Global Performances of a Belated Concept: Revisiting Modernity Through Concept History [1]

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This article traces the trajectory of French, German, English, and Ottoman-Turkish fin de siècle concepts of *modernity* to contrast them with *modernity* as a category for analysis and periodisation that many contemporary historians and social scientists use to demarcate a point in time they identify as a caesura in history. In this most conventional usage, 'modernity' began when humankind embarked on a world-historical transition to a condition that has more or less persisted until the present day; *modernity* is used to designate a historical period *and* a condition with new and unprecedented attributes. [2]

Three aspects in particular have complicated using *modernity* as an analytical concept to theorise, discuss, or even select, the historical phenomena commonly understood as representing 'modernity.' Firstly, the indeterminateness of the *modernity* word itself, which, strictly semantically speaking, means nothing but 'nowness' or 'newness.' This vagueness is further exacerbated by the sheer plethora of often mutually exclusive qualities that scholars and intellectuals have identified as characteristic of this 'nowness.' [3] Secondly, *modernity* is a highly normative and politically charged concept. Because the claim to be part of this 'world-historical transition to a new stage of history' has been at the heart of most bids for intellectual, social, and political authority and national sovereignty and legitimacy across the globe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *modernity* is not just descriptive, it is highly prescriptive. Marking any specific phenomenon as part of 'modernity' always is an implicit political statement with repercussions for interpretations of the present. This may, of course, be applicable to most analytical concepts—none of which are, after all, inherently objective, universal, or metahistorical research tools but historically

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[1] More than the footnotes of this article may reveal, the ideas and arguments of this article have been shaped by years of discussion and constructive disagreement with Margrit Pernau. For comments and invaluable feedback on the manuscript, I am grateful to Paulina Dominik, Christin Sander, Alp Eren Topal, Luc Wodzicki, the participants of the 'South Asia and Beyond' colloquium headed by Margrit Pernau and Frederik Schröer at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, and, of course, to the anonymous reviewers at *Cromohs.* I also owe gratitude to Alex Holmes for her attentive copy-editing.

[2] For the sake of clarity, I will graphically keep the concept (*modernity*) and the historical phenomenon that this concept is supposed to describe ('modernity') apart in this paper.

[3] Conventional benchmarks for 'modernity' are, among others: nationalism, rationalisation, industrialisation, democratisation, globalisation, social alienation, ecological catastrophes, colonialism, secularisation, individualisation, mass society, scientificisation, urbanisation, capitalism, and technologisation.

contingent and socially constructed.[4] However, the concept of *modernity* is particularly precarious because it is not only a macro-concept subsuming many other analytical concepts (civil society, industrialisation, democracy, etc.) but also, thirdly, because in many readings the universal blueprint for humankind's so-called transition to 'modernity' continues to be exclusively those myriad transformations that happened in regions around the northern Atlantic.[5] This scheme, which implies that there is one original north-Atlantic 'modernity' and many derivates thereof across the world,[6] has either prompted many 'non-Western' historians to reject the concept altogether[7] or provoked counter-definitions, such as the controversial multiple modernities programme.[8] It is on account of *modernity*'s problematic amalgam of indeterminacy, Eurocentrism, and normativity that scholars have characterised it in exasperation as a 'sphinx,'[9] a 'gesture of the powerful,'[10] an 'essentially contested concept,'[11] or even as merely 'performative.'[12]

While the following pages can in no way claim to solve this definitional quagmire, they approach it with a historical perspective by recovering *modernity* as an actor's (emic) category via global concept history: when, how, why, and where in the world did intellectuals at the turn to the twentieth century actually use the *modernity* concept.[13] This 'empiricist intervention' into 'modernity'/*modernity* scholarship unearths *modernity*'s historical meanings and performances in Western Europe and—

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[4] FELIX BERENSKOETTER, 'Approaches to Concept Analysis,' *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2017): 151–73.

[5] For more explicit reiterations of this Eurocentric narrative: JOHN JERVIS, *Exploring the Modern. Patterns of Western Culture and Civilisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); PETER CONRAD, *Modern Times, Modern Places* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999); STEPHEN GAUKROGER, *Civilization and the Culture of Science: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1795–1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); STEPHEN E. TOULMIN, *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); DAVID HARVEY, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006).

[6] PARTHA CHATTERJEE, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[7] For example, TABISH KHAIR, 'Modernism and Modernity,' *Third Text* 55 (2001): 3–13.

[8] SHMUEL N. EISENSTADT, 'Multiple Modernities,' *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 1–29. For criticism on this research program see FREDERICK COOPER, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 114–40.

[9] ZVI B.-D. BENITE, 'Modernity. The Sphinx and the Historian,' *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 638–52.

[10] DIPESH CHAKRABARTY, *Habitations of Modernity. Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 19.

[11] WOLFGANG KNÖBL, 'Beobachtungen zum Begriff der Moderne,' *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 37, no. 1 (2012): 63–77 (77).

[12] DONALD L. DONHAM, 'On Being Modern,' in *Critically Modern. Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*, ed. BRUCE M. KNAUFT (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 241–57 (241).

[13] For introductory texts on concept history, see: ERNST MÜLLER and FALKO SCHMIEDER, *Begriffsgeschichte Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2020), 30–50; BERENSKOETTER, 'Approaches'; REINHART KOSELLECK, 'Begriffsgeschichte und Sozialgeschichte,' in REINHART KOSELLECK, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik Geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), 107–30. For introductions on *global* concept history, see foundational texts in *Global Conceptual History. A Reader*, eds MARGRIT PERNAU and DOMINIC SACHSENMAIER (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

more importantly—beyond.[14] It provides conceptual self-reflexivity and correctives to anachronistic ex-post projections by revealing semantic and pragmatic differences between the historical *modernity* concept and the 'macro-periodisation' device that is the contemporary analytical concept. Lastly, and somewhat in contradiction to the objective of finding differences, the article asks whether some of the main characteristics of the analytical concept (indeterminacy, Eurocentrism, and normativity) can also be found in the historical *modernity* concept.

This strict analytical focus on a single term does, however, present two major methodological issues. Firstly, with regard to social and political history: engaging with the socio-political lexica with which historical actors have been labelling those structural changes conventionally described by scholarship as 'modernity' is, of course, not meant as alternative to studying historical phenomena themselves. In fact, considering that conceptual history and social (extralinguistic) history are separate entities following different temporalities of change, it would be erroneous to assume that 'modernity' needed the *modernity* concept for it 'to happen.'[15] Secondly, with regard to intellectual and conceptual history: the article's (semasiological) approach, which exclusively investigates the meanings and usages of single words, departs from previous studies that approach it as a recognisable and definable phenomenon that predated and was independent of the *modernity* word.[16] Clearly, the semasiological focus on a single term potentially renders the present study analytically blind to such earlier expressions. As a matter of fact, this article will even heuristically sideline concepts from the same lemma such as *modernisation*, *modernism*, and the adjective *modern*—even if they are inextricably linked to *modernity* and have been used interchangeably by some historical actors.

All these caveats notwithstanding, this narrow semasiological approach still is particularly suited to offer new insights into the actual trajectory of the historical *modernity* concept for a number of reasons. First of all, it can be especially productive for abstract concepts, such as *modernity*, where the reconstruction of the 'thing' to which they originally referred is analytically thorny—or even risks reinscribing the very anachronistic projections and contestations that had rendered *modernity* so difficult for historians to grasp in the first place. Furthermore, as this article follows the dictum of historian of concepts Reinhart Koselleck that concepts are 'both causal factors and

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[14] This 'empiricist intervention is inspired by: COOPER, *Colonialism in Question*; LYNN M. THOMAS, 'Modernity's Failings, Political Claims, and Intermediate Concepts,' *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 727–40.

[15] On the modalities of conceptual change see HELGE JORDHEIM, 'Against Periodization. Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities,' *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 151–71 (163–66).

