sense, also existed for centuries.

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124 Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, 23–26.

125 For contrasting views on merchant's time, see Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 226–231; Le Goff, "Merchant's Time and Church's Time," 34–37.

126 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 324. For a fuller account, see *ibid.*, 311–333.

The characteristics just discussed represent the temporality of the reproduction of the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies, which is the other side of the temporality of the lower sphere. To emphasize the main connections between time and power: access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism of the upper sphere, which includes innovations that enable improvements in the speed of travel and communication, the recording of information, and the organization of trade; the consequent ability to coordinate across expansive territories, to store information, and to defer time constitute various modes of time-space distanciation that enable the exercise of power; the exercise of power enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic. The relation between the sphere of subsistence and the sphere of surplus is, again, also a relation of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.

The Mixing of the Two Spheres

While the relation between the lower sphere and the upper sphere represents the basic division of time within pre-capitalist societies, this division is not total, since social actors of both spheres have some contact with the temporality of the opposite sphere. An obvious example of this point is that peasants typically have access to local markets and consequently engage with the unique temporality of trade. A corresponding example is that merchants often use their profits to buy land in the countryside and therefore have contact with the temporality of agriculture. Simply put, peasants and merchants are clearly not entirely separate.[127]

However, while this kind of "mixing" does do away with the notion of an absolute dichotomy, it does not mean that we should reject the

127 For a discussion of such examples, see Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, 25–80.

distinction between the two spheres altogether. The examples used in fact show that such mixing is structurally limited. Peasants' access to local markets is limited because they operate with a very modest physical surplus, which is why they generally only buy things that help them survive and are not engaged in elaborate trading practices. Merchants who own property in the countryside are also rarely involved in actual farming and spend the majority of their time on other activities. In other words, while peasants and merchants are not entirely separate, they do in fact mostly live in different social worlds.[128]

The social actors of the two spheres therefore do have some contact with the temporality of the opposite sphere, which can be viewed as a mixture of different temporalities that exist in social actors' understanding of time. However, the relation between these temporalities is significantly different. To put it in a simplified way: the basic framework of peasants' time-consciousness is determined by the temporality of agriculture, with the temporality of the market having only a secondary role, while the opposite is true of merchants' time-consciousness (in the examples used). Both types of time-consciousness are a mixture of multiple elements, but the relation between these elements is different.

We can conclude that the relation between the sphere of subsistence and the sphere of surplus is more complex than how it was described above, but that these complications do not imply we should reject this relation as the basic division of time within pre-capitalist societies. Something similar can be said of other exceptions, which will not be discussed here.

Braudel's Multiple Temporalities, Revisited

The above three subsections represent our framework for characterizing the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies. It is useful to point out

128 *Ibid.*

the main differences between our approach and Braudel's conception of multiple temporalities, which are as follows.

First, the mechanism that explains how the different temporal levels are generated and connected represents the starting point of our approach, the point of view from which the different temporalities of pre-capitalist societies are understood. The focus on the extraction and distribution of surplus enables a heterogeneous analysis of the temporalities of social actors, but one in which this heterogeneity is nevertheless integrated into a broader framework.

Second, the basic division of time in our approach is between the lower and upper spheres of pre-capitalist societies, while the mixing of the two spheres is understood as an additional elaboration of this dichotomy. In contrast, Braudel's basic division of time is between three temporal levels, which are construed in a different way. This point is best exemplified by the fact that our approach understands the material life of the upper class as the more dynamic part of pre-capitalist societies, while Braudel makes the basic distinction between the relative stasis of the material life of both classes, on the one hand, and the relative dynamism of other parts of society, on the other. Our approach therefore makes the direct connection between the relative dynamism of the material life of the upper class and the relative dynamism of the market sphere, while Braudel's does not. To put it differently: an analysis of the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies that centers on surplus extraction provides a theoretical explanation for Braudel's empirical observation that the material life of the lower class and the upper class have different temporalities.

Finally, our understanding of the temporality of human action is based on a holistic view of social relations, which is why it emphasizes the interconnectedness of the different social spheres and their interaction with power. The temporalities of the politico-military, ideological,

and market spheres are understood as inherently interconnected because the temporality of all of them is counterposed to the temporality of subsistence production. This point is best exemplified by the connection between the temporalities of the market and the politico-military spheres: when merchants lend money to states, the deferral of time that is enabled via debt and credit has the social role of maintaining the pre-capitalist class structure. The merchant's ability to defer time is understood in the context of existing social relations, which is to say that it has the social role of reproducing extra-economic surplus extraction. In contrast, Braudel's conception of the different temporal levels is primarily based on the internal temporality of material objects and different types of trading practices, which does not lend itself to a holistic characterization of the temporalities of societies. Braudel also discusses the fact that pre-capitalist states borrow money, but, crucially, the discussion of this phenomenon is not part of an overall framework that can account for the temporality of power in a satisfactory manner.[129]

These points are, of course, connected: analyzing the temporalities of pre-capitalist societies from the point of view of the mechanism that generates and connects them entails a basic division of time which is dichotomous (not tripartite), as well as a holistic approach that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the different social spheres and their relation to power (not one that is based on the inherent temporality of different economic processes).

Comparison with Capitalism

The temporalities of pre-capitalist societies have to be understood in contrast with the temporalities of capitalist societies. The latter

129 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, 519–522.

will be discussed in a simplified manner, solely for the purpose of comparison.[130]

The transition to capitalism involves a fundamental transformation of the division of time among social actors. This transformation can be attributed to two key structural differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies.

First, surplus is systematically invested in the sphere of production in capitalist societies. This type of investment results in a level of dynamism in the lives of capitalist workers that is decisively absent from the lives of pre-capitalist peasants. To look at it from another perspective: capitalist workers do not have access to the means of subsistence and are therefore not "protected" from changes that occur outside of their immediate environment, as pre-capitalist peasants are to a significant extent. Additionally, one of the consequences of modern economic growth is that discretionary spending becomes accessible to a larger segment of the population. The ability to buy non-essential goods varies between different social actors in capitalism, of course, but this inequality is structurally different from pre-capitalist inequalities.

Second, the capitalist state represents the formal universalization of many spheres of society that are limited to a minority of the population in pre-capitalist societies. To put it in a simplified way: the democratic political system represents formal universal access to the political sphere, the public institutions of the police and army to the military sphere, the institution of public education to the ideological sphere, and public physical infrastructure to the sphere of travel and communication. New types of inequalities emerge in all these spheres, but they are, again, structurally different from pre-capitalist inequalities.

130 We discussed the basic characteristics of capitalist societies in the subsections "The Theory of Social Forms" and "A Closer Look at Pre-Capitalist and Capitalist Societies."

The combination of these transformations represents a radical dynamization of the lower class of capitalist societies when compared with the lower class of pre-capitalist societies. Particularly important is the fact that, in capitalism, innovations in the political, military, and ideological spheres, as well as those in the sphere of consumption, are all formally accessible to the entire population, while in pre-capitalist societies they are mostly limited to a minority of social actors. Capitalist societies are also characterized by asymmetrical temporal relations between different social actors, which primarily concern income and wealth inequality, but the point to emphasize is that capitalist asymmetric relations are structurally different from pre-capitalist ones.

The transition to capitalism also involves a fundamental transformation of time-space relations. One of the consequences of the technological dynamism of capitalist societies is an unprecedented improvement in the speed of travel and communication, which leads to a level of global interconnectedness that is greater than ever. Social actors are embedded in their local contexts to a much lesser extent and interact with distant social actors to a much greater extent.[131] Additionally, many of the political functions that are concentrated in pre-capitalist cities are transferred to the capitalist state, which results in a transformation of the pre-capitalist division between the city and the countryside. The division between urban and rural areas still exists in capitalist societies, of course, but its significance is diminished because the nation-state represents a relative homogenization of the population across a clearly delimited territory.[132]

131 Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 323–350; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 240–323; Rosa, *Social Acceleration*, 97–107.

132 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 140–150; Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 2, 35–41, 192–197.

Finally, these developments also result in a fundamental transformation of the time-consciousness of social actors. While the premodern understanding of time was primarily dictated by natural rhythms and the temporal patterns of daily tasks, the modern understanding of time is independent of environmental and social contexts. As we have already explained, the general acceptance of abstract time-consciousness is a consequence of both the technological innovations that enable more precise time measurement and the accompanying social transformations.[133] The building of railways, which required the synchronization of different regions within states, marked a particularly important development in this respect. Principles of abstract time also govern the most widespread institutions of modern societies, such as schools and factories, which represent the main channels through which social actors internalize a specific understanding of time.[134]

We can conclude that there is a fundamental difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies with regard to all of the temporal characteristics discussed above.

Reprise

Human history can be divided in many ways. In this part of the book, we have presented a framework of periodization that centers on the relations between and within different kinds of societies. The argumentation in favor of this framework can be summarized as follows.

The starting point in the attempt to develop a systematic approach to the periodization of human history involves a shift of focus from

133 See above, the subsection "The Time-Consciousness of Social Actors."

134 Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, 104–126; Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*, 289–350; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 70–79.

changes in particular aspects of human activities to changes in the character of time itself. The latter approach is advanced by theorists such as Koselleck and Rosa, who argue that the temporality of Modernity is structurally different from the temporality of previous historical periods. The simplest way to explain this difference is to emphasize that the pace of social change in Premodernity is much slower than the pace of social change in Modernity. That is to say, the premodern era of history was characterized by a greater degree of continuity than the modern era, which is characterized by constant change.

The emphasis on the pace of social change leads to the question of how we can account for the acceleration that has taken place in the past few centuries. This is where, in our view, Koselleck and Rosa fall short. The most important structural changes to social time can be explained by contemporary social theory, more specifically by the differences between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies. The theoretical reason for this conclusion is that societies determine the most important aspects of the temporality of human action, which includes the pace of social change. The transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies, therefore, is unlike any other historical transformation because it represents a change in the pace of change itself.

The framework of periodization that would follow from these considerations is simple: different types of societies determine different paces of social change, which correspond to different historical periods. There are, however, two problems with this approach.

First, different types of societies exist at the same time, which is why social forms cannot be directly equated with historical periods. This problem can be addressed by focusing on the relations between societies as the key criterion for dividing human history. The most important of these relations is the character of geopolitical competition because it determines whether different types of societies can

coexist in the long term, which is what defines the period of Premodernity, or whether one type of society dominates the others and spreads around the world, which is what defines the period of Modernity. If we interpret this dynamic in temporal terms, we can say that it shapes both the overall pace of change and the relation between older and newer temporalities in different historical eras. In other words, our explanation for the accelerated pace of change in recent centuries focuses on military conflict, since wars represent the main mechanism by which the dynamism of capitalism translates into the dynamism of Modernity.

Second, societies are composed of multiple parts and are consequently characterized by multiple temporalities. The different temporal levels of societies are emphasized in the work of Braudel, but this heterogeneity is not integrated into a unified framework of analysis. This problem can be addressed by understanding the mechanism that generates and connects the temporalities of social actors, which is the extraction and distribution of surplus, as the starting point for characterizing the temporalities of societies. The explanation is simple: subsistence and surplus are inherently related to stasis and dynamism, respectively; societies are structures that determine the way surplus is extracted and distributed; societies can therefore be understood as ways of dividing time among social actors. It follows that pre-capitalist and capitalist societies fundamentally differ in their temporal distributions.