[16] For two excellent intellectual histories of *modernity* as idea and concept regardless of the term see: CHRISTOPHE CHARLE, *Discordance des temps. Une brève histoire de la modernité* (Paris: Colin, 2011); JAVIER FERNÁNDEZ SEBASTIÁN and GONZALO CAPELLÁN DE MIGUEL, 'The Notion of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Spain. An Example of Conceptual History,' *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 1, no. 2 (2005): 159–184. For a conceptual history of *modernity* applying an onomasiological approach see: MARGRIT PERNAU, 'Die Gefühlte Moderne. Emotionen und Begriffsgeschichte in Nordindien, 1870–1920,' *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44, no. 1 (2018): 54–78.

indicators of historical change,'[17] it approaches linguistic and extralinguistic reality—while not reducible to one another—as inextricably interwoven. Put differently, even if 'modernity' did not need the historical concept to materialise, the paper still asks if, how, when, and especially where *modernity* might have actually precipitated 'modernity.' More generally, concepts may cause historical change in two ways: via reification and performance. Reification 'highlights that, by giving meaning to "things," concepts do not just make these things intelligible, they actually make things, that is, in the words of Michel Foucault they "systematically form the objects of which they speak."'[18] Just as any conceptualisation of objects constitutes a way to construct an abstracted and general theory about them—and all connected phenomena—so does the *modernity* concept constitute a historically first attempt of theorising a universal and purely temporal 'state of world-historical newness and contemporaneity.' To understand how and if these acts of theorising historical time affected society, it is pertinent to study the political performance of *modernity*, that is, how historical actors used this concept to (publicly) challenge or defend social, political, or intellectual orders. Ultimately, what drives this semasiological focus on a single concept is, in the apt words of Pablo Sánchez Léon, 'a struggle against ontology in the definition of any historical subject or historiographical object.'[19] Hence, giving centre-stage to the historical contestations, ambivalences, or even absences of the *modernity* concept not only offers a clearer picture of past paradigms and discussions, but also takes us a long way in de-essentialising *modernity* as category.[20]

To recapitulate the objectives of this article, it follows the trajectory of the historical *modernity* terms/concepts across intellectual circles in fin de siècle Paris, Berlin, New York, Istanbul, and Ankara from the 1860s until the 1920s. This article thereby neither claims to offer a new global intellectual history of ideas and theorisations of *modernity*, nor does it present a temporal-turn inspired account of a new historical consciousness, let alone a new interpretation of Ottoman-Turkish 'modernity.'[21] Its aims are much more modest and even experimental. Next to uncovering the meanings and multi-local performances of *modernity* concepts (*modernité, die Moderne, modernity, yeñilik,* and *ʿaṣrilik*), the article examines if, and to what extent, attributes of the contemporary analytical concept, such as semantic indeterminacy, eurocentrism, and normativity were also inherent to the historical concept—and if they even might have been conducive to *modernity*'s transregional circulation and popularity.

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[17] REINHART KOSELLECK, 'Basic Concepts in History,' Eng. Transl. MICHAELA RICHTER, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 1–37 (8).
[18] BERENSKOETTER, 'Approaches,' 168. Citation from MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 49.
[19] PABLO SÁNCHEZ LEÓN, *Popular Political Participation and the Democratic Imagination in Spain: From Crowd to People, 1766–1868* (Cham: Springer International, 2020), 329.
[20] It also this somewhat presentist agenda that explains the exclusion of other words from the same lemma such as *modernism, modernisation,* or *modern,* which have either historiographically faded into the background or are, like *modern,* mere relational, temporal qualifiers for nouns.
[21] On the temporal turn see: ZOLTÁN BOLDIZSÁR SIMON and MAREK TAMM, *The Fabric of Historical Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); A. R. P. FRYXELL, 'Time and the Modern. Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities,' *Past & Present* 243 (2019): 285–98.

Ultimately, the proliferation of *modernity* concepts in the very late Ottoman Empire, a so-called periphery of 'modernity,' may provoke alienation effects that should not only prompt historians to revisit still prevalent Eurocentric conceptions of *modernity* and 'modernity' but also problematise the relationship between historical and analytical language.

A Belated Concept: A History of *Modernity*

Any sketch of the history of the *modernity* term needs to start with its creator Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867). A full century after philosophers across Europe had begun discussing the concept of historical progress that is often described as the intellectual bedrock for 'modernity,' the art critic and poet Baudelaire invented the word *modernity* (*modernité*) arguing that 'there appears to be no better word to express the idea at issue.'[22] The issue was the relationship between the historical ('fashion') and the timeless ('poetic') in art. By underlining that art ought to consist in equal parts of '*modernity*, i.e., the transitory, fugitive, and contingent,' and of 'the eternal and immutable,'[23] Baudelaire problematised notions of artistic universality and timelessness. The purely temporally determined concept *modernity* allowed him to theorise aesthetic norms while consciously eschewing formal definitions, as well as to make a radical claim for 'nowness.' Baudelaire's concept of *modernity* was indicative of new sense of historicity, which, firstly, assumes that just as every form of art, every age was by default different from preceding and succeeding ages, and secondly, that characteristics of the present age are worthy of artistic consideration and, in fact, should be actively espoused. Contemporaneity became normative.

That indeed this '"modernity," which is visible all across Paris,' had become '*the* object' of many prominent litterateurs one generation after Baudelaire was observed by critic and writer Jules Lemaître (1853–1914).[24] Lemaître nevertheless visibly struggled to pinpoint *modernity*'s meanings:

> It is easy to grasp this neologism, but it takes an effort to determine what it represents, because the modern changes imperceptibly, and then the modern is displaced or mixed with what it is not modern or not anymore. Modernity is primarily, if you want, in the entirety and in the detail of exterior life, in the manner of painting, which is peculiar to our times.

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[22] CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, 'Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne: IV La Modernité,' *Le Figaro* 916 (26 November 1863): 4. For the concept of *progress* see: REINHART KOSELLECK, 'Fortschritt,' in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historische Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, eds OTTO BRUNNER, WERNER CONZE, and REINHART KOSELLECK, 9 vols, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1975), 351–423; ROBERT A. NISBET, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 1980); LUCIAN HÖLSCHER, 'Time Gardens: Historical Concepts in Modern Historiography,' *History and Theory* 53 (2014): 577–91. For the historical co-constitution of notions of *modern age/Neuzeit* see REINHART KOSELLECK, '"Neuzeit." Zur Semantik moderner Bewegungsbegriffe,' in KOSELLECK, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 300–48; FRANÇOIS HARTOG, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

[23] BAUDELAIRE, 'La Modernité,' 5. Italics from the original.

[24] JULES LEMAÎTRE, *Les Contemporains. Études et portraits littéraires* (Paris: H. Lècene et H. Oudin, 1887), 48. Italics are mine.

At the end of one page of often mutually exclusive qualifications, Lemaître summarised, 'Modernity, it is a thing both very vague and very simple.'[25] His vain efforts to designate *modernity* show, firstly, that semantic indeterminacy characterised the concept from its very inception and, secondly, that *modernity* had nevertheless become a valuable and appealing aesthetic concept in Parisian artistic milieus.

Across the borders in Imperial Germany, *modernity* (*Moderne*) temporarily transcended aesthetic discourse as it became a battle cry for adherents of literary naturalism. This current, which promised a 'scientific, literary, artistic, and social renovation of the world,'[26] rallied around a heroic and defiant *modernity* as allegorically female and entangled with concepts of revolution, progress, and reform.[27] In contrast to Baudelaire's *modernity*, which had highlighted—and valorised—art's invariable historicity and presentness, the naturalists stressed historical progress, anticipating notions of artistic and social avant-garde as they hailed the poet as agent of history, a 'trailblazing prophet of the future.'[28] Poetry was the arena for a 'social, national, religious-philosophical and literary struggle,' between old and new.[29]

While the German-language naturalist literary movement was already declared bankrupt by 1904, *modernity*'s associations with swift transformations continued—albeit confined again to more aestheticist registers.[30] English playwright Ashley Dukes, for example, defined the 'hallmark of modernity' as being 'in touch with, or in advance of, the thought of their own time'; the 'modern' artist 'breaks new paths, offers new forms and modes of expressions.'[31] Critics of *modernity*, on the other hand, were quick to diagnose a 'malady of modernity' i.e., of obsessively following the fashions of the time.[32] A critic in New York observed a 'slavery to the present' that made contemporary intellectuals, who 'change their ideas like neckties,' so superficial, erratic, ignorant of the past and therefore incapable of sound scholarship that 'we "moderns" are provincial, in the temporal sense.'[33] To conclude, these examples—from the 1860s to the early interwar period—suggest that while many fin de siècle writers found the *modernity* word meaningful and even normative, they themselves were aware of the fuzziness and indeterminacy of the concept. The linchpin holding these various *modernity* utterances together was that turn-of-the-century writers used it to describe—

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[25] LEMAÎTRE, *Les Contemporains*, 48–49.