The reason why our approach to dividing human history emphasizes the relations between and within societies, then, is that these relations determine the most important temporal characteristics of historical periods. More specifically, they determine both the overall pace of change and the way in which older and newer characteristics are distributed between societies and among social actors in different historical eras. The main advantage of this approach is that it can

account for the temporal differences between societies and social actors that exist at the same time, which is to say that it can account for the heterogeneity of time.

Based on the first two parts of the book, we can turn to an analysis of the period 1450–1750 as a problem of periodization.

PART III: THE NOTION OF LATE PREMODERNITY

Introduction

Every historical period can be interpreted in different ways. A book about historical periodization operates on the assumption that alternative perspectives on dividing history can be systematically compared and analyzed. This assumption leads to the following question: How should discussions that seek to evaluate contested framings of historical periods be structured?

The starting point of such discussions involves overviewing the notions of periodization that are relevant to understanding the period that is the subject of analysis. Different frameworks for dividing history have existed since the beginning of historiography, which means that there will be plenty of material to draw from. The process of outlining alternative approaches should also give a sense of the basic characteristics of the period in question.

The main part of discussions about historical periods as problems of periodization involves comparing alternative interpretations and then either deciding which one is supported by the strongest arguments or presenting a new interpretation. The primary purpose of this part is to identify the specificity of the period under discussion and determine its place within the broader historical context. Ideally, the advantages and disadvantages of different perspectives can be judged by criteria that inform a general framework of periodization, which is why we presented our approach to dividing human history before analyzing a particular historical era. The argumentation in favor of a specific notion of periodization should also clarify why it is preferable to the alternatives.

Finally, a comprehensive discussion about the interpretation of historical periods involves determining the historical turning points that demarcate them from the preceding and succeeding periods.

Assessing which notion best describes a particular era of history is not the same as defining its beginning and end, which requires a separate discussion.

The historical period that will be the subject of our analysis is the period that spans roughly from 1450 to 1750. The analysis is divided into discussions of (1) established approaches to this historical period, (2) the arguments in favor of the notion of Late Premodernity, and (3) the identification of the historical turning point that represents the end of this era.

Different Approaches to the Period 1450–1750

Modernity and Premodernity

In examining the notions of periodization that are relevant to understanding the period 1450–1750, the distinction between Premodernity and Modernity offers the most natural starting point. These two notions have, of course, been the subject of extensive discussion in the humanities and the social sciences. A brief outline of the basic characteristics that are usually associated with these notions will suffice for the present purposes.[135]

Anthony Giddens sums up the main characteristics of Modernity as follows: "[This notion] *is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions,*

135 We presented our interpretation of these notions as part of our overall framework of periodization in the second part of the book. That part includes either explicit or implicit criticisms of other perspectives.

including the nation-state and mass democracy."[136] To put it differently, Modernity is most strongly associated with industrial capitalism in the economic sphere, democratic nation-states in the political sphere, and science or "rationality" in the ideological sphere. These characteristics, which can at least heuristically be understood as the core tenets of Modernity, are closely connected with many other developments, such as universal education, industrial warfare, nationalism, etc.[137]

The notion of Premodernity is traditionally understood in opposition to Modernity, as that from which Modernity has broken away. The central characteristics of Premodernity therefore include the predominance of subsistence agriculture in the economic sphere (rather than a market or industrial economy), the persistence of power structures based on the formal inequality of social actors in the political sphere (rather than democratic nation-states in which all citizens are formally equal), and the centrality of religious frameworks for interpreting the world in the ideological sphere (rather than science or "rationality").[138]

Although there are many problems with the notions of Modernity and Premodernity, especially with the simplified form in which they were just presented, they nevertheless remain important reference points for discussions about the periodization of human history.

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136 Anthony Giddens and Christopher Pierson, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* (Polity Press, 1998), 94.

137 For a range of discussions on Modernity, see Ebke and Haack, "Periodisation and Modernity," 307–320; Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*; Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*; Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*; Koselleck, "The Eighteenth Century as the Beginning of Modernity," 154–169; Rosa, *Social Acceleration*; Rutar, *Od klasične sociologije*; Wagner, *Modernity*.

138 For a range of discussions on Premodernity, see Ridder and Patzold, *Die Aktualität der Vormoderne*.

Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages, Old Europe, and Late Premodernity

How does the period 1450–1750 fit into the dichotomy between Premodernity and Modernity? As we have already explained, this historical period is commonly understood through the notion of Early Modernity, which originates from the division of history into ancient, medieval, and modern periods. This tripartite model was first formulated by Italian humanists, who understood their age as a break with a dark middle period that obscured the achievements of the classical world. Modern historiography refined the humanist framework by recognizing the period 1450–1750 as a distinct historical era. It is important to note that the term "Early Modernity" did not always imply a connection with Modernity and was sometimes even used to express distance from it. The link between these two notions became solidified only in the second half of the 20th century, in the context of scholarly debates about the nature and origins of European modernization.[139]

This historical background explains why most discussions of the period 1450–1750 focus on European developments, a tendency that also characterizes our own approach. Nevertheless, we contend that our analysis has implications for global history as well.

The recognition of Early Modernity as a distinct notion of periodization resulted in its more exact definition. In the article "Introduction:

139 For recent scholarship on the conceptual history of Early Modernity, see Justus Nipperdey, "Inventing 'Early Modern' Europe: Fashioning a New Historical Period in American Historiography 1880–1945," *Journal of Early Modern History* 27, no. 3 (2023): 199–223; Nipperdey, "The Pitfalls of Terminology," 107–118. For a range of discussions of this notion, see Hans Erich Bödeker and Ernst Hinrichs, eds., *Alteuropa – Ancien Régime – Frühe Neuzeit: Probleme und Methoden der Forschung* (Fromann-Holzboog Verlag, 1991); Jack A. Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 249–284; Wolfgang Reinhard, "The Idea of Early Modern History," in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (Routledge, 1997), 281–292; Scott, "Introduction: 'Early Modern' Europe," 1–33; Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 296–307; Štuhec, "Klare Trennlinien," 85–94.

'Early Modern' Europe and the Idea of Early Modernity," Hamish Scott highlights nine characteristics that distinguish the specificity of this historical period: (1) the relatively continuous demographic growth from the middle of the 15th century to the Industrial Revolution, with the partial exception of the 17th century; (2) the relatively continuous economic development, again with the partial exception of the 17th century, which was related to an expansion of the non-agricultural sector; (3) the rise of centralized state structures, which involved significant administrative and military transformations; (4) the fragmentation of the relative unity of European Catholicism that resulted from the Reformation and the subsequent consolidation of national religions; (5) the partial transformation from collective identities and extended family systems to individual identities and nuclear family structures; (6) the relative decline in the social standing of women; (7) the first phase of globalization and the consequent change of Europe's position in the world; (8) the significant technological innovations of the period, particularly the printing press and gunpowder; (9) the new currents of thought of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment.[140] Many of these characteristics were closely connected: demographic growth led to other types of economic changes, the great maritime discoveries had a significant influence on the new currents of thought, etc.

It is evident even from this brief overview that the early modern period, like any other historical era, is composed of multiple distinct elements. While this complexity is often acknowledged, the predominant contemporary understanding of the period 1450–1750 tends to highlight the importance of modern characteristics. This emphasis means that the recognition of Early Modernity as a distinct historical period

140 Scott, "Introduction: 'Early Modern' Europe," 3.

did not fundamentally challenge the humanist division into Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modernity, which continues to shape the broader understanding of human history.

While the notion of Early Modernity represents the most prominent interpretation of the period 1450–1750, it is not the only one. Notable alternatives include the notion of the Long Middle Ages, proposed by Jacques Le Goff, the notion of Old Europe, proposed by Dietrich Gerhard, and the notion of Late Premodernity, proposed by Lars-Emil Nybo Nissen.[141]

The notion of the Long Middle Ages, which emphasizes the unity of the period 500–1750, is, of course, an extension of the notion of the Middle Ages. The basic character of this historical period can be understood through two main continuities: (1) the endurance of feudal economic and social relations, with the notion of "feudal" used simply to express contrast with ancient slavery and modern industrial capitalism; and (2) the central ideological and institutional role of Christianity, which should likewise be understood in contrast with ancient paganism and modern secularization.[142] The Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment are consequently emphasized as the key developments that marked the end of this long period of European history. Le Goff also goes to great lengths to minimize the significance of the changes that are traditionally understood to represent the end of the Middle Ages. He pays particular attention to the Italian Renaissance, which he views as the continuation of medieval cultural trends.[143] The

141 Jacques Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Columbia University Press, 2015); Dietrich Gerhard, *Old Europe: A Study of Continuity, 1000–1800* (Academic Press, 1981); Lars-Emil Nybo Nissen, "Persistently Pre-Modern: Dynamics of Change in the World of Late Pre-Modernity" (PhD diss., University of Copenhagen, 2019).

142 Florian Mazel, "Un, deux, trois Moyen Âge… Enjeux et critères des périodisations internes de l'époque médiévale," *Atala. Cultures et sciences humaines* 17 (2014): 106–109.

143 Le Goff, *Must We Divide History*, 31–112.

main idea behind the notion of the Long Middle Ages, then, is that the economic, social, and ideological structures that emerged after the decline of Antiquity remained largely intact until the middle of the 18th century, which is what connects the Middle Ages and the period 1450–1750.

The notion of Old Europe, which emphasizes the unity of the period of roughly 1000–1800, is focused primarily on the importance of social institutions. Gerhard defines the main characteristics that distinguish the specificity of this historical era as follows:

> *The emergence of princely courts, related to the new ideal of chivalry, the establishment of the universities, the beginnings of the professional lawyer and of the trained official, the definite distinction between an armed nobility and a non-armed peasantry, the coexistence of knight and burgher, the highly stratified society of the cities, the intricate organization of municipalities and guilds – all these can be traced back to the twelfth century, the period in which Europe attains its maturity. Everywhere local pride and regionalism are interrelated with the privileges of the corporate society. The emerging centralized state* […] *will have a hard time fighting these strongly entrenched counterforces*.[144]

This overview captures some of the central social and political structures that shaped European history for centuries. The main idea behind the notion of Old Europe, then, is that the institutional framework that emerged in the European High Middle Ages remained largely intact until the late 18th century, which is what gives the period 1000–1800 its "old" character.

The notion of Late Premodernity, as it is presented by Nissen, emphasizes the premodern character of developmental patterns during

144 Dietrich Gerhard, "Periodization in European History," *The American Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (1956): 906. It is important to note that a number of other German historians favor the notion of Old Europe as well. Scott, "Introduction: 'Early Modern' Europe," 19–20.

the period 1450–1750. Using the examples of China, France, and the Habsburg Empire, Nissen contends that the most significant transformations in the 17th and 18th centuries should be understood as a continuation of the premodern dynamics of continuity and change. The relative growth of the population and of the non-agricultural sector that occurred in this period marked an intensification of the economic processes that are inherent to agrarian societies, not the start of modern economic growth. Similarly, the rise of bureaucratic-imperial states marked an attempt by the ruling elite to stabilize their position within the existing system, not the start of a transition to a new social order. None of these developments requires the application of the conceptual framework of modernization to be understood. The main idea behind Nissen's interpretation of Late Premodernity, then, is that the central economic, political, and military transformations of the period 1450–1750 represented an extension of the entire premodern era of history.[145]

While there are important differences between the notions of the Long Middle Ages, Old Europe, and Late Premodernity, they all share the assumption that the older characteristics remained predominant in the period 1450–1750. This assumption indicates that it is a mistake to view this historical period as the beginning of Modernity.

A Mixture of Premodern and Modern Characteristics

A somewhat different interpretation of the notion of Early Modernity, one which is especially productive in our view, emphasizes the coexistence of premodern and modern characteristics in the period

145 Nissen, "Persistently Pre-Modern," 203–210. It is worth noting that the term "Late Premodernity" predated Nissen's PhD thesis, but it lacked a fully developed argument. Peter N. Stearns, "Periodization in World History: Challenges and Opportunities," in *21st-Century Narratives of World History: Global and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. R. Charles Weller (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 99–100.

1450–1750.[146] Elaborating on this interpretation also gives us an opportunity to take a closer look at some of the individual characteristics of this era.

Older characteristics of the period 1450–1750 are those that originated not only in the Middle Ages but also in earlier eras of human history, which means that they can be described along roughly the same lines as the basic definition of Premodernity. These characteristics include the centrality of subsistence agriculture, formally unequal power structures, and religious interpretative frameworks. The specifically "Old European" elements of this period are outlined in Gerhard's description above and are largely self-explanatory.

Newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750, most of which are listed in Scott's article and recounted above, deserve more attention. This period was marked by significant demographic growth, as Scott emphasizes, but this growth was still subject to Malthusian constraints in the majority of European societies. The population increase that occurred in the long 16th century (roughly 1450–1620) was followed by a decline in productivity and real wages, which represented the upper limit of growth. It was only after the crisis of the 17th century (roughly 1620–1680), which was a period of population stagnation and partial decline, that growth resumed at the end of the 17th century and particularly in the 18th century. The dominant demographic pattern of this period was therefore one of cyclical ups and downs, not linear growth. The notable exceptions to this pattern were England and the Netherlands, which should consequently be considered separately (as discussed below).[147]

146 Štuhec, "Reformacijska gibanja," 5–20; Štuhec, "Klare Trennlinien," 85–94.

147 Robert C. Allen, "Economic Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Europe, 1300–1800," *European Review of Economic History* 4, no. 1 (2000): 1–26; Robert C. Allen, "The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War," *Explorations in Economic History* 38, no. 4 (2001): 411–447.

Economic developments in the period 1450–1750 also included a relative growth of the non-agricultural sector. It should be emphasized that the quantitative expansion of manufacturing and trade that occurred during this period resulted in significant qualitative changes, which included the rise of the private market, the establishment of the putting-out system of rural manufacturing, and the innovation of double-entry bookkeeping.[148] The quantitative and qualitative dimensions should therefore be understood together. Objects of material life that were specific to this era, such as tobacco, potatoes, and Rococo furniture, also reflected important changes in the market sphere. Many of these goods were introduced to the global market from the New World and therefore represented novelties only from a European perspective.[149]

In addition to economic transformations, the period 1450–1750 was also marked by important political and military changes. The most significant development in these spheres was the relative centralization and generalization of power that occurred with the rise of absolutism. Absolutist states were established through a process of integrating segments of the upper class that were previously endowed with distinct administrative, judicial, and military powers into a centralized state apparatus gradually extending across the entire territory of societies. This process was accompanied by significant military transformations, which included the expanded use of gunpowder in warfare, the increased reliance on mercenary forces, and the growth of standing armies. Developments in the political and military spheres should therefore be understood together. It is important to emphasize that these changes

148 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 211–249, 474–514.

149 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 104–333; Janine Maegraith and Craig Muldrew, "Consumption and Material Life," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*, vol. 1, *Peoples and Place*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford University Press, 2015), 369–397.

did not give rulers absolute power, as the term "absolutism" misleadingly suggests, since much of the *de facto* authority remained with regional lords and influential estates.[150]

Transformations in the character of power that occurred in the period 1450–1750 also involved an intensification of social discipline, a development that can be partially captured by the notion of "confessionalization." Confessionalization refers to the process by which organized religions in both Catholic and Protestant regions of Europe became institutionally consolidated and more closely aligned with state structures. As a result, religious identity came to function as an instrument of governance in new ways, enabling expanded forms of social regulation and control.[151] Other important consequences of the Reformation included the fragmentation of the relative unity that had characterized medieval Catholicism, a partial erosion of papal and clerical authority, and a growing emphasis on personal faith grounded in individual engagement with the Bible. The latter development contributed to a significant rise in literacy rates among the general population, particularly in parts of north-western Europe.[152]

These changes in the religious sphere were connected to broader transformations in social life, which involved shifting family structures

150 Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (Verso, 2013); Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, 450–499; Heide Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power: History and Theory of the Bourgeois State*, trans. David Fernbach (Brill, 2007), 645–662; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 151–196.

151 Wolfgang Reinhard, "Pressures Towards Confessionalization? Prolegomena to a Theory of the Confessional Age," in *The Long Reformation*, ed. Jeffrey R. Watt (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 14–28; Ute Lotz-Heumann, "The Concept of 'Confessionalization': A Historiographical Paradigm in Dispute," *Memoria y Civilización* 4 (2001): 93–114. For a Political Marxist interpretation of the role of religion in the *ancien régime*, see Lucija Zala Bezlaj, "Religija in politično v *ancien régimu*," *Zgodovinski časopis* 76, no. 3–4 (2022): 398–429.

152 C. Scott Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); Sašo Jerše, "Vera in hotenja: silhuete religioznosti v zgodnjem novem veku," in *Vera in hotenja: študije o Primožu Trubarju in njegovem času*, ed. Sašo Jerše (Slovenska matica, 2009), 13–29; Marko Štuhec, "Nekatera izhodišča sodobnega zgodovinopisja o reformaciji," in *Vera in hotenja: študije o Primožu Trubarju in njegovem času*, ed. Sašo Jerše (Slovenska matica, 2009), 33–44; Jeffrey R. Watt, ed., *The Long Reformation* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006).

and gender relations. It is important to note that the traditional narrative regarding European family patterns, which drew a clear distinction between nuclear families in the north-west and extended kinship networks elsewhere, has been substantially revised.[153] Nevertheless, the period 1450–1750 was marked by a gradual movement away from communal forms of life toward more individual modes of organization, as smaller households became increasingly common in significant parts of Europe. While the partial transition toward a society focused on the individual created certain opportunities for autonomy, it also introduced new forms of restriction and hierarchy. This ambiguity was particularly evident in the changing status of women, since the rise of the nuclear family brought both expanded possibilities for independence and renewed expressions of patriarchal control.[154]

Many of the developments already discussed overlapped with transformations in the sphere of knowledge production that occurred in the period 1450–1750. These changes involved major technological and institutional innovations as well as radical ideological shifts. The two technological breakthroughs that are worth highlighting are the printing press, which arguably represented the most important improvement in the recording and dissemination of information since the invention of writing, and the mechanical clock, which revolutionized time measurement. Both technologies were often employed for governing and

153 Mikołaj Szołtysek, "Households and Family Systems," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*, vol. 1, *Peoples and Place*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford University Press, 2015), 313–341; Mikołaj Szołtysek and Bartosz Ogórek, "How Many Household Formation Systems Were There in Historic Europe? A View Across 256 Regions Using Partitioning Clustering Methods," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 53, no. 1 (2019): 53–76.

154 Margaret R. Hunt, "Social Roles and Individual Identities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*, vol. 1, *Peoples and Place*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford University Press, 2015), 342–368; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, "Reformation Society, Women and the Family," in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Routledge, 2002), 433–460.

disciplinary purposes. The period under discussion was also marked by the emergence of numerous new institutions connected to the ideological sphere, such as academies, museums, scientific societies, Masonic lodges, salons, and the Republic of Letters. The latter was a transnational network of correspondence that allowed the "intellectuals" of Europe to maintain communication across the continent.[155]

The major ideological currents of the period 1450–1750 included the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment. Despite their considerable differences, these intellectual movements shared several important characteristics: a changing attitude toward traditional authorities, which were increasingly called into question; the introduction of new methodologies, ranging from humanist interpretations of classical texts to emerging scientific practices; and a redefinition of human value and potential. Against this background, more radical ideas also began to take shape, most notably the notions of secular rationalism, progress, and universal rights. Although these concepts were only partially developed and often limited in practice, their emergence nevertheless represented a significant break with previous ideological frameworks. In other words, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment marked the rise of ideas that would later become closely associated with Modernity.[156]

In addition to the economic, political, military, social, and ideological transformations that occurred within societies, the period 1450–1750 was also marked by important changes in the relations between societies.

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155 Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Polity Press, 2000); Elisabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour*.

156 Peter Rietbergen, *Europe: A Cultural History*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2021), 239–263, 382–438; Marko Štuhec, "Paradigme vednosti v evropskem zgodnjem novem veku," in *Knjiga, znanje, razum: od protestantizma do razsvetljenstva: (1500–1800): prispevki z znanstvenega posveta ob razstavi, 7. in 8. oktober 2020*, eds. Mojca Ferle and Irena Žmuc (Muzej in galerije mesta Ljubljane, Mestni muzej, 2021), 10–34; Wiesner-Hanks, *Early Modern Europe*, 133–170, 383–428.

In the European context, these relations were primarily shaped by the consolidation of absolutist states and the consequent reconfiguration of the continental balance of power. Significant developments in geopolitics included the creation of a network of international diplomacy, the establishment of territorial states as the basic negotiating entities, and the exercise of geopolitical pressure by the absolutist states.[157] The latter dynamic resulted in the spread of absolutism to parts of Europe that had no internal transition from feudal to absolutist monarchies, most importantly to eastern Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries.[158]

Finally, the period 1450–1750 was also marked by major changes in global relations that resulted from European maritime discoveries, events that fundamentally changed the course of human history. The consequences of these events included the initiation of the "Columbian Exchange," that is, the exchange of objects, plants, diseases, and ideas between the Americas and the rest of the world, the establishment of a global network of trade, the first phase of European colonialism, the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade, and the transformation of medieval ideological horizons. Together, these developments significantly altered the relation between Europe and other parts of the world, which can be understood as a good indicator of the overall impact that the great discoveries had in the centuries that followed them.[159]

According to the interpretation of Early Modernity that is under discussion, the older and newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750 should be understood together, since it is precisely the coexistence of premodern and modern elements that gives this period its specificity. This interpretation requires two clarifications. First, not all of the

157 Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1, 450–499; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 197–248; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, rev. ed. (Blackwell, 1992), 161–191.

158 Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, 195–220.

159 Goldstone, *Why Europe?*; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*; Rietbergen, *Europe*, 307–348.

newer characteristics of this period can be understood as radical breaks from the past. The relative expansion of manufacturing and trade, for example, can be understood as a continuation of economic activity that existed for millennia and was widespread in many parts of the world. Second, many of the characteristics that are typically associated with Modernity arguably have their roots in earlier eras. For example, while the idea of progress became predominant only during the Enlightenment, it had important precedents in ancient and medieval thought.[160] In other words, it is not so easy to determine which characteristics can be interpreted as modern and which cannot.

These considerations notwithstanding, the assumption going forward will be that *some* of the characteristics that first emerged in the period 1450–1750 definitively did represent a break with the past in a sense in which the characteristics of previous periods did not. In our view, the most important of these were the first phase of globalization, the technological innovations of the printing press, gunpowder, and the mechanical clock, the ideological shifts of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, and the emergence of capitalist social property relations in England (as discussed below). These developments justify the association of the period 1450–1750 with Modernity, even if that association is not simple or straightforward. The mixture of premodern and modern characteristics just outlined will be the central focus of the discussion that follows.