[26] MICHAEL G. CONRAD, *Münchener Flugschriften. Die Moderrne* (Munich: M. Poeßl, 1891), 4.

[27] EUGEN WOLFF, 'Die Moderne. Zur "Revolution" und "Reform" der Litteratur,' supplement, *Deutsche academische Zeitschrift* 3, no. 33 (26 September 1886).

[28] '"Durch!",' *Allgemeine Deutsche Universitäts-Zeitung* 1 (January 1887), 10. See also HANS-ULRICH GUMBRECHT, 'Modern, Modernität, Moderne' in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, eds BRUNNER, CONZE, and KOSELLECK, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978), 93–131 (122).

[29] '"Durch!",' 10.

[30] With the hope, however, that 'modernity might come to its senses.' See SAMUEL LUBLINSKI, *Die Bilanz der Moderne* (Berlin: Siegfried Cronbach, 1904), 5.

[31] ASHLEY DUKE, *Modern Dramatists* (London: F. Palmer, 1911), 18.

[32] RENÉ DOUMIC, 'La Manie De La Modernité,' *Revue des Deux Mondes* 148, no. 4 (1898): 925–26.

[33] '"We Moderns," A New Attempt to Define the Meaning of Modernity,' *Current Opinion* 66 (February 1919): 117–18.

at times polemically, at times approvingly—a particular mindset of living in a watershed era and, moreover, of being affirmative of change.[34]

Even though the *modernity* term clearly had entered the vocabularies of fin de siècle intellectuals in Western Europe and the United States, a closer and comparative look at the historical occurrences of the *modernity* word suggests a rather peripheral status in said vocabularies. Quantitative and qualitative comparisons of *modernity* with concepts from a very similar semantic cluster, i.e., concepts expressing historical change, newness, and transformation such as *modern civilisation*, *progress*, *revolution*, or *development* offer a clearer picture of *modernity*'s discursive marginality of which, so far, only few historians have taken note.[35]

Quantitatively, the *Google Ngram Viewer* can offer a first sense of *modernity*'s marginality until the last third of the twentieth century.[36] Allowing for a comparative view of historical occurrences, the *Ngram Viewer* confirms that, compared to concepts such as *modern civilisation*, *progress*, or *development*, the English word *modernity* was well-nigh absent in the twentieth century.[37] While *modernité* and *die Moderne* have slightly different trajectories, they echo the English word's long inconspicuousness and its abrupt surge toward the end of the second millennium.[38] It is, moreover, elucidating to contrast the trajectories of the words *modernity*, *modernism*, and *modernisation* with each other on the *Ngram Viewer*. Occurrences of *modernism(e)*, which was mainly a technical concept in literature and Christian reformism both in English and French,[39] markedly spiked during the fin de siècle, whereas *modernization/modernisation* usages took off in the 1940s. References to *modernity/modernité*, in contrast, only surged towards the 1970s—and further rocketed in subsequent decades.[40] This sudden proliferation of

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[34] GUMBRECHT, 'Modern,' 121. This meaning of *modernity* was most manifest in an eponymous review article in which the author considered himself and contemporaries as uniquely poised to snatch a 'look upon the changing face of existence.' LOUIS W. MILES, 'Modernity,' *The Sewanee Review* 19, no. 4 (1911): 422–29 (422).

[35] This has been noted in passing by: KNÖBL, 'Beobachtungen'; JOHN D. KELLY, 'Alternative Modernities or an Alternative to "Modernity". Getting Out of the Modernist Sublime",' in *Critically Modern*, ed. KNAUFT, 258–86; SEBASTIAN CONRAD and JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL, 'Introduction,' in *An Emerging Modern World: 1750–1870*, eds SEBASTIAN CONRAD and JÜRGEN OSTERHAMMEL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 3–31; CHRISTOF DIPPER, 'Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch und die "Entdeckung Der Moderne",' in *Das Jahr 1913: Aufbrüche und Krisenwahrnehmungen am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkriegs*, eds DETLEF MARES and DIETER SCHOTT (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 95–118.

[36] While references to Google's *Ngram Viewer* in understanding the trajectory of the *modernity* word are popular in secondary literature, historians seldomly commented on how rare this concept actually was: FRIEDRICH JAEGER, WOLFGANG KNÖBL, and UTE SCHNEIDER, 'Einleitung,' in *Handbuch Moderneforschung*, eds FRIEDRICH JAEGER, WOLFGANG KNÖBL, and UTE SCHNEIDER (Stuttgart: Springer, 2015), 1–16 (1); CHARLE, *Discordance des temps*, 18.

[37] GOOGLE, *Books Ngram Viewer*, 'Modernity, modern civilization, progress, development,' (American English 2019), accessed 10 February 2023; GOOGLE, *Books Ngram Viewer*, 'Modernity, modern civilisation, progress, development,' (British English 2019), accessed 10 February 2023.

[38] GOOGLE, *Books Ngram Viewer*, 'Modernité, civilisation moderne, progrès, développement,' (French 2019), accessed 10 February 2023.

[39] ADAM J. LOEPPERT, *Modernism and the Vatican* (London: Kessinger, 1912). For an overview of the modernism discussion in the Protestant Church, see ELDRED C. VANDERLAAN, 'Modernism and Historic Christianity,' *The Journal of Religion* 5, no. 3 (1925): 225–38; GUMBRECHT, 'Modern,' 124–25.

[40] This explosion was also noted in JAEGER, KNÖBEL, and SCHNEIDER, 'Einleitung,' 1.

modernity can be explained, first, by the word's emancipation from Cold-War modernisation theory,[41] a theory in which *modernity*, together with 'tradition,' had replaced colonialism's conceptual pair 'civilisation' and 'barbarism.'[42] Second, the new omnipresence of *modernity* was the function of a new epochal consciousness. Since the 1980s, *modernity* became meaningful as analytical concept to postmodernist philosophers, sociologist, and cultural theorists who sought to make sense of an era they considered as having abruptly ended, i.e., 'modernity.' It was only this interdisciplinary scholarship that constructed 'modernity' as the story of rise and fall of a coherent historical condition, period, or project.[43] Hence, far from being a fin de siècle buzzword, the 'fetishism of modernit*ies*'[44] is a phenomenon of recent origins.

Qualitative analyses suggest in a similar vein that the *modernity* concept was absent in abstract and normative descriptions of the socio-political historical realities. *Modernity* was semantically and pragmatically too confined to literary and aestheticist discourses to become a contemporary epochal self-designation. It did not figure in the vocabularies of those nineteenth-century and fin de siècle scholars, scientists, and philosophers who, along with their interpretations of the world, were later declared paradigmatic and constitutive of the 'project of modernity,' such as Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, Émile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, or even Max Weber.[45] *Modernity* also remains absent in less classical scholarly surveys of the late nineteenth century.[46] Omnipresent in these surveys are, in contrast,

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[41] GERARD DELANTY, 'Modernity,' in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. GEORGE RITZER (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 3069–71; COOPER, *Colonialism in Question*; CORNELIA KLINGER, 'Modern/Moderne/Modernismus,' in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch*, eds KARLHEINZ BARCK et al., 7 vols, vol. 4 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002), 121–67.