The Period 1450–1750 as Late Premodernity

The Structure of the Argument

In our view, the notions of Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages, and Old Europe are flawed characterizations of the period 1450–1750

160 Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (Basic Books, 1980).

and result in a misleading division of history, which is why this period should instead be understood as the late premodern period. Following the logic of the first two parts of the book, the focus of our argumentation will not be on the individual characteristics of this period themselves, but rather on the relations between them. We will attempt to show that the framework that was developed in the second part of the book explains the distribution of the older and newer characteristics in the period 1450–1750. The argumentation proceeds by discussing (1) the relations between societies that existed in this period, (2) the relations within societies that existed in this period, and (3) how this period compares with Modernity. On this basis, we will define the notion of Late Premodernity and explain why it is preferable to the alternatives.

The Relations Between Societies in the Period 1450–1750

In order to argue for a specific interpretation of the period 1450–1750, we first have to situate it in the macro-historical context that was discussed in the second part of the book. To recapitulate, that part proposed a tripartite division of human history into Prehistory, which was the period of the sole existence of one type of society, Premodernity, which was the period of the long-term coexistence of different types of societies, and Modernity, which is the period of the domination of one type of society. The premodern coexistence of different societal types was primarily a result of the relatively weak geopolitical pressure exerted by pre-capitalist societies, while the modern domination of one societal type is primarily a result of the strong geopolitical pressure exerted by capitalist societies.[161] How does the period 1450–1750 fit into this framework?

161 See above, the subsection "The Three Eras of Human History."

In answering this question, we first have to identify the different types of societies that existed in this historical era. The specificity of the period 1450–1750 in this respect lies in the fact that the late 14th and early 15th centuries marked the initial emergence of capitalism in the sense of social property relations. According to the Brenner Thesis, the transition to capitalism happened as an unintended consequence of the class struggle that occurred in England in the wake of the Black Death. This struggle resulted in a significant part of the English lower class losing access to the means of subsistence and a significant part of the English upper class leasing their land to tenant farmers on a competitive land market. The creation of a class of workers who had to sell their labor to survive and a class of tenants who were embedded in relations of economic competition meant that a substantial number of English social actors began to follow the capitalist rules for reproduction, that is, they began to pursue the strategies of specialization, profit maximization, and the continual introduction of new technologies. The initial establishment of capitalist social property relations in some parts of the English countryside was followed by their gradual spread throughout society.[162]

The consequences of England's transition to capitalism already became apparent in the period 1450–1750. Most importantly, that

162 The presented account of the origin of capitalism has been the subject of substantial controversy. Our view is that, while some of Brenner's specific claims have been successfully challenged, his general argument remains valid. The main point to emphasize is that the Political Marxist framework continues to offer a persuasive explanation for the divergent trajectories of England, France, and Eastern Europe during the period 1450–1750. Importantly, recent research has reaffirmed the significance of enclosures for England's economic development. For a contemporary defense of the Brenner Thesis, see Brenner, "Property and Progress," 49–111; Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism*; Rutar, *Capitalism for Realists*, 33–40; Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*. For recent scholarship on the significance of enclosures, see Spencer Dimmock, *England's Second Domesday and the Expulsion of the English Peasantry* (Brill, 2024); Leander Heldring, James A. Robinson, and Sebastian Vollmer, "The Economic Effects of the English Parliamentary Enclosures," *NBER Working Paper* no. 29772 (2022). It is also worth noting that the New Institutional Economics framework draws heavily on Brenner's argumentation in explaining England's transition to inclusive institutions. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 469–470.

country experienced simultaneous growth in population and real wages during the 17th century, which represented a break with the Malthusian developmental pattern. The results included a significant change in the composition of the English economy, as the agricultural sector markedly declined, and the gradual extension of discretionary spending to an ever-larger portion of the population. Simply put, England started to demonstrate certain characteristics typical of modern economies.[163] The spread of capitalist social property relations also provides the background against which the developments of the English Revolution, which resulted in the establishment of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy that protected the interests of the newly emergent capitalist class, and the developments of the English Enlightenment, which resulted in the application of scientific advancements for the improvement of economic productivity, should be understood.[164] The transition to capitalism, therefore, led to fundamental changes in the economic, politico-military, and ideological spheres of English society.

In addition to England, the Netherlands also experienced a partial transition to capitalist social property relations during the period 1450–1750, which resulted in significant economic growth. However, this growth did not culminate in a sustained economic breakthrough. We will not discuss the case of the Netherlands further because it is not of central importance to our argument.[165]

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163 Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25–56; Paul Bouscasse, Emi Nakamura, and Jón Steinsson, "When Did Growth Begin? New Estimates of Productivity Growth in England from 1250 to 1870," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 140, no. 2 (2025): 835–888.

164 Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Verso, 2003); Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 252–262; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to Enlightenment* (Verso, 2012), 211–287.

165 For a Political Marxist interpretation of the developments in the Netherlands, see Robert Brenner, "The Low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 1, no. 2 (2001): 169–241.

While certain parts of north-western Europe were undergoing the transformations just described, other regions followed a different historical trajectory. The most common development in continental Europe during the period 1450–1750 was the transition from feudal to absolutist monarchies. It is important to emphasize that absolutist political formations represent a type of pre-capitalist society, since they are characterized by direct producers having access to the means of subsistence and by exploiters having direct control over the means of coercion, resulting in extra-economic surplus extraction. A simple way to think about absolutism is to understand it as "centralized feudalism."[166] The main empirical corroboration of the pre-capitalist character of absolutism is the fact that societies in continental Europe continued to follow the Malthusian developmental pattern during the 17th and 18th centuries, while the breakthrough to sustained economic growth only occurred in England. In the context of the period under discussion, then, we should make an important distinction between capitalist England and the pre-capitalist societies on the continent (with the partial exception of the Netherlands).[167] Pre-class societies also continued to exist, of course, but they were not prominent in Europe.

We can conclude that the period 1450–1750 was characterized by the coexistence of pre-class, pre-capitalist, and capitalist societies. The next step of our discussion involves examining the relations between societies, since that is what differentiates the three eras of history in our framework. These relations have to be examined in the global and European contexts.

The main point to highlight in the global context is that the relation between Europe and the most advanced parts of the world, namely

166 Gerstenberger, *Impersonal Power*, 645–662; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 151–196.

167 Brenner, "Property and Progress," 82–111.

the relation between Europe and the great Asian civilizations, did *not* fundamentally change in the period 1450–1750. The argument that the "Great Divergence" between Europe and Asia did not occur until at least the 18th century is one of the central claims of the California School of historians.[168] While comparisons between these two regions can be made across various dimensions, the realm of geopolitics is the most significant for the present discussion. The argument goes that Europeans remained confined to scattered coastal outposts and did not manage to penetrate the interior of the Asian continent during the period 1450–1750. The 17th century did mark the rise of European trading empires, but these empires did not pose an existential threat to India and China, which were militarily equal to or more advanced than Europe. In other words, the pressure exerted by European societies in this historical period was not strong enough to invoke a significant response from the most advanced parts of Asia, which largely continued to follow their own developmental dynamics.[169]

The European context is somewhat more ambiguous, since the character of the relations between societies did significantly change due to

168 The California School refers to a group of historians who contend that the traditional understanding of the relation between Europe and Asia in the period 1450–1750 requires revision. The most prominent member of this school is Kenneth Pomeranz, who argues that England (the most developed part of Europe) remained comparable to the Yangtze Delta (the most developed part of China) in terms of major economic indicators until the 18th century. However, this argument has been the subject of substantial criticism. In our view, the broader claim that the Asian empires were comparable to Europe in the period 1450–1750 is correct, but the narrower claim that the Yangtze Delta was comparable to England in this period is not correct. For an exploration of the arguments of the California School, see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000); Goldstone, *Why Europe?*; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*. For criticisms of Pomeranz's thesis from different perspectives, see Robert Brenner and Christopher Isett, "England's Divergence from China's Yangzi Delta: Property Relations, Microeconomics, and Patterns of Development," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 2 (2002): 609–662; Peer Vries, *State, Economy and the Great Divergence: Great Britain and China, 1680s–1850s* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

169 Goldstone, *Why Europe?*, 52–70; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, 43–101.

the rise of absolutist states. However, most traditional accounts greatly overestimate the importance of these changes.[170] The main point to emphasize is once again that the geopolitical pressure exerted by both capitalist England and the continental absolutist states remained relatively limited. Although there was a discernible tendency toward the centralization and generalization of political and military power in the period 1450–1750, the effect of military conflict was not significant enough to fundamentally transform the political geography of Europe. This period was consequently characterized by the long-term coexistence of different societal and political formations:

> *During the seventeenth-century crisis, regionally uneven solutions to domestic class conflicts and geopolitical struggles over the politically constituted powers of extraction spawned important regime variations among European polities. The result was a heterogeneous geopolitical system. France, Austria, Spain, Sweden, Russia, Denmark-Norway, Brandenburg-Prussia, and the Papal States were absolutist. The Holy Roman Empire remained a confederal elective monarchy until 1806. The Dutch General Estates established an independent oligarchic merchant republic. Poland was a "crowned aristocratic republic" and Switzerland a free confederation of cantons. Whereas Italian merchant-republics struggled against being transformed into monarchies, England became a parliamentary constitutional monarchy presiding over the world's first capitalist economy. Yet, despite this diversity, the early modern international system was dominated by the numerically and power-politically preponderant dynastic states.*[171]

Particularly noteworthy is the coexistence of capitalism and the absolutist states, on the one hand, and the Holy Roman Empire, the Italian city-states, and the Dutch merchant republic, on the other. To put it

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170 Hannes Lacher, *Beyond Globalization: Capitalism, Territoriality and the International Relations of Modernity* (Routledge, 2006), 79–98; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 197–248.

171 Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 218. For examples of other authors highlighting this heterogeneity, see Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 32; Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 188.

differently, relatively decentralized political formations continued to endure at the very heart of Europe throughout the period 1450–1750. While it is true that dynastic states played the leading role in the international system, neither the transition to capitalism in England nor the rise of absolutist states on the continent resulted in a homogeneous Europe.

We have identified the different types of societies that existed in the historical period we are discussing and examined the character of the relations between them. What do these considerations tell us about the place of the period 1450–1750 in human history? The specificity of this period should be sought in the fact that it was the period in which capitalism already existed, but it was not yet sufficiently developed to exert significant geopolitical pressure on other societies. The modern type of society was already in existence, as the English transition to capitalism had already occurred, but the relations between societies remained premodern, as the economic productivity of capitalism did not yet translate into a significant military advantage. The persistence of relatively weak geopolitical pressure meant that the changes that happened due to the emergence of capitalism largely remained limited to England and did not have a very significant effect on either the great Asian empires or continental Europe. The period 1450–1750 was consequently characterized by the premodern heterogeneity of societal and political formations.