[42] DEAN C. TIPPS, 'Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies. A Critical Perspective,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15, no. 2 (1973): 199–226 (206).

[43] BERNARD YACK, *The Fetishism of Modernities: Epochal Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Social and Political Thought* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 8; THOMAS, 'Modernity's Failings,' 730. For these contemporary engagements with modernity, see for example: JERVIS, *Exploring the Modern*; MARSHALL BERMAN, *All That is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); PETER OSBORNE, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 1995); BRUNO LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); DAVID HARVEY, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, repr. (1989; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995); ZYGMUNT BAUMANN, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); KARSTEN FISCHER, ed., *Neustart des Weltlaufs? Fiktion und Faszination der Zeitwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999); FREDERIC JAMESON, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002).

[44] YACK, *The Fetishism of Modernities*, 8.

[45] On the 'project of modernity' see for example JÜRGEN HABERMAS, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990). The absence of the *modernity* concept among the classical sociologists in France, USA, UK, and Germany (with the exception of Georg Simmel but also he uses it is a purely aesthetic concept) has been noted in WOLFGANG KNÖBL, 'Soziologie,' in *Handbuch Moderneforschung*, eds JAEGER, KNÖBL, and SCHNEIDER, 261–74 (261–62). Another exception is Nietzsche who used the word *Modernität* (instead of *die Moderne*) to discuss the 'shortcomings' of his period. FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, *Götzen-Dämmerung oder wie Man mit dem Hammer philosophirt* (Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1889), 89–90.

[46] See the following (less known) scholarly surveys of the nineteenth century, which barely contained the *modernity* word: JAMES BOYD, *Progress of One Hundred Years and Review of the 19th Century* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman & Co, 1901); ARTHUR GEORGE SEDGWICK, *The 19th Century: A Review of Progress* (London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1901); PAUL DUPUY, *La question morale à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Schleicher Frères,

concepts such as *decadence*, *development*, *evolution*, *degeneration*, *revolution* and above all *progress* and *modern civilisation*.

Lastly, *modernity*'s confinements to aesthetic discourse also accounts for its quasi-absence in justifications of turn-of-the-century Euro-American colonialism.[47] It did not feature, for example, in Jean Mélia's heavily colonialist manifesto, which postulated the task to civilise Algeria as postwar France's new 'destiny.'[48] Similarly, *modernity* was absent in Evelyn Baring's *Modern Egypt* (1908),[49] the infamous thousand-page justification of British imperialism. These absences prove exactly wrong historiography's truism that 'empirically speaking, *modernity* has often been used as a transparent justification for the West's predatory and imperious mission civilisatrice.'[50] Rather, and strictly empirically speaking, the single most referenced concept of European colonialist discourse until well into the twentieth century was *civilisation*.[51]

To summarise, *modernity* was marginal in West-European languages at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only did the French neologism *modernité* struggle to travel beyond Paris, but once it did reach London,[52] Berlin, or New York, it often retained

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1897); ÉDOUARD DRIAULT, *Les problèmes politiques et sociaux à la fin du XIXe siècle* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1900); MICHEL SALOMON, *Le spiritualisme et le progrès scientifique. Étude sur le mouvement philosophique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: B. Bloud, 1902); HIPPOLYTE FIERENS-GEVAERT, *La tristesse contemporaine. Essai sur les grands courants moraux et intellectuels du XIXe siècle* (Paris: F. Alcan 1899). One should also note the total absence of the *modernity* word in a reader of 'canonical' fin-de-siècle texts (in English translation) by Oxford University Press: ROGER LUCKHURST and SALLY LEDGER, eds, *The Fin De Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, C. 1880–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[47] Nevertheless, there were, of course, instances when *modernity* was seen as tantamount to European achievements. Traveling writers described, for example, 'European clothes as the hallmark of progress and modernity' in Japan (LAWRENCE J. L. DUNDAS, *A Wandering Student in the Far East* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1908), 13), or they noted, 'Alexandria has become thoroughly imbued with modernity,'[47] when they saw limousines made in France (ARCHIE BELL, *The Spell of Egypt* (London: Page Company, 1916), 60). Similarly, observers used the *modernity* concept in representations of non-European societies as mired in tradition. An example is a description of al-Azhar Madrasa in Cairo as a place where 'One feels the religious East of the 7th century; shut away from the whirlwind of modernity that rushes us along with inevitable swiftness.' CLAYTON SEDGWICK COOPER, 'A visit to the mohammedan Oxford,' *The New York Times*, 7 February 1915, 24.

[48] One of the key concepts of the book is 'francisation.' JEAN MÉLIA, *La France et l'Algérie* (Paris: Plon, 1919). See also ALEXIS MARIE GOCHET, *La France coloniale illustrée: l'Algérie et les autres colonies françaises considerées au point de vue historique, géographique, ethnographique et commercial* (Tours: A. Mame, 1895).

[49] In contrast, the word *civilisation* can be found ninety times. EVELYN BARING, LORD CROMER, *Modern Egypt* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1916). The same tendencies, an overabundance of *civilisation* references and an absence of the *modernity* word, can be found in GEORGE LLYOD, *Egypt Since Cromer* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1933).

[50] RICHARD WOLIN, '"Modernity". The Peregrinations of a Contested Historiographical Concept,' *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011): 741–51 (741).

[51] BRETT BOWDEN, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); NELE MATZ, 'Civilization and the Mandate System Under the League of Nations as Origin of Trusteeship,' in *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, eds ARMIN VON BOGDANDY and RÜDIGER WOLFRUM (Leiden: M. Nijhoff, 2005); BRUCE MAZLISH, *Civilization and its Contents* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[52] When Henry James (1843–1916), for example, praised Matthew Arnold in 1884 as 'a poet of this age, of the moment in which we live, of our "modernity",' he used *modernity* in quotation marks and only by reference to a 'new school of criticism in France,' one of his readers, Anglican clergyman and writer Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890), was so intrigued by this neologism that he called upon the Philological Society to lexically 'fix it' through a lexicon entry. HENRY JAMES, 'Matthew Arnold,' *The*

its connection to French artistic life,[53] was met with ridicule,[54] and rarely transcended literary and aesthetic debates[55]—and even in this discourse, it remained peripheral.[56] Characterised by semantic blurriness and indeterminacy, *modernity*, with the exception of the German-language naturalist movement, at no time became a normative rallying cry for social, intellectual, or political renewal and barely figured in the numerous nineteenth-century (global) public discussions or controversies around science, society, religion, gender, or democracy. Put in a nutshell, if we follow historian of concepts Reinhart Koselleck in defining key concepts as 'indispensable to any formulation of the most urgent issues of a given time,'[57] then it was certainly no key concept in nineteenth and early twentieth-century West-European languages. It seems *modernity* was, historically speaking, hardly constitutive of 'modernity.'

Modernity in the 'Peripheries'

The fact that *modernity* was not a key concept in West-European languages at the turn of the twentieth century also fundamentally changes how historians of non-European societies can study receptions of the concept of *modernity*, as well as local conceptions thereof. To start with, it changes perspectives on a more fundamental, even political, level for Ottoman-Turkish historiography, where it has been an—albeit unwritten—assumption that there was no Turkish-language equivalent for *modernity*.[58] Against the backdrop of *modernity*'s marginality in West-European discourses, this alleged absence ceases to be a sign of Ottoman backwardness as it 'acquits' Muslim and Turkish-speaking intellectuals from either the charge of parochialism or from having consciously rejected appropriations of *modernity*. Furthermore, on a more analytical level, it allows historians of non-Western societies to move beyond highly problematic

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English Illustrated Magazine 1, no. 4 (January 1884): 241–46 (244); 'Notes and News,' *The Academy* 609 (5 January 1884): 8.

[53] English and German-language authors often used the French original. See for example CHARLES GRAY SHAW, *Christianity and Modern Culture: An Essay in Philosophy of Religion* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Graham, 1906), 20.