We also attempted to describe societies and historical periods in temporal terms. To recapitulate, the temporalities that existed in Premodernity were characterized by adaptive stabilization (and the corresponding temporal characteristics), which resulted in a slow pace of change and the long-term coexistence of different temporalities. The temporalities that exist in Modernity, on the other hand, are characterized by both adaptive and dynamic stabilization (and the corresponding

temporal characteristics), which results in a faster pace of change and the domination of the newer temporalities over the older ones.[172] The specificity of the period 1450–1750 should be sought in the fact that it was marked by the coexistence of temporalities characterized by both adaptive and dynamic stabilization, but the resulting difference in dynamism was not yet significant enough to have an important effect on the relations between temporalities. The mix of temporalities changed, but the relations between them stayed the same. A result of the premodern character of these relations was that the dynamism of newer temporalities remained limited and did not translate into the dynamism of the historical period as a whole. The period 1450–1750 was consequently marked by a relatively slow pace of change and the long-term coexistence of different temporalities, which is to say that it was marked by premodern temporal characteristics.

We can conclude that the character of the relations between societies determined both the pace of change and the limitation of certain new characteristics in the period 1450–1750.

The Relations Within Societies in the Period 1450–1750

While some of the new characteristics of the period 1450–1750 were limited to England, most of them were not. In addition to the relations between societies, we have to consider the relations within societies, particularly within the societal type that was the most prominent in the period that is the subject of our analysis. To recapitulate, pre-capitalist societies are, at the most basic level, divided into the lower sphere, which is composed of social actors engaged in subsistence production, and the upper sphere, which is composed of social actors dependent on

172 See above, the subsections "The Temporality of Societies" and "The Three Eras of Human History."

surplus. To put it in simple terms, the lower sphere consists of subsistence peasants, while the upper sphere encompasses the political, military, ideological, manufacturing, and trade spheres.[173]

How is the distinction between the lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies relevant to our discussion? The simple point to make is that most of the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750 were limited to the upper sphere, while the older characteristics remained predominant in the lower sphere of societies in continental Europe. In order to substantiate this point, we have to examine the individual characteristics of this period separately.[174]

The limitation of economic developments in the period 1450–1750 was primarily a result of the pre-capitalist composition of economies in continental Europe. The quantitative expansion of manufacturing and trade and the accompanying qualitative transformations that occurred in this period were structurally limited because the agricultural sector still dominated the economy. Manufacturers and merchants were the exception, not the rule. Objects of material life that were specific to this period from a European perspective, such as coffee and Rococo furniture, were mostly limited to the upper class, while the material life of the lower class changed much more slowly. Luxury objects were generally bought by the lords and the wealthier bourgeoisie, not by the peasants. The partial exceptions to this dynamic were the New World crops that began to be used in the sphere of production and therefore influenced the lower class. However, the broader impact of American crops on the European economy did not materialize until the middle of the 18th century, while their importance in the preceding centuries remained

173 See above, the subsection "A Closer Look at Pre-Capitalist and Capitalist Societies."

174 We discussed these characteristics in the subsection "A Mixture of Premodern and Modern Characteristics."

limited.[175] That is to say, the material life of peasants did not change very significantly in the historical period that is under discussion.

The limitation of political and military developments in the period 1450–1750 was primarily a result of the pre-capitalist class structure of societies in continental Europe. The centralization and generalization of political power and the accompanying transformations of the military that occurred in this period represented changes in the relations within the upper class, but not in the relations between the lower and the upper class. The developments that resulted from the rise of absolutist states consequently had a limited effect on most of the population: the fact that peasants had to pay taxes to the centralized state in addition to the dues that they owed to the local lords did not represent a major change in their societal position or daily life. Despite this basic limitation, there was a more general intensification of social discipline in this period, which was closely connected to the process of confessionalization. However, the significance of this intensification was once again limited because the organizational and technological capacities of pre-capitalist power were not sufficiently developed to allow for intensive control over the general population.[176] In other words, villages continued to be the political bodies that governed the most important aspects of peasants' lives in the period we are discussing.

The limitation of social developments in the period 1450–1750 was primarily a result of the local embeddedness of social actors in continental Europe. The transformation of family structures and gender roles that occurred in this era arguably represent the most important exception to our argument, since they happened within all segments of society. However, the significance of these changes should not be overstated.

175 Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 1, 163–172.

176 Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique*, vol. 1, 164–176.

The transition to individual households, which was only partial and occurred unevenly across Europe, did not change the importance of localized community structures based on subsistence agriculture and communal networks. The more fundamental transformation of social life came with the spread of modern institutions such as schools and factories, which restructured the spatial and temporal coordinates of everyday life. While the rise of the nuclear family brought both opportunities and constraints for women, the overall impact of these changes was to reshape rather than dismantle patriarchal structures. Meaningful progress in women's social and political standing did not emerge until the feminist movements of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Simply put, peasants' lives were still predominantly shaped by local patriarchal communities in the period that is under discussion.

Finally, the limitation of ideological developments in the period 1450–1750 was primarily a result of the fact that the production of knowledge remained a monopoly held by the upper class of societies in continental Europe. Access to the technologies of the printing press and the mechanical clock was largely limited to social actors living in cities. The institutions related to the ideological sphere that emerged in this period, such as academies, scientific societies, and Masonic lodges, consisted of an even smaller number of individuals who represented the "intellectuals" of Europe at that time. While the ideological currents of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment may have significantly changed the worldview of certain parts of the upper class, their broader societal impact likewise remained limited. The most important exception to these limitations was the more general growth of the literacy rate that occurred in this period, especially in some countries of north-western Europe. However, the fundamental transformation of the educational structure of the European population happened with the spread of compulsory education in the 18th

and 19th centuries, not with changes related to the Reformation. To put it differently, peasants generally did not read printed books, listen to lectures at the Royal Society, or think about the character of social progress in the period we are discussing.

We can conclude that the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750 were mostly limited to the upper sphere, while the older characteristics remained predominant in the lower sphere of societies in continental Europe. While this dichotomy has important exceptions, the overall pattern is quite clear. How can we account for such a distribution of the old and the new? In answering this question, we have to return to the second part of the book, in which we argued that the relation between these two spheres should be interpreted in temporal terms: the lower sphere and the upper sphere of pre-capitalist societies represent two distinct but interdependent temporalities that are connected by the extraction of surplus. We did not simply make this observation but also provided an explanation for it, which we can now apply to the period that is the subject of our analysis.

To recapitulate, subsistence production is inherently related to stasis because the amount of time spent on satisfying basic human needs constrains the possibility of substantially transforming the environment, and access to surplus is inherently related to dynamism because it provides the resources that greatly expand the possibility of transformation.[177] In pre-capitalist societies, surplus is mostly limited to the upper sphere. As pre-capitalist societies were the most prominent societal type in continental Europe during the period 1450–1750, then, most of the newer characteristics of this period were limited to the upper sphere, while the older ones remained predominant in the lower sphere. If pre-capitalist societies are understood with the spatial

177 See above, the subsection "The Inherent Temporality of Subsistence and Surplus."

analogy of a desert representing areas of subsistence production and an interconnected network of oases representing areas of surplus, then it can be said that most of the newer characteristics of this period were limited to the interconnected oases, while the older ones remained predominant in the desert.

It is important to emphasize that this kind of temporal distribution was characteristic of all historical periods in which pre-capitalist societies were the most prominent societal type. Just as most of the newer characteristics of Antiquity and the Middle Ages were limited to the upper sphere of societies, so too were most of the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750. How is the period 1450–1750 different? The specificity of this historical period should be sought in the fact that it was the period in which certain modern characteristics first emerged, but they emerged within the premodern type of society. The mix of characteristics that existed in this period changed, as certain modern characteristics emerged, but the relations between them did not change, as the premodern type of societal structure remained intact. A result of the endurance of pre-capitalist social relations was that the modern characteristics of this era remained limited in the same way that newer characteristics had been limited in all premodern eras of history.

The same point can be made from a different perspective: social actors engaged in subsistence production mostly operate on the land they own and cultivate, which can be understood as a kind of "protection" against changes that occur outside of that environment.[178] As the majority of social actors in continental Europe during the period 1450–1750 had access to the means of subsistence, then, the modern characteristics that first emerged in this period only had a limited impact on them, which is why this sphere was dominated by premodern characteristics.

178 See above, the subsection "The Relation Between the Lower Sphere and the Upper Sphere."

Finally, the temporal relation between the lower sphere and the upper sphere can be explained by the connection between time and power in pre-capitalist societies: access to surplus is the primary source of the relative dynamism and the high level of time-space distanciation of the upper sphere, which enables the exercise of power, which enables extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic. The primary source of the following innovations is access to surplus.[179]

The centralization and generalization of political power and the accompanying transformations of the army (innovations in the politico-military sphere) enabled more efficient coordination across territories (time-space distanciation), which enabled, for example, the centralized collection of taxes and the suppression of peasant revolts by absolutist states (the exercise of power). The printing press and related improvements (innovations in the ideological sphere) enabled more efficient recording and storage of information (time-space distanciation), which enabled more efficient surveillance of the population by absolutist states (the exercise of power). Double-entry bookkeeping and other financial instruments (innovations in the market sphere) enabled more efficient deferral of time via debt and credit (time-space distanciation), which represented an important source of financing for the absolutist states (enabling the exercise of power).

The innovations of the period 1450–1750 were largely used in the service of absolutist states, which enabled extra-economic surplus extraction and therefore the reproduction of the entire dynamic. It is not only that the modern characteristics of this period were mostly limited to the upper sphere, but also that they had the social role of reproducing premodern social structures.

179 We are emphasizing only some of the main connections between time and power. We discussed our interpretation of this relation in the subsection "The Reproduction of the Upper Sphere."

We can conclude that the relation between the sphere of subsistence and the sphere of surplus explains the distribution of premodern and modern characteristics among social actors in continental Europe during the period 1450–1750.

The Period 1450–1750 Against Modernity

Everything that has been discussed thus far has to be understood in comparison with Modernity. This comparison once again involves examining the relations between and within societies.

While the relations between societies in the period 1450–1750 were characterized by relatively weak geopolitical pressure, resulting in the long-term coexistence of different societal types, the relations between societies in Modernity are characterized by strong geopolitical pressure, resulting in the domination of one type of society. The emergence of capitalism in England played a central role in Europe's ascendancy as the leading world power, a shift that had devastating consequences for the great Asian empires and for non-Western regions more broadly.[180] Relations within Europe were also largely dictated by the effect that capitalist Britain had on the pre-capitalist societies on the continent (as discussed below). In other words, the limitations of modern characteristics that were discussed in the context of the relations between societies in the period 1450–1750 do not apply to Modernity.

While the relations within the most prominent type of society in the period 1450–1750, which is to say within pre-capitalist societies, were primarily characterized by the division between the lower sphere and the upper sphere, the relations within the dominant type of society in Modernity, which is to say within capitalist societies, are characterized by a fundamentally different internal structure. As we have

180 Allen, *Global Economic History*; Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World*, 103–173.

already explained, there are two main reasons for this difference: first, the systematic investment of surplus in the sphere of production represents a radical dynamization of the lower class of capitalist societies when compared with pre-capitalist societies; and second, the capitalist state represents the formal universalization of many social spheres that are limited to a minority of social actors in pre-capitalist societies. As a result, innovations in the political, military, and ideological spheres, and those in the sphere of consumption, all become formally accessible to the entire population with the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies. New types of asymmetric relations emerge in capitalism, but they are structurally different from the asymmetric relations of pre-capitalist societies.[181] In other words, the limitations of modern characteristics that were discussed in the context of the most prominent type of society in the period 1450–1750 do not apply to the dominant type of society in Modernity.

We can conclude that the relations between and within societies are fundamentally different in the period 1450–1750 and in Modernity. Two additional points should be emphasized when comparing these historical periods. First, England was already undergoing the transition to capitalism in the period 1450–1750, which means that it was characterized by a different internal temporal distribution than societies in continental Europe. In that country, non-essential consumption was gradually becoming accessible to a larger portion of the population due to the growth of real wages; the intensification of social discipline had a bigger impact because a significant segment of the English lower class did not have access to the means of subsistence; and scientific advancements increasingly came to be used in the sphere of production, especially during the 18th century. Developments in the economic,

181 See above, the subsection "Comparison with Capitalism."

politico-military, and ideological spheres had a greater effect on the lower sphere of English society than the lower spheres of societies on the continent. However, these transformations largely remained limited to England.[182]

Second, the modern characteristics that first emerged within pre-capitalist societies in the period 1450–1750 continued to exist after those societies transitioned to capitalism, which means that these same characteristics became embedded in a different kind of social relations. For example, the technological innovation of the printing press was first used in the service of absolutist states and therefore of extra-economic surplus extraction, but it was later used in the service of capitalist states and therefore of economic surplus extraction. That is to say, modern characteristics exist in both the period 1450–1750 and Modernity, but the social role of these characteristics becomes fundamentally different as an increasing number of societies make the transition to capitalism. This conclusion should inform our understanding of the notion that is central to discussions about historical periodization. In considering the notion of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, the focus should be not only on the initial emergence of particular characteristics, but also on the type of social relations in which they are embedded. The issue is not just when certain characteristics arise, but also what social function they serve.

The Definition of Late Premodernity

We have discussed the relations between and within societies in the period 1450–1750 and compared this period with Modernity. This brings us, finally, to our definition of the notion of Late Premodernity. This definition has two dimensions.

182 See above, the subsection "The Relations Between Societies in the Period 1450–1750."

First, the period 1450–1750 should be understood as part of Premodernity because it was marked by premodern relations between and within societies. The continuity of these relations meant that the newer characteristics of this period were limited, while the older characteristics, which is to say the premodern characteristics, remained predominant. More specifically, most of the newer characteristics of this period were limited to one society and to one sphere of other societies, namely to England and the pre-capitalist upper sphere, while the premodern characteristics remained predominant in the lower sphere of societies in continental Europe.

To put it in temporal terms, the period 1450–1750 should be understood as part of Premodernity because it was marked by premodern relations between temporalities. The continuity of these relations meant that both the pace of change and the distribution of older and newer characteristics in this period were comparable to the entire premodern era of history.

Second, the period 1450–1750 should be understood as a late historical period because it was marked by the limited emergence of modern characteristics. If we understand historical periods as temporally heterogeneous entities, then we can say that the limited appearance of characteristics of the succeeding period represents an internal part of late periods. In other words, the limited emergence of modern characteristics is an argument in favor of the lateness of this era.[183]

The period 1450–1750 was therefore marked by the predominance of the characteristics of the preceding period, which is to say of Premodernity, and the limited emergence of the characteristics of the succeeding period, which is to say of Modernity. The specific mixture of the predominance of premodern characteristics and the simultaneous

183 See above, the subsection "Early, Middle, and Late Periods."

limited emergence of modern ones is the reason why this period should be understood as Late Premodernity.

It is useful to compare our interpretation of the period 1450–1750 with the notions of Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages (the period of roughly 500–1750), Old Europe (the period of roughly 1000–1800), and the existing interpretation of Late Premodernity.[184]

The main issue with the prevailing interpretation of Early Modernity is that it places too much emphasis on the modern characteristics of the period 1450–1750. While the emergence of certain modern elements in this period is important, these elements remained structurally limited. The basic definition of the period 1450–1750 should consequently be centered on the predominance of premodern characteristics. The inflated importance of modern elements also results in a misleading division of human history, one which places too much emphasis on the end of the medieval era. The problem with this view is that the continuity between Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the period 1450–1750 is greater than the continuity between all these periods, on the one hand, and Modernity, on the other. The notion of Early Modernity therefore does not sufficiently account for the predominance of premodern characteristics in the period 1450–1750 and mischaracterizes the place of this period in human history.

The notions of the Long Middle Ages and Old Europe correctly maintain that the older characteristics remained predominant during the period 1450–1750. However, these notions nevertheless have at least two problems. First, they also underestimate the continuity of the periods 500–1750 and 1000–1800 with the entire premodern era, which results in a division of history that puts too much emphasis on the discontinuities of the end of Antiquity and the changes around

184 See above, the subsection "Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages, Old Europe, and Late Premodernity."

1000. While these two historical turning points are important, they are not comparable to the historical turning points that represent the beginning of Premodernity and the beginning of Modernity (as discussed below). Second, these two notions fail to adequately address the emergence of modern characteristics in the period 1450–1750. The definition of this period should be able to encompass the significance of the modern elements, but it should stress that these elements remained limited. The notions of the Long Middle Ages and Old Europe therefore do not sufficiently account for both the continuity of the older characteristics of the period 1450–1750 with the premodern era of history and the continuity of the newer characteristics of this period with the modern era of history.

The notion of Late Premodernity, on the other hand, correctly recognizes the continuity of the older characteristics of the period 1450–1750 with the entire premodern period. The problem with Nissen's interpretation of this notion is that he primarily focuses on China, France, and the Habsburg Empire, and only on the economic, political, and military developments within those societies. This limited scope of analysis means that his characterization of Late Premodernity is inherently not conducive to a holistic view of the developments of this historical era. We would argue that it is because of these limitations that, just like the notions of the Long Middle Ages and Old Europe, Nissen's understanding of Late Premodernity does not sufficiently account for the significance of the modern characteristics that emerged in this period. To put it differently: although the premodern dynamics of continuity and change remained the most prominent developmental patterns during the period 1450–1750, this period was also the first period in history that was marked by the limited emergence of modern developmental patterns, which should represent an important part of its definition.

An additional problem with all these interpretations is that they are, at least in their basic framing, homogeneous notions of periodization. The homogenizing perspective is the reason why these notions tend to minimize the coexistence of different temporalities rather than conceptualize historical periods as inherently temporally heterogeneous. It should not be surprising, then, that the most prominent approaches to the period 1450–1750 emphasize either the older or the newer characteristics of this period, but not both.

The interpretation of Early Modernity that focuses on the coexistence of the premodern and modern characteristics in the period 1450–1750, on the other hand, correctly emphasizes the significance of this mixture.[185] The main problem with this interpretation is that it does not additionally specify the character of the relations between the older and newer elements, which means that it is unclear whether the premodern or modern characteristics are more important to understanding the period 1450–1750. The place of this period in human history consequently remains ambiguous. The analysis we provided makes it clear that it is not simply the coexistence of premodern and modern characteristics, but rather the predominance of premodern characteristics and the simultaneous limited emergence of modern ones, that gives the period 1450–1750 its specificity. The emphasis on the greater significance of premodern characteristics means that this period is unambiguously part of the premodern era of history, even if it represents the late stage of that era.

Our interpretation of the notion of Late Premodernity can be understood as a synthesis of the notions of Early Modernity, the Long Middle Ages, and Old Europe, since it combines aspects of all of these approaches to the period 1450–1750. This interpretation also highlights

185 See above, the subsection "A Mixture of Premodern and Modern Characteristics."

the fact that the differences between Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the period 1450–1750 should all be understood as subdivisions of Premodernity, a period which should, at the most basic level, be differentiated only from Prehistory, on the one hand, and from Modernity, on the other.

The End of Premodernity

The Persistence of the Old Regime?

The argumentation thus far needs to be extended to the question of when Premodernity ended. If this period is defined by the long-term coexistence of different societal types, then it ended when one type of society started to dominate all others. But when did this happen, historically?

To put the question differently: Why should we not view the long 19th century (the period that spans from the Dual Revolution to the First World War) as a continuation of Premodernity, as Arno Mayer famously argues?[186] Some countries may have started modernizing during that time, but the majority did not. While we can emphasize the fact that Britain was largely modernized, we can similarly underscore the fact that Russia remained largely premodern. Which characteristics should we focus on when defining this period, the premodern or the modern ones?

In what follows, we will argue that the long 19th century represents the beginning of Modernity because it was the period in which the relation between premodern and modern characteristics fundamentally changed in favor of the latter. The historical turning point between

186 Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime*.

Premodernity and Modernity is best captured by the notion of the Dual Revolution, even if this notion needs to be interpreted in a somewhat different way than Eric Hobsbawm suggests.[187]

The Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution

In order to argue for a specific interpretation of the Dual Revolution, we first have to discuss the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution separately. As we have already explained, England managed to overcome Malthusian constraints during the 17th century, which happened because of its transition to capitalist social property relations centuries earlier. The Industrial Revolution should be understood as a continuation of this trajectory: the constant drive toward technological improvement that is at the heart of capitalism represented the central background of both the invention and the application of industrial technologies. Simply put, capitalism should be understood as the main cause of the Industrial Revolution.[188]

Following the general thread of our argumentation, it should be clear that the significance of the Industrial Revolution cannot be understood solely by focusing on the internal dynamics of Britain, as it also has to be understood in the context of how it changed the relations between societies. The second half of the 18th century marked a fundamental shift in this respect. As Benno Teschke notes, England (later

187 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789–1848* (Vintage Books, 1996), 1–4.

188 The causes of the Industrial Revolution are highly contested. In parallel with the debate about sustained economic growth, we assign the primary explanatory role to capitalist social property relations, but acknowledge that a full explanation requires considering other factors. For the most comprehensive Political Marxist account of England's Industrial Revolution, see Michael Andrew Žmolek, *Rethinking the Industrial Revolution: Five Centuries of Transition from Agrarian to Industrial Capitalism in England* (Brill, 2013). For an alternative institutionalist account of the Industrial Revolution, see Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 96–123. For criticisms of other paradigms, see Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*, 45–69; Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 34–232; Rutar, *Capitalism for Realists*, 23–33; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 116–150.

Great Britain) had played the geopolitical role of active balancing in relation to the continent ever since the Glorious Revolution. However, this role gradually transformed into something different:

> *This technique was initially a defensive mechanism, designed to safeguard domestic arrangements. But by the late eighteenth century, British balancing no longer served the exclusive function of security and order, but had the side-effect of forcing continental states to respond to and finally adjust to the superior socio-political British model, especially under the impact of the Industrial Revolution. In this process, active balancing became the major conduit for distributing pressure on continental states that had, in the long run, a transformative effect on politico-economic organization in "backward" state/society complexes*.[189]

Britain's economic superiority began to have significant geopolitical consequences during the Seven Years' War, which plunged France into a long-term financial crisis. The timing of this war shows that Britain's break from Malthusian constraints started to have an important impact on other societies *before* the Industrial Revolution, which is another indication that Britain's economic ascent predated industrialization. The French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, during which Britain was already in the first phase of the Industrial Revolution, represented events in which the geopolitical advantages of sustained economic growth started to become particularly apparent. In these wars, Britain played a crucial role as a financier of the anti-French coalition, which was an important factor contributing to France's eventual defeat. The superiority of the British economy continued to play a central role in the wars to follow. The Industrial Revolution therefore widened and solidified the already existing gap

189 Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 263. For a range of Political Marxist discussions about the effects of British pressure, see *ibid.*, 262–268; Lacher, *Beyond Globalization*, 93–98; Xavier Lafrance and Charles Post, eds., *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); Rutar, *Od klasične sociologije*, 101–131.

between Britain and the rest of Europe, the consequences of which unfolded during the entire 19th century.[190]

Despite its significance, European dynamics in the late 18th century cannot be reduced to the Industrial Revolution, since there was another central development. France had been in a constant financial crisis ever since the Seven Years' War, which it tried to resolve with a series of unsuccessful reforms. The crisis ultimately culminated in the French Revolution and the subsequent French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Several aspects of these events need to be highlighted in the context of the present discussion.