[54] See a devastating review in New York-based *The Nation* of an American-English translation of Belgian painter Alfred Stevens' collection of aphorisms, *Impressions sur la Peinture* (1886), in which the anonymous critic particularly objected to Stevens' and the American editor's omnipresent references to *modernity*: *The Nation* 1142 (19 May 1887): 433.

[55] Even SAMUEL LUBLINSKI's *Bilanz der Moderne* (*Modernity's Balance Sheet*; Berlin: Siegfried Cronbach, 1904), which offered a panoramic assessment of Germany's political, social, economic, and intellectual conditions, ultimately described *modernity* (die Moderne) as a mere literary phenomenon.

[56] *Modernité*, next to being left aside by heavy-weight literary critics such as Ferdinand Brunetière (1849–1906) (FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE, *L'évolution des genres dans l'histoire de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1890); FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE, *Questions de critique* (Paris: Lévy, 1897); FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE, *Études critiques rur l'histoire de la litterature française* (Paris: Hachette, 1907)), was mostly absent in French survey works on nineteenth-century literature (see for example: GEORGES MEUNIER, *Le bilan littéraire du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Charpentier, 1898); GEORGES PELLISSIER, *Le mouvement littéraire au XIXe siecle* (Paris: Hachette, 1900); HENRI BÉRALDI, *La reliure du XIXe siècle* (Paris: L. Conquet, 1895); EMMANUEL DES ESSARTS, *Anthologie scolaire des poètes français du XIXe siècle* (Paris: C. Delagrave, 1891); EUGÈNE GILBERT, *Le roman en France pendant le XIXe siècle* (Paris: E. Plon 1900); GEORGE ATHÉNAS and MARIUS-ARY LEBLOND, *L'idéal du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Félix, 1909).

[57] KOSELLECK and RICHTER, 'Basic Concepts in History,' 3.

[58] While I have nowhere seen such a total statement in Ottoman historiography, there is a notable absence of reflections about possible Ottoman translations for *modernity*.

Eurocentric juxtapositions, such as between Western societies and 'those [other] societies and cultures in which there was no terminology for modernity in the Western sense of "theories of modernisation" and/or which exist in a tension with Western modernity.'[59] Freed from the burden of explaining a lack of indigenous *modernity* concepts, it should now be a priority for area-studies historians to reconstruct the semantic fields via which non-European intellectuals discussed historical changes and the laws of history; the concepts and theories which were the bedrock for 'modernity.' Even though the last years have seen excellent new studies on this issue, much more remains to be done.[60]

Furthermore, it turns out that Turkish-speaking Ottomans were convinced they had a word for *modernity*. In 1900, one of the most accomplished late-Ottoman lexicographers used the word *yeñilik* to translate *modernité*.[61] On the one hand, *yeñilik*, which means in the most general sense 'newness,' 'novelty,' or 'innovation,' was semantically indeed a match. On the other hand, it was not an awkward neologism like *modernité* but had a much broader—and even trivial—pragmatic scope and was sometimes used in the plural (*yeñilikler*). This pairing of *yeñilik* and *modernité* is a reminder that, first, words do not actually need to be equivalent for historical actors to see and declare them as such.[62] In fact, it is often this translational entanglement on the part of historical actors (the translators) themselves that creates equivalences between words—equivalences that are, however, never total and sometimes only

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[59] JAEGER, KNÖBL, and SCHNEIDER, 'Einleitung,' 4. Translation is mine.

[60] For studies on transformations of 'time regimes' in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire see: ALP E. TOPAL, 'Political Reforms as Religious Revival. Conceptual Foundations of Tanzimat,' *Oriente Moderno* 101, no. 2 (2021): 153–80; ÖZGÜR TÜRESAY, 'The Political Language of Takvîm-i Vekayi: The Discourse and Temporality of Ottoman 'Reform' (1831-1834),' *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 31 (2020): 1–45; AVNER WISHNITZER, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); ON BARAK, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); VANESSA OGLE, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); DANIEL KOLLAND, 'The Making and Universalization of New Time. A History of the Late Ottoman-Turkish Magazine *Servet-i Fünûn* (1891-1914)' (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2021). For studies on other regions or even with a global scope see SEBASTIAN CONRAD, ''Nothing is the Way it Should Be''. Global Transformations of the Time Regime in the Nineteenth Century,' *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2017): 821–48; PRATHAMA BANERJEE, *Politics of Time. 'Primitives' and History-Writing in a Colonial Society* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006); MARGRIT PERNAU, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India. From Balance to Fervor* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2020); STEFAN TANAKA, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); MARGRIT PERNAU et al., eds, *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); MARGRIT PERNAU, 'Fluid Temporalities: Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity,' *History and Theory* 58, no. 4 (2019): 107–31.

[61] ŞEMSEDDÎN SÂMÎ, *Ḳāmūs-ı Fransevî: Türkçe'den Fransızca'ya Lügat Kitâbı* (Istanbul: Mihrān Maṭbaʿası, 1900), 1461. Scholars of Ottoman history have barely made this connection between *yeñilik* and *modernity*. Monica Katiboğlu is the exception that proves the rule even if she does not further discuss the implications of this connection, 'Specters and Circulation of Meaning: Edebiyat-ı Cedide on Modern Literary Language,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 40, no. 2 (2020): 361–71 (365).

[62] MARGRIT PERNAU, 'Provincializing Concepts. The Language of Transnational History,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 3 (2016): 483–99; LYDIA HE LIU, *Translingual Practice. Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity in China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

ephemeral. In this instant, the alignment of *yeñilik* with *modernité* seems to have been the work of Ottoman litterateurs, who were thoroughly immersed in French intellectual and artistic debates and therefore familiar with this still rather technical term. What is most striking about this translational entanglement is that *yeñilik*'s alignment with *modernité* was less on the level of semantics but of pragmatics, i.e., how and in what discursive contexts the word was used. *Yeñilik* entered aesthetic discourse being touted as new ideal signalling newness.[63] Legitimising new forms and conceptions of literature and poetry, it served an ideological purpose in the acrimonious discussions around the controversial heavily France-leaning New Literature movement (*edebīyāt-ı cedīde*; 1896–1901).[64] Furthermore, a second result of *yeñilik*'s convergence with *modernité* is that it meant more than just newness but *historical* newness. As Turkish-writing authors used *yeñilik* to make normative claims in the name of the progress of history, it became one of the numerous Ottoman-Turkish concepts of historical time that had been crystallising since the second half of the nineteenth century—most notably *teraḳḳī* (progress), *temeddün* (civilising), *medenīyet-i ḥāżıra* (modern civilisation), *tekāmül* (evolution), and *inḳılāb* (revolution).[65] Nevertheless, in stark contrast to the Ottoman concept for *progress*, which was fiercely debated as it emerged in the 1860s,[66] the *modernity* concept, on account of remaining initially confined to literary debates, hardly provoked controversy.

Even if the new presence of the *modernity* concept in late-Ottoman literary discourse was a function of the hegemony of French intellectual life, its emergence should not be analysed through historiographical lenses such as European diffusion.[67] Rather, its popularity and intelligibility reveal social and intellectual similarities between Ottoman Turkish-Muslim and West-European intellectual elites, who used *modernité/yeñilik/Moderne* to make very similar claims to historical newness.[68] The fact

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[63] For example: 'The *yeñilik* in his way of expressing himself.' HAMDI BEYZADE OSMAN ADIL, 'Wanda,' *Müṭālaʿa* 22 (December 1896): 2; 'In fact, it is undeniable that there is a kind of *yeñilik* to these works; every writer shows such a *yeñilik*.' MENEMENLIZĀDE MEḤMED ṬĀHIR, 'Yeñi Edebīyāt-ı Cedīde,' in *Ṣervet-i Fünūn Cerīde-yi Muṣavveresiniñ Evlād-ı Şuhādā ve Maʿlūlīn-i Gazā ʿOsmānīye Menfaʿatine Maḫṣūṣ Nüsḫa-yı Mümtāzesi*, ed. AḤMED İḤSĀN (Istanbul: ʿĀlem Maṭbaʿası, 1313 [1897]), 57; 'They cannot deny that these works were a change, a *yeñilik* in our literature.' AḤMED ŞUʿAYB, 'Muṣāḥabe-yi Edebīye 61: Ṣoñ Yazılar,' *Ṣervet-i Fünūn* 482 (June 1900): 214; 'There awoke a progressive idea called *yeñilik*.' AḤMED RĀSIM, 'Sāde Yazalım,' *Mecmūʿa-yı Ebużżiyā* 82 (March 1899): 1698; 'I have found everything, modern life, *yeñilik*, it's all in my hand, I describe it.' AḤMED RĀSIM /JEAN RICHEPIN, *Uhlān Ḳarısı (Mam'selle Napoléon)* (Istanbul: A. Asaduryan Şirket-i Mürettibiye, 1318 [1900]), 55; '*Yeñilik* fashion.' AḤMED RĀSIM, 'Teraḳḳī ve Tekāmül,' *Maʿlūmāt* 354 (May 1898): 2.

[64] For more on these discussions, FAZIL GÖKÇEK, *Bir Tartışmanın Hikâyesi. Dekadanlar* (Istanbul: Dergâh, 2007); KOLLAND, 'The Making and Universalization of New Time,' ZEYNEP SEVINER, 'Thinking in French, Writing in Persian: Aesthetics, Intelligibility and the Literary Turkish of the 1890s,' in *Ottoman Culture and the Project of Modernity: Reform and Translation in the Tanzimat Novel*, eds MONICA M. RINGER and ETIENNE CHARRIÈRE (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 19–36.

[65] On these concepts see KOLLAND, 'The Making and Universalization of New Time.'

[66] AḤMED MIDḤAT, *Teraḳḳī* (Istanbul: Ḳırk Anbār: Istanbul, 1306 [1888/9]), 2–4.

[67] For critique of this paradigm see SEBASTIAN CONRAD, 'Enlightenment in Global History. A Historiographical Critique,' *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 99–127.

[68] On this new elite in Istanbul see ZEYNEP UYSAL, *Metruk Ev. Halit Ziya romanında modern Osmanlı bireyi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2014), and AVNER WISHNITZER, 'Beneath the Mustache. A Well-Trimmed History

that *yeñilik* quickly transcended aestheticism ultimately dispels notions of imitation. Beyond being used to both describe a sense of breathless and frantic transformations and affirmation of change,[69] *yeñilik* gained new socio-political stakes once young officers dismantled the autocratic regime of Abdülhamid II (1876–1908/9) in 1908, along with its censors. *Yeñilik* became, along with *terakḳī* (progress) and *medenīyet-i ḥāżıra* (modern civilisation), part of the vocabulary of political actors who sought to save the empire by mobilising the public for an empire-saving 'revolution' (*inḳılāb*).

Yeñilik's semantic indeterminacy allowed it to become a normative claim-making device for different ideological movements and to become ideologised. Just as, for example, Hüseyin Cahid (Yalçın; 1875–1957), the editor of the new ruling party's mouthpiece, promised that his party would finally end a century-long dialectic 'confrontation between *yeñilik* and oldness [*eskilik*],'[70] so did the early nationalist Turkist Modern Life movement (*yeñi ḥayāt*) promise 'to cut down in wrath the old values in this time of renewal,'[71] and 'to sweep away all kind of prevalent oldness and to bring *yeñilik* in its stead.'[72] Although Turkists praised *yeñilik* as 'expression and cause of the new scientific, artistic and philosophical ideals that have invaded the minds,'[73] and thereby a Europe-inspired 'state of nowness,' they followed a decidedly anti-Westernist agenda aiming for nationalist renewal. Hailing themselves as 'the champions [*mücāhid*] of *yeñilik* who bestow upon our [Turkish] pure soul a force that allows it to bravely persist in the darkness of present and future,'[74] Turkists aimed at dislodging earlier generations of Ottoman intellectuals, such as Hüseyin Cahid. They denounced them as 'cosmopolitan' (*ḳozmopolit*) and 'imitators of the West' (*garb muḳallidleri*). All this suggests that *yeñilik* became embedded in the Ottoman political sphere—and thereby ideologised—to an extent that the French turn-of-the-century *modernité* concept had not.

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of Facial Hair in the Late Ottoman Era,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 61, no. 3 (2018): 289–326. For more specialised studies on this social formation, albeit in the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean, see KEITH WATENPAUGH, *Being Modern in the Middle East. Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); LUCIE RYZOVA, *The Age of Efendiyya. Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014). For a more theoretically informed discussion on the effects of global capitalism on the well-nigh contemporaneous emergence of similar subjectivities across the globe in the nineteenth century see ANDREW SARTORI, *Bengal in Global Concept History. Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[69] See especially 'Yeñi bir Moda Tecrübesi,' *Ṣervet-i Fünūn* 1032 (March 1911): 434; YAʿḲŪB ḲADRĪ, 'Netāyic,' *Rübāb* 14 (May 1912): 143–45.

[70] ḤÜSEYIN CĀHID, 'Oñ Beş Günde,' *Ṭanīn* 253 (16 May 1909): 1.

[71] ALI CANIB and MEHMED Z. GÖKALP, 'Yeni Lisan (No. 2),' in *Genç Kalemler Dergisi*, ed. ÇETIN PARLATIR (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1999), 105–109 (109).

[72] İsmāʿīl Mestān, 'Genç Türklük Emeli Yaşayabilecek mi?,' *Ḥaḳīḳat* 73 (June 1911): 1. For *yeñilik*, see above all the journal *Yeñi Felsefe Mecmūʿası* (New Philosophical Review; 1911–1913).

[73] ALI CANIB, 'Gençlik Kavgası: "Milli" daha doğrusu "Kavmi" Edebiyat ne Demekdir? (13 Mayıs 1327),' in *Genç Kalemler Dergisi*, ed. PARLATIR, 166.

[74] KĀZIM NĀMĪ, 'Yeñi Aḫlāḳ,' *Yeñi Felsefe Mecmūʿası* 2 (August 1911): 18.

While such statements need to be taken with a grain of salt and ultimately remain preliminary and conjectural,[75] it is heuristically rewarding to continue this thought experiment by looking at a later Turkish translation for *modernité*: *ʿaṣrīlik*. The word was part of a whole cluster of new concepts based on the lemma *ʿaṣr* (age, epoch) that sociologist and Turkism's chief ideologue Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924) coined between the years 1911 and 1916. These neologisms were *ʿaṣrī* (modern, 'according to the age'),[76] *ʿaṣrīyet* (modernism, '"according to the age"-ness'), and *muʿāṣırlaşmak* (modernisation, 'to become contemporary').[77] These neologisms allowed the anti-imperialist Turkist Gökalp to promote social and economic transformations in line with—and for the time being, perceived as—superior Western models while shunning concepts of change such as 'Europeanisation' (*Avrupalılaşmak*) or 'Westernisation' (*garblılaşmak*), which had become omnipresent after the horrendous defeat in the First Balkan War (1912–1913). In other words, Gökalp used these neologisms to decolonise developmental visions in Ottoman society by abstracting social, intellectual, and economic conditions from Western Europe, i.e., the societies that were perceived as representative of the progress of their 'age,' and to translate these specific conditions through temporalisation into a desired and potentially universal 'state of historical nowness' that every society across the globe could reach. Hence, Gökalp did not coin a neologism to translate *modernity* in order to embrace Eurocentrism, but to dispel it.[78]

It is a reminder of the inseparable, yet complicated, relationship between social and conceptual history that the artificial neologism *ʿaṣrīlik*, the new translation for *modernity*, did not catch on right away. It proliferated only against the backdrop of the 'cataclysmal events'[79] during and after the First World War that led to the end of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.[80] *ʿAṣrīlik* became a battle cry—and truly Koselleckian key concept—for a war-weary but thoroughly radicalised (Ottoman) Turkish-Muslim urban elite, which aimed for an

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[75] Especially since these statements are especially based on word searches in Google Books, JSTOR, and Archive.org.