Most importantly, the French Revolution was not capitalist in character and was related to capitalism only in the sense that Britain's geopolitical pressure represented one of its immediate causes. The assumption that the French Revolution and capitalism are fundamentally separate phenomena goes against the classical notion of the Bourgeois Revolution, which frames the rise of capitalism in terms of a struggle between a regressive aristocracy and a progressive bourgeoisie. According to this view, the French Revolution marked one of the events in which the bourgeoisie won and initiated the transition to capitalism. The bourgeoisie is therefore understood as a social class that sought to overthrow the old system and establish a new one.[191]

While it used to be widely accepted, the classical notion of the Bourgeois Revolution has been thoroughly criticized by contemporary scholarship.[192] Among its many problems is the fact that the French

190 Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*; Lynn Hunt and Jack R. Censer, *The French Revolution and Napoleon: Crucible of the Modern World*, 2nd ed. (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022); Mike Rapport, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

191 For the classic formulation of this interpretation, see Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, trans. R. R. Palmer (Princeton University Press, 1970).

192 For an overview of the main developments in the historiography of the French Revolution, see George C. Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (Verso, 1987), 5–52.

bourgeoisie was not capitalist and did not seek to make the transition to capitalism, which did not happen with the French Revolution itself. On the contrary, the French bourgeoisie was looking to improve its position *within* the existing system by limiting the grip that the aristocracy had on the absolutist state. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in the French Revolution should therefore be understood as a civil war between different parts of the upper class, the purpose of which was not to overthrow the pre-capitalist structure of society as such. The genuinely progressive elements of the French Revolution were not initiated by the bourgeoisie but were a result of pressures from the lower class.[193]

However, the non-capitalist character of the French Revolution does not necessarily diminish its significance. Many of the developments that occurred during the Revolution did represent a radical break with the past, which legitimizes the association of this event with Modernity. Important innovations included the intensification of Enlightenment egalitarianism, high levels of mass involvement in political upheavals, the rise of nationalism as a central organizing principle, and the introduction of numerous institutional reforms, such as liberal constitutions, national education systems, and mass conscription. In other words, even though the French Revolution was not capitalist, it did lead to unprecedented changes.[194]

Finally, the significance of the French Revolution also cannot be understood solely by focusing on the internal dynamics of France, as it has to be understood in the context of how it changed the relations

193 Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory*, 66–76; Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*, 179–207; Xavier Lafrance, *The Making of Capitalism in France: Class Structures, Economic Development, the State and the Formation of the French Working Class, 1750–1914* (Brill, 2019), 92–139.

194 For general overviews of the French Revolution, see William Doyle, *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2019); Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 53–76; Michel Vovelle, *La Révolution française: 1789–1799* (Armand Colin, 1992).

between societies as well. The short-term consequences of the Revolution were connected to the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which spanned the entire European continent and resulted in the spread of many of the innovations of the Revolution beyond the borders of France. These wars therefore changed the meaning of the event itself.[195] The long-term consequences are arguably even more important, since the Revolution not only represented the model for future progressive movements across the world, but also strongly influenced the behavior of reactionary forces, which had to justify their legitimacy in a fundamentally new way. The *ancien régime* may have formally survived the Revolution, but it lost its status as the presumed social order. The significance of this transformation is captured succinctly by Joseph de Maistre: "*Formerly royalism was an instinct, now it is a science*."[196]

The Dual Revolution

The notion of the Dual Revolution, of course, combines the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Hobsbawm defines this notion in connection with his interpretation of the long 19th century:

> *Essentially the central axis round which I have tried to organize the history of the century is the triumph and transformation of capitalism in the historically specific forms of bourgeois society in its liberal version. The history begins with the decisive double breakthrough of the first industrial revolution in Britain, which established the limitless capacity of the productive system pioneered by capitalism for economic growth and global penetration, and the Franco-American political revolution, which established the leading models for the public institutions of bourgeois society* […] *The first volume of this history,* The Age of Revolution 1789–1848*, is structured round this concept of a "Dual Revolution."*[197]

195 Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 77–98.

196 Quoted in Doyle, *The French Revolution*, 89.

197 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (Vintage Books, 1989), 8–9.

It should be clear that the classical notion of the Bourgeois Revolution forms the conceptual background for Hobsbawm's interpretation of the Dual Revolution.[198] According to this view, the two revolutions are understood as distinct phenomena, but they are nevertheless connected by the fact that the bourgeoisie of both countries had the role of a progressive social class that fought for a new social order. The progressive character of the British and French bourgeoisie represents a link between the two revolutions.

However, just as the classical notion of the Bourgeois Revolution is problematic, so too is its application to the notion of the Dual Revolution. The main problem with Hobsbawm's interpretation is that it does not sufficiently account for the radical differences between the socio-economic conditions of Britain and France during the second half of the 18th century. To explicate this point once again: Britain was characterized by capitalist social property relations, which means that the British upper class followed the capitalist rules for reproduction (they pursued the strategies of specialization, profit maximization, and the continual introduction of new technologies), while France was characterized by pre-capitalist social property relations, which means that the French upper class followed the pre-capitalist rules for reproduction (they primarily pursued the strategy of the consolidation of political and military power). This point is best exemplified by the fact that the French bourgeoisie pursued the strategy of advancement within the absolutist state, not the strategy of introducing new technologies to enhance economic productivity.[199] The notion of the Dual Revolution should therefore be interpreted in a way that recognizes the fundamental differences between British and French societies during that time.

198 Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*, 31.

199 *Ibid.*, 179–207.

The "duality" of the Dual Revolution should be understood in a more radical sense, as it were.

One question naturally arises following this line of argument: If the two revolutions were so fundamentally different, why should we talk about the Dual Revolution at all? Why not simply focus on Britain's economic and geopolitical superiority? The answer is that it was the interaction between the two revolutions, not solely the progressiveness of Britain, which shaped European geopolitics in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As we have already explained, the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars represented two of the main events through which the pressure of modernization was initially established. In the immediate sense, it was the actions of France, not Britain, that forced other countries to make significant changes in their social structures during that time. This dynamic was most apparent in the case of Prussia, which began its transition to capitalist social property relations shortly after its defeat to Napoleon. Prussia started to imitate the socioeconomic system of Britain, but it did so because of the war it fought against France.[200] This historical example complicates the argument that it is the productiveness of existing capitalist societies that forces other types of societies to make the transition to capitalism.

In order to address this problem, we have to reconsider the geopolitical significance of the French Revolution. The main point to emphasize is that the innovations that happened during the Revolution, particularly the establishment of nationalism as the central organizing principle and the corresponding institutional changes, allowed France to be competitive in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. France's ability to compete with Britain was not sustainable in the long

200 Terence J. Byres, *Capitalism from Above and Capitalism from Below: An Essay in Comparative Political Economy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 104–158; Rutar, *Od klasične sociologije*, 109–110.

term because the differences between the economic capabilities of the two countries were simply too significant. But in the short term, the developments of its political revolution enabled France to wreak havoc on the European continent despite its relative backwardness. The temporary intervention of France therefore represents an important part of understanding how the pressure of modernization was initially established, which is one of the reasons why the radical character of the French Revolution has an important explanatory role. To put it differently: the theory that capitalism primarily spreads because its productiveness puts geopolitical pressure on other societies should make use of the notion of the Dual Revolution, since this notion helps explain the historical role of non-capitalist France in the initial establishment of that pressure. While the Industrial Revolution was of crucial importance in the long term, the French Revolution was equally significant in the short term.

We can conclude that the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution represent two fundamentally different phenomena, but that their interaction in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars is central to understanding how the pressure of modernization was initially established. The pressure of English modernization primarily demanded economic reforms, such as the transition to capitalist social property relations, industrialization, and market liberalization, while the pressure of French modernization primarily demanded reforms to the political and military organizations, such as the introduction of national constitutions, national education systems, and universal conscription.[201]

201 It is important to emphasize that pre-capitalist social property relations represent a structural limitation on any efforts toward modernization. The transition to capitalism is therefore of central importance in explaining how societies modernize. For Political Marxist analyses of how that transition occurred in different countries, see Lafrance and Post, *Case Studies in the Origins of Capitalism*.

The effects of the Dual Revolution resulted in the strong tendency toward the homogenization of societal and political formations characteristic of the modern era of history. While this tendency has been unfolding ever since, the particular significance of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars is that the pressure of modernization expressed itself in those wars in a sense in which it previously had not. The fall of the Holy Roman Empire, which had played a central role in European history for centuries, is especially important.[202]

European societies responded to the new situation in different ways. In some cases, political leaders began introducing the reforms that represented the start of modernization. This reaction happened in Prussia, which underwent a series of political and economic transformations soon after its defeat to Napoleon. In other cases, the upper class responded by attempting to maintain the *status quo* by any means possible. The conservative reaction was epitomized by the Congress of Vienna. The common thread across all cases, however, is that social actors had to respond to the pressure of modernization in one way or another because they were forced to do so.

The Long 19th Century as the Beginning of Modernity

We have discussed the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and their interaction in the Dual Revolution. What do these considerations tell us about the place of the long 19th century in human

202 It is worth noting that the Ottoman Empire, the Americas, India, and Australia were all implicated in the geopolitical developments of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The parts of the world that were not directly affected include China and Japan, which only came under significant geopolitical pressure toward the middle of the 19th century, and Africa, which only began to "be scrambled for" toward the end of the 19th century. These exceptions notwithstanding, the Age of Revolution can be understood as a global phenomenon. For a brief overview of these developments, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton University Press, 2014), 59–63.

history? Mayer is correct in the sense that premodern characteristics remained widespread during that century. The point, however, is not to make a list of older and newer characteristics, but to examine the relations between them.

The modern character of these relations is the main reason why the long 19th century should be understood as the beginning of Modernity. The period 1450–1750 and the long 19th century were both marked by the coexistence of premodern and modern characteristics, but the *relations between* these characteristics fundamentally changed: while modern characteristics remained limited to certain societies and certain social actors in the period 1450–1750, they started to influence all societies and all social actors in the long 19th century. Social dynamics in the long 19th century were dictated by the pressure of modernization in a sense that had not been the case in the period 1450–1750.

The endurance of numerous premodern characteristics throughout the long 19th century is not of central importance. There is always continuity between successive historical periods. The main point to emphasize is that the premodern elements of society were forced to respond to the modern elements, which marks the central difference from previous historical eras. To look at it from another perspective: the various conservative reactions to the pressure of modernization should be understood as an internal part of Modernity.