[76] There are in fact a few scattered earlier occurences of the adjective *ʿaṣrī* in Ottoman-Turkish. It was also popular in contemporary Arabic writings such as in the Cairo-based periodical *al-Manār*, however. See for example: FLORIAN ZEMMIN, *Modernity in Islamic Tradition. The Concept of 'Society' in the Journal al-Manar (Cairo, 1898–1940)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 204.

[77] Gökalp introduced these neologisms with the French original in parenthesis in MEHMED Z. GÖKALP, 'Yeni Hayat ve Yeni Kıymetler: (26 Temmuz 1327),' in *Genç Kalemler Dergisi*, ed. PARLATIR, 236–39; GÖKALP, 'Türkleşmek, İslâmlaşmak, Muʿāṣırlaşmak,' 5 *Türk Yurdu* 46 (August 1913): 401–404. Eventually, *muʿāṣırlaşmak* was complemented by *ʿaṣrīleşmek* as translation for *modernisation*, whereas *ʿaṣrīyet* was more or less replaced by *ʿaṣrīlik*, as (uncommented) conceptual translation for *modernity*. The first usage seems to be: ZIYĀ GÖKALP, 'Millī Terbīye: 4,' *Muʿallim* 4 (October 1916): 101.

[78] For an example of such a usage, see MEḤMED ŞEMSEDDĪN, *Māẓīden Ātīye* (Istanbul: s.n., 1919), 282–83.

[79] HANS-LUKAS KIESER, KEREM ÖKTEM, and MAURUS REINKOWSKI, eds, *World War I and the End of the Ottomans: From the Balkan Wars to the Armenian Genocide* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

[80] More generally, on the 'language engineering' of late Ottoman intellectuals and especially the Turkish Republic, see GEOFFREY L. LEWIS, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

unconditional, top-down 'revolution' (*inḳılāb*) of a 'people' (*ḥalḳ*) they deemed stuck in the 'Middle Ages' (*ḳurūn-ı vusṭa*).[81] To reformers, *ʿaṣrīlik* was socio-politically and ideologically more useful than the *yeñilik* concept, which evoked one-dimensional heroic imaginations of historical newness, because it was more prone to theorisation.[82] *ʿAṣrīlik* allowed them to more accurately conceptualise and diagnose the perceived asynchronicities between 'chronological' and 'historical' time in Turkish society. Turkish intellectuals argued that 'in order to be considered modern [*ʿaṣrī*], it is not just enough to be living in the twentieth century,'[83] and warned that Turkish society was only part of the 'contemporary age' (*ḥāl-i ḥāżır*) in the sense of empty, abstract time of chronology. *ʿAṣrīlik*, in the sense of 'the aspirational and evolutionary vision' to be part of global progress time was totally absent, however.[84] Against the backdrop of the famous slogan 'to reach beyond the level of modern civilisation' (*muʿāṣır medenīyet sevīyesinin üstüne çıkmaḳ*), *ʿaṣrīlik* was not only an ideal but an imperative for the newly founded Turkish Republic.

Nevertheless, *ʿaṣrīlik*'s vague definition of 'following the universal progresses of humanity to create forms of government, society, and labour that confirm to the needs of time,'[85] left room for a host of—at times mutually exclusive—interpretations of the concrete meanings of this key concept. As state power was monopolised in the hands of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk; d. 1938), it was the intellectual circles closest to him that acquired the prerogative of interpreting the concrete meaning of this '"according-to-the-age"-ism.' Their often sociologically grounded interpretations paved the way for the abolishment of the caliphate, the promotion of state feminism, laicism, the introduction of the Latin alphabet, Bauhaus-like architecture, and a new civil code.[86] That these visions of *ʿaṣrīlik* were often inspired by Western models was not lost on most public intellectuals. Veteran journalist Ahmed Rasim (1864–1932), for example, derided '*ʿaṣrīlik*, that is *modernité* [sic],' as just the most recent label for a pro-Western attitude that previous generations of critics had denounced as 'foppish *yeñilik* and Frankish imitationism,' teasingly adding, 'this word "modern" is on everyone's lips.'[87]

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[81] For social and political histories of this 'revolution' see: RYAN GINGERAS, *Eternal Dawn: Turkey in the Age of Atatürk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); SEVGI ADAK, *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in Turkey: State, Society and Gender in the Early Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022); SIBEL BOZDAĞAN, *Modernism and Nation-Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); HALE YILMAZ, *Becoming Turkish: Nationalist Reforms and Cultural Negotiations in Early Republican Turkey, 1923–1945* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

[82] At least until the 1920s, however, *yeñilik* remained the most popular translation for *modernité/modernity*. *İnglizce-Türkçe Lügat* (Istanbul: Fratelli Ḫāʾim, 1924), 344; *Fransızca'dan Türkçe: Küçük Ḳāmūs-ı Fransavī* (Istanbul: Maʿārif Maṭbaʿası, 1928), 900.

[83] ʿALĪ CĀNIB, 'Edebiyātta ʿaṣrīlik,' *Nedim* 8 (March 1919): 103.

[84] ḤASAN ḤIKMET, 'ʿAṣrīlik vs. Ḥāl-i Ḥāżır,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 581 (January 1924): 131.

[85] ḤASAN ḤIKMET, 'ʿAṣrīliğiñ Maʿanası,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 559–60 (September 1913): 130.

[86] For a sociologically grounded debate on society in accordance with 'modernity' see: MEḤMED ZEKERĪYA, 'İctimāʿī Mesʾeleler: ʿAṣrī Milletler Hangileridir?,' *Büyük Mecmūʿa* 1 (March 1919): 2–3.

[87] AḤMED RĀSIM, 'Cumhūrīyet'iñ ilk (birinci) Bahārı,' *Aḳşam* 1961 (March 1924): 2.

Similarly, oppositional groups contested the Kemalist regime's 'abuse' (*sūʾ-i istiʿmāl*) of the *modernity* concept.[88] Writers of the Islamist weekly *Sebīlü r-Reşād* (Straight Path; 1908–1925) tried to undo the regime's co-optation of the concept and to save it by arguing 'true modernity' (*ḥaḳīḳī ʿaṣrīlik*) was only feasible with and through Islam.[89] In the increasingly autocratic atmosphere of the Turkish Republic, the struggle over the meaning of ʿaṣrīlik was an uphill battle for Islamic modernists, however. Because they could not prevent its growing association with 'secularism' (*laʾiḳlik*) in jurisprudence and education[90] and with what they perceived as female 'immorality,'[91] they eventually denounced "'*Aṣrīlik*" [which] has become synonymous with catastrophe, degeneration, and downfall.'[92] Hence, while *Sebīlü r-Reşād* began treating ʿaṣrīlik as an enemy concept until censorship closed down the journal in 1925, a radicalised and paternalistic elite around Mustafa Kemal's Republican People's Party formulated with ʿaṣrīlik its own *mission civilisatrice*: the transformation of Turkish-Muslim society according to Western models. Finally, this Turkish example shows, firstly, how malleable the *modernity* concept was content-wise and that, consequently, it could have theoretically also served proponents of political Islam as rallying cry. Secondly, the example illustrates the primacy of political power in such semantic struggles. Thirdly, when intellectuals in the early Turkish Republic discussed the social and political structures and attributes of 'modernity,' they actually did so with the *modernity* concept.

Conclusion: Towards A Global History of the *Modernity* Concept

While the article has shown that the *modernity* term appealed to fin de siècle intellectuals around the world, it juxtaposed the limitedness of West-European *modernity* words to aestheticist contexts in opposition with Turkish translations of *modernity*, which became widely used socio-political concepts. While the translational association with *modernité* certainly played a part in intellectually invalidating *yeñilik*, this first Turkish translation for *modernity* quickly gained a life of its own and became a battle cry for historical newness and 'revolution.' *Yeñilik*'s new prominence was owed to the swift galvanisation of the Ottoman public sphere, as intellectuals tried to react to the catastrophes that shook the Ottoman Empire after 1908. The politicisation and ideologisation of the Ottoman-Turkish *modernity* concept further increased as a new translational equivalent was coined: ʿaṣrīlik. While *yeñilik* was used by intellectuals as a

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[88] For the use of 'abuse' see: ḤIKMET, 'ʿAṣrīliğiñ Maʿanası,' 131.