This central shift is best captured by the notion of the Dual Revolution: before these two phenomena, social structures had largely been maintained based on inertia, but after them they were under constant pressure to change. The Dual Revolution should therefore be understood as the historical turning point between Premodernity and Modernity because it represents the short period of time during which the relation between premodern and modern characteristics fundamentally

changed. If we simplify and associate Premodernity with the relative stasis of pre-capitalist societies and Modernity with the relative dynamism of capitalism, we can say that the Dual Revolution represents the moment in which the relation between relative stasis and relative dynamism fundamentally changed in favor of the latter. According to our interpretation, then, this change in the relation between stasis and dynamism represents the most significant change in human history.[203]

Reprise

Every historical period can be interpreted in different ways. In this part of the book, we have argued that the period 1450–1750 should be understood as the late premodern period. The argumentation in favor of the notion of Late Premodernity can be summarized as follows.

The starting point of our analysis is that the period 1450–1750 was marked by the coexistence of premodern and modern characteristics in a sense in which older historical periods were not. There are three observations about this mixture that are important to our approach.

First, the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750 were relatively limited. To give a few examples: the overcoming of Malthusian constraints was mostly limited to England, the use of the mechanical clock was mostly limited to cities, and the consumption of new luxury products was mostly limited to the lords and the bourgeoisie. Such limitations did not hold only for certain types of new characteristics, but for new characteristics in general.

Second, the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750 were limited in specific ways. Some of the most significant transformations in social relations were limited to one society, England (with the partial

203 See above, the subsection "The Three Eras of Human History."

exception of the Netherlands). Others were limited to a minority of social actors within other societies, namely, to the social actors that were connected to surplus. In other words, the newer characteristics of this period were mostly limited to England and to the upper sphere of other societies, while the older characteristics remained predominant in the lower sphere of societies in continental Europe.

Finally, this type of limitation of newer characteristics was comparable to previous historical periods. Just as the newer characteristics in the ancient and medieval periods were mostly limited to the upper sphere, so too were the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750. The distribution of older and newer characteristics in the period 1450–1750 had a distinct pattern, and this pattern was an extension of the entire premodern era of history.

How can we account for the continual endurance of this pattern? The explanation can be gathered by understanding the connection between surplus and dynamism and consequently interpreting the relations between and within societies in temporal terms. The reason why most of the new characteristics were limited to the upper sphere of societies in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the period 1450–1750 is that the most prominent type of society in these periods was the pre-capitalist type, in which surplus is limited to the upper sphere. The mechanism that determines the division of time among social actors remained constant in all these periods. The specificity of the period 1450–1750 in this respect lies in the fact that it was the era in which certain modern characteristics emerged for the first time, but they emerged within the premodern type of society.

England represents a special case because it was already undergoing the transition to capitalism in the period 1450–1750, which resulted in it becoming more dynamic than societies in continental Europe. However, the gulf in the dynamism of societies did not yet have an

important effect on the relations between them. The specificity of the period 1450–1750 in this respect lies in the fact that the modern type of society already existed, but it did not yet have a significant impact on other societies. The dynamism of capitalism was consequently limited to one society and did not translate into the dynamism of the historical period as a whole.

These considerations result in two reasons why the period 1450–1750 should be understood as the late premodern period. First, it should be understood as part of Premodernity because it was marked by premodern relations between and within societies. The continuity of these relations meant that both the overall pace of change and the distribution of older and newer characteristics in this period were comparable to the entire premodern era of history. Second, it should be understood as a late historical period because it was marked by the limited emergence of certain modern characteristics. Following our interpretation, the limited emergence of the characteristics of the succeeding period represents an internal part of late periods. The specific mixture of the predominance of premodern characteristics and the limited emergence of modern ones is what defines the notion of Late Premodernity.

Finally, there is the question of when Premodernity ended, which is closely connected to the persistence of many premodern characteristics throughout the long 19th century. While this continuity is significant, the main point to emphasize is that the social dynamics in that century were dictated by the pressure of modernization in a sense that had not been the case in previous historical eras. The change in the relation between premodern and modern characteristics is best captured by the notion of the Dual Revolution, which should consequently be understood as the historical turning point between Premodernity and Modernity.

CONCLUSION

History Through the Lens of Periodization

Periodization is often understood as an arbitrary thought experiment of no particular significance. The division of history into periods is reduced to a matter of perspective: if one emphasizes the newer characteristics of the period 1450–1750, this historical period can be defined as modern, but if one emphasizes the older characteristics, it can be defined as premodern. Discussions about dividing history typically consist of nothing more than a list of different alternatives. In this book, we have (implicitly) argued that such an oversimplified understanding of periodization results from the underdevelopment of this field of historiography.

The first part of the book provided the basis for a theory of periodization by discussing the notions that are needed for a systematic approach to dividing history. The second part argued for a framework of periodization that centers on the relations between and within societies, which were interpreted in temporal terms. The third part applied the conclusions of the first two parts to an analysis of the period 1450–1750.

The foregoing discussion was therefore not a simple matter of emphasizing certain characteristics over others. Our argumentation was based on significantly more elaborate considerations, without which we would not be able to characterize the period 1450–1750 as Late Premodernity. Namely: only once we understand that the basic subject matter of discussions about periodization are the relations between

temporalities; only once we interpret late periods as inherently containing limited characteristics of succeeding periods; only once we understand that societies determine the most important aspects of the temporality of human action; only once we additionally interpret societies as ways of dividing time among social actors; only once we focus on the relations between different societies when defining historical periods; and only once we apply all of these considerations to an analysis of the period 1450–1750 can we understand that this period represents an extension of the entire premodern era in a temporal sense.

Answering the question of how to characterize the period 1450–1750 therefore requires a reinterpretation of the relation between temporal and societal structures and an analysis of the way in which this relation itself changes over time. In other words, discussions about periodization represent a lens through which to view the most important changes in human history.

Povzetek

Periodizacija je vseprisoten del zgodovinopisja: način delitve zgodovine vpliva na načrtovanje zgodovinskih raziskav, na strukturo zgodovinskih oddelkov in v širšem smislu tudi na splošno razumevanje preteklosti. Ker o tej temi ni veliko poglobljenih raziskav, je namen knjige obravnavati periodizacijo kot neodvisno problematiko.

Natančneje se knjiga osredotoča na zgodovinsko obdobje, ki se običajno pojmuje kot zgodnji novi vek, torej obdobje približno med letoma 1450 in 1750. Ta časovni razpon je z vidika periodizacije posebej zanimiv, saj so v njem soobstajale značilnosti, ki jih povezujemo z različnimi vrstami družb. Značilnosti, ki jih navadno razumemo kot predmoderne, kot so samooskrbno kmetijstvo v ekonomski sferi, sistemi oblasti, ki temeljijo na utrjenih hierarhijah družbenih akterjev v politični sferi, in religija kot glavni način interpretacije sveta v ideološki sferi, so obstajale sočasno z značilnostmi, ki jih navadno razumemo kot moderne. Te vključujejo prvo fazo globalizacije, vzpon fiskalno-vojaških državnih tvorb, tehnološke inovacije, kot so smodnik, tisk, kompas in mehanska ura, ter nove miselne tokove renesanse, znanstvene revolucije in razsvetljenstva. Kako naj razmišljamo o sočasnem obstoju tako različnih elementov?

Tega vprašanja se lotevamo iz treh različnih perspektiv. V prvem delu knjige obravnavamo problematiko periodizacije na abstraktnem nivoju in poskušamo opredeliti pojme, ki so pomembni za delitev zgodovine na obdobja. Osrednji cilj tega dela je postaviti heterogenost časa v središče razmišljanja o periodizaciji, za kar je potrebna sprememba perspektive in premik od posameznih časovnosti k odnosom med časovnostmi. Iz tega izhodišča podamo svojo interpretacijo pojma zgodovinskega preloma, pojmov zgodnjih, visokih in poznih zgodovinskih obdobij in

predlagamo drugačno razumevanje časovne zavesti družbenih akterjev. Te nove definicije slonijo na pojmu sočasnosti neistočasnega.

Drugi del knjige predlaga okvir za delitev zgodovine, ki temelji na odnosih med različnimi vrstami družb in znotraj njih. V poddelu o odnosih med družbami začnemo s tipologijo družb, tj. z opredelitvijo predrazrednih, predkapitalističnih in kapitalističnih družb. V nadaljevanju argumentiramo, da so družbene formacije osrednjega pomena za periodizacijo zgodovine, saj določajo najpomembnejše časovne vidike delovanja družbenih akterjev. Toda definicije zgodovinskih obdobij ne smemo izpeljati iz same tipologije družb, saj različne vrste družb obstajajo hkrati. Periodizacija človeške zgodovine mora zaradi tega sloneti na analizi zgodovinskega razvoja odnosov med družbami. Na tej podlagi vpeljemo novo interpretacijo pojmov prazgodovine, predmodernosti in modernosti.

V nadaljevanju se osredotočamo na odnose znotraj družb. Pri tej obravnavi začnemo s kritiko pristopov, ki sicer izpostavljajo raznolikost časovnosti družbenih akterjev (npr. časovnosti kmetov, trgovcev in aristokratov), ampak te raznolikosti ne vključijo v širši okvir svoje analize. Slednje lahko dosežemo tako, da razumemo črpanje družbenega presežka kot osrednji mehanizem, ki tako deli kot povezuje časovnosti različnih delov družbe. Na tej podlagi nadaljujemo z opisom časovnosti predkapitalističnih družb, ki jih nato primerjamo z različnimi časovnostmi kapitalizma.

V tretjem delu knjige obravnavamo obdobje 1450–1750 kot problem periodizacije. Začnemo z opredelitvijo pojmov periodizacije, ki so pomembni za razumevanje tega časovnega razpona. To so pojmi modernosti, predmodernosti, zgodnjega novega veka, dolgega srednjega veka, stare Evrope in pozne predmodernosti. Nadaljujemo z natančnejšim opisom procesov, ki so se odvijali v tem zgodovinskem obdobju.

V nadaljevanju predstavimo svojo analizo obdobja 1450–1750. V njej pokažemo, da lahko na podlagi okvira za delitev zgodovine, ki smo ga razvili v drugem delu knjige, pojasnimo sámo porazdelitev predmodernih in modernih značilnosti med družbami in med družbenimi akterji v obdobju 1450–1750. Podrobnejša razčlenitev tega zgodovinskega obdobja torej sloni na širšem pristopu k delitvi preteklosti, ki upošteva metodološko izhodišče sočasnosti neistočasnega. Na tej podlagi vpeljemo svojo definicijo pojma pozne predmodernosti in razvijemo kritiko prevladujočih interpretacij.

V zadnjem delu knjige se osredotočimo na vprašanje dolgega 19. stoletja z vidika periodizacije. Začnemo z opisom angleške industrijske revolucije, francoske politične revolucije in pojma dvojne revolucije, ki ju povezuje. Četudi veliko predmodernih značilnosti še vedno obstaja v 19. stoletju, to stoletje zaznamuje pritisk modernizacije na način, kot to ni veljalo za starejša obdobja zgodovine. To ključno spremembo najbolje zajema pojem dvojne revolucije, ki ga posledično interpretiramo kot zgodovinski prelom med predmodernostjo in modernostjo.

Pojmovanje obdobja 1450–1750 kot pozno predmodernega obdobja predstavlja alternativo tripartitni delitvi evropske zgodovine na antiko, srednji vek in novi vek, ki še vedno ostaja najvplivnejši okvir za periodizacijo zgodovine. V širšem smislu je naš namen pokazati, da razprave, ki se osredotočajo na problem periodizacije, predstavljajo nov pogled na največje spremembe človeške zgodovine.

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