[89] For one of the most comprehensive arguments for this unity of Islam and modernity see YAHYA ʿAFĪF, 'İslāmīyet ve Aṣrīlik,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 618 (September 1924): 305–308.

[90] MEḤMED EMĪN, 'Aḥlāḳ Telaḳḳīsinde ʿAṣrīlik,' *Büyük Mecmūʿa* 2 (March 1919): 19; 'Türkler ʿAṣrī bir Millet Midir?,' *Zamān* 261 (December 1918): 2; AḤMED NAʿĪM, 'Bizde Dīn ve Devlet,' *İslām* 11 (November 1918): 1; ḤASAN ḤIKMET, 'Laʾiḳlik–ʿAṣrīlik,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 555–56 (August 1923): 91–93; MEḤMED ʿAḲĪF, 'Ḥasbiḥāl,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 612 (August 1924): 209.

[91] For example, 'Dāru l-Fünūn'lu Ḥanımlarla Beyleriñ Dans Ḥādiseleri,' *Sebīlü r-Reşād* 636 (January 1925): 187–190.

[92] ḤIKMET, 'ʿAṣrīliğiñ Maʿanası,' 131.

claim to historical newness, ʿaṣrilik allowed them to absolutise historical time; the concept was supposed to offer a purely temporal theorising space for socio-political visions beyond Western models. Because ʿaṣrilik was originally coined to replace concepts such as 'Westernisation' (garblılaşmak), it was very popular among anti-imperialist Turkist and Islamist intellectuals in the early Republic. That ʿaṣrilik nonetheless became—at least implicitly—synonymous with conditions in Western Europe was therefore no foregone conclusion but the function of political power, i.e., of the authoritarian single-party era (1923–1945). Kemalist intellectuals forged the *modernity* concept into a weapon for the conceptual arsenal of the 'Turkish revolution,' whose radicalness would serve as both example and deterrent to other colonial and post-colonial, non-Western societies.[93]

In a more general sense, what do these mostly semantic and conceptual engagements with *modernity* as concept reveal about 'modernity' as a historical phenomenon and/or period? The answer cannot be straightforward and will vary for Europeanists and area studies scholars. As the paper revealed that the *modernity* word/concept was quasi-absent in intellectual, social, cultural, or political negotiations in Western Europe long after its coinage in 1863, the answer for Europeanists would be that 'modernity' transpired without the historical *modernity* concept. Instead, when nineteenth and early twentieth-century political and intellectuals leaders theorised, discussed, and sought to change the conditions of their age, they did this via a host of other concepts such as *modern world*, *age of progress*, *modern times*, *decadence*, or (*modern*) *civilisation*.[94] It was these concepts that were, to put it again in the words of Reinhart Koselleck, the 'indicators and factors of change.'

While these findings with regard to the historical concept in no way need to disqualify *modernity* as analytical concept, let alone nullify narrations and analyses of events, processes, or upheavals that scholars theorised through the *modernity* concept, they still should give historians pause. Above all, these insights should sharpen the awareness of historians to the striking differences between *modernity* as historical concept and the analytical concept that describes and thereby reifies 'modernity' as historical period and 'world-historical transition.' Being reminded that the analytical concept only recently became popular and is underpinned by concerns of the late twentieth century helps to de-ontologise and de-naturalise them. Furthermore, as the West-European and especially the Ottoman-Turkish examples have shown, *modernity* was at no point in its history a semantically tangible concept free from power relations, let alone a universal or objective one. In fact, the moment *modernity* transcended aestheticist discourse, this semantically indeterminate concept became a discursive and

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[93] For Republican Turkey as model to other regimes in the wider region see AMIT BEIN, *Kemalist Turkey and the Middle East: International Relations in the Inter-War Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); ADEEB KHALID, 'Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective,' *Slavic Review* 65, no. 2 (2006): 231–51; NATHALIE CLAYER, FABIO GIORNI, and EMMANUEL SZUREK, eds, *Kemalism: Transnational Politics in the Post-Ottoman World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018).

[94] For more on this, see KOSELLECK, '"Neuzeit".'

more often than not Eurocentric weapon appropriated and used to exclude others by the most powerful actors (social class, state, or internationally, those nations/empires self-identifying as the 'civilised world'). In a similar vein, also as a historiographical category *modernity* either continues to be implicated in Eurocentric interpretations of history, which take West-European experiences as a blueprint. Alternatively, it falls victim to arbitrariness—well-nigh anything could be declared conducive of 'modernity'—and 'buzzwordification.' This trend has culminated in monographs which have promised to shed light on haunting,[95] paper,[96] plebeian,[97] provincial,[98] protestant,[99] perverse,[100] or hygienic[101] modernities. Having said this, a proper discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of *modernity* as analytical concept lies beyond the scope of this paper. Furthermore, lest we forget, discussions on semantics ultimately risk remaining nominal unless they inspire new vistas of the past.

Setting reflections on the analytical concept aside, the example of the very late Ottoman Empire has shown that historians with global or area studies perspectives, in contrast to Europeanists, might not be able to ignore the *historical modernity* concept if they are interested in the actual concepts that propelled social and political change—because in Istanbul and Ankara, 'modernity' did happen with the *modernity* concept. This finding, in turn, allows for two conclusions: firstly, it corroborates temporal-turn scholarship that argues for the global spread of new and globalised ways of interpreting time and history towards the turn of the twentieth century.[102] *Modernity*, easily compatible with and building on preexisting concepts of historical time such as civilisation, evolution, revolution, or progress not only allowed Turkish-writing intellectuals to theorise 'states of historical nowness' but also to make normative claims with it. Moreover, the fact that they used ʿaṣrilik to describe and invalidate secular *and* (modernist) Islamic orders suggests that *modernity*'s semantic indeterminacy and contestability were no obstacles to its global circulations. Instead, they arguably propelled it rendering *modernity* politically more adaptable and useful. Similarly, Ottoman-Turkish translations for *modernity* should be less characterised as transmissions of meaning but rather as transfers of temporal claims, chiffres, or even shibboleths. The article's second conclusion, or rather hypothesis, is that it was no semantic coincidence that the *modernity* concept first gained such a socio-political

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[95] MICHAEL D. FOSTER, 'Haunting Modernity. Tanuki, Trains, and Transformation in Japan,' *Asian Ethnology* 71, no. 1 (2012): 3–29.

[96] NILE GREEN, 'Paper Modernity? Notes on an Iranian Industrial Tour, 1818,' *Iran* 46 (2008): 277–84.

[97] IL'JA GERASIMOV, *Plebeian Modernity: Social Practices, Illegality, and the Urban Poor in Russia, 1905-1917* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

[98] JENNIFER JENKINS, *Provincial Modernity: Local Culture and Liberal Politics in Fin-De-Siècle Hamburg* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[99] HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ, STEFAN HUEBNER, and IAN TYRRELL, eds, *Spreading Protestant Modernity: Global Perspectives on the Social Work of the YMCA and YWCA, 1889–1970* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2021).

[100] See the eponymous book series published by Duke University Press.

[101] RUTH ROGASKI, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

[102] See note 60 above.

significance on the so-called peripheries of 'modernity.' The concept allowed Turkish intellectuals a way to conceptualise (and consequently address) their own perceived temporal 'otherness,' i.e., 'backwardness' (*geri ḳalmışlıḳ*). The ʿaṣrīlik concept shows how historical newness was grasped, theorised, claimed, and translated into action across an early-twentieth-century world under conditions of West-European hegemony—albeit irrespective and in spite of 'the West.' While much more comparative research is needed, this article has shown that any history of the performances of the *modernity* concept needs to write it as a global story.