



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Master's Thesis 2022 60 ECTS

The Faculty of Landscape and Society (LANDSAM)

Towards a Cosmopolitan Theory of Modernity: A Comparative Historical Analysis of Emerging Buddhist, Islamic and Post-Christian Modernities

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MSc International Relations

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Declaration

I, Adam Mohamed Farhi, declare that this thesis is the result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....*Adam M. Farhi*.....

Date.....15.08.2022.....

Epigraphs

And when it is said to them, ‘Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger,’ they say, ‘Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers.’ Even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided? Qur’an, 609 CE, Sahih International, 5:104

Islam is the end product of the translation of Romanity to the East. (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 4)

The ‘theft of history’ [...] refers to the take-over of history by the west. [...] That continent makes many claims to having invented a range of value-laden institutions such as ‘democracy’, mercantile ‘capitalism’, freedom, individualism. (Goody, 2006, p. 1)

Goody does not consider globalization in his book, but globalization just might be the greatest theft of history. (Jennings, 2010, p. 4)

The act of distinguishing between “religious” and “secular” is a recent development. In the academic field of religious studies, the claim that religion is a modern invention is not really news. (Nongbri, 2013, p. 3)

A non-Eurocentric approach [to modernity] would [...] aim to identify those features of modernity that can be found in non-Western parts of the world and where the explanation for the phenomena does not lie in western influences, but in autonomous logics of development. (Delanty, 2006, p. 268)

If Western-centrism is to be avoided, Islam-centrism is only its other, not the theoretical solution. (Buck-Morss, 2003, p. 99)

There are many reasons to study historical sociology [...]. For some scholars, engagement grows [...] *from the seeming analogy – or contrast – between present circumstances and an earlier era.* [...] The most compelling reason for the existence of historical sociology is [...] the importance of studying social change. (Calhoun, 2003, p. 383, emphasis added)

Dedication

To My Mother

Acknowledgments

Having reached the stage of writing the Acknowledgments, I cannot but reflect on how at once bitter and sweet this experience has been. I wrote this thesis in several cities and towns in two continents: Kenitra, Fez, Ås, Ski, Oslo, Råde, and Vinstra. The idea of the thesis first crystallized in my mind in the late autumn of 2016 at Ibn Tofaïl University, a Moroccan public university. While I had known that I was swimming against the tide of Moroccan academia, little did I know that following these ideas, part of which I experimented with at NMBU and UIO courses, would make me swim against the tide of Norwegian academia as well, that these ideas were too radical for all the critical thinking and freedom Norwegian academia boasts. I don't bear grudges, but this thesis is for me inseparable from the context in which it was written.

When NMBU and UIO signed a pledge, at the encouragement of SAIH, to support academic freedom through the government-funded Students-at-Risk program, inspired by the Scholars-at-Risk network, and give persecuted international students a chance to continue their education and research, there was no footnoted asterisk to exclude from Norwegian academic freedom the critical study of (state) Islam. When, few weeks into my IR program in the autumn of 2019, I had a talk about my Student-at-Risk status with the then academic chair of my master program, the person told me: “You can't do it [your Islam-related research] here [Norwegian academia] too.” At the time, I thought that was a worrying piece of advice, but my experience with the person and their assistant for the rest of the program proved that that statement was meant as a command. I received similar but indirect signs at UIO. Besides, having finished presenting my experience with researching Islam in Morocco in an event for recipients of the said scholarship at an OsloMet classroom, the 2019–2020 elected leader of SAIH—a conduct that I believe is not representative of the great work SAIH does—suggested that I go pursue such research in Tunisia. When in reply I mentioned safety concerns in Tunisia, the person gave France as a second suggestion. If things stopped here, I would not be writing this.

Little did I realize that some of the academic staff of the university that hands me a government-funded scholarship to compensate for my problems researching Islam in Moroccan academia and continue that research under its guardianship would expose me to politically-motivated, coordinated, group, academic bullying and discrimination culminating in me taking a semester sick-leave, filing a still-open, 11-page “si ifra” case, and changing the supervisor, thereby experiencing a second trauma for insisting on pursuing critical but

academically legitimate research on state Islam and speak about it publicly using my NMBU affiliation. I experienced the disjuncture between the inclusive and diverse academic freedom discourse the employees of my university use publicly and the academic bullying and discrimination some of them do privately to someone doing research they do not want to be associated with.¹

In my formal complaint in May 2021, I still did not understand what was happening. It took me some time to familiarize myself with Norwegian language, society, and politics to connect the dots between various incidents from various people in various academic settings and understand that various individuals in, and with links to, Norwegian academia did not want someone affiliated with their university researching state Islam critically and speaking about it publicly and were hell-bent on making my experience miserable to the point of me abandoning the topic or leaving their university. Even when I saw past incidents, the degree of bullying increased.

The critical study of state Islam is indeed uncomfortable and sensitive and requires much responsibility, but that is what academia is for, critical but responsible research. I had the chance to test the limits of Norwegian academia, and I can reckon that critical works on Islam published by the world's topmost university presses—such as Al-Azmeh's *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and his People*, published in the heydays of ISIL by Cambridge University Press—would not, it seems, see the light of day in Norwegian academia. Browsing through the research outputs of Norwegian universities on Islam, Norwegian academia unfortunately does not seem to have enough freedom for such works of profound value. While MENA authoritarian governments ban de jure the critical study of state Islam, Norwegian academia bans it de facto, informally and by tacit agreement. These are lamentably the main 'acknowledgements' I collected in my pursuit of this research in Moroccan and Norwegian academia: legal risk, exclusion, mental distress, and exile in the first, and academic discrimination and bullying, attempted exclusion, mental distress, and sick leave in the second.

I thank my current supervisor, Associate Professor Poul Wisborg, for agreeing to take over the supervision of my thesis after I filed the complaint. Your valuable feedback helped me improve the study. Any errors are mine. I express gratitude to the Norwegian government for the Student-at-Risk scholarship, that, in spite of my experience above, will forever make

¹ My statements do not apply to my current supervisor, whose standpoint I do not know and with whom I discussed this experience before in less detail.

me feel a child of Norway. I also thank my family for putting our family relations above our differing theistic and nationalistic convictions.

Adam Mohamed Farhi

Vinstra, August 2022

Abstract

Current theories of modernity, an international phenomenon, have been criticized for being Eurocentric, and attempts to address their problem of Eurocentrism are at best semi-Eurocentric. This thesis suggests a new theory of modernity, the Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (TTM), that is arguably more empirically robust and, being non-ethnocentric and cosmopolitan, normatively sounder. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, this theory is underpinned by a rethinking of the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism. This thesis takes a historical–sociological International Relations approach to the study of modernity, employing the comparative historical methods for data collection and analysis. Through the lens of this new theoretical framework, the post-Christian nationalist modernity is but one among many modernities in history. Out of this plurality, three cases are selected, analyzed, and then compared to illustrate the theory and reach a better understanding of modernity in general and of these cases in particular: Axial Buddhist modernity (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islamic modernity (7th–13th centuries CE), and the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE). Analysis of these cases shows that modernity is a transhistorical phenomenon with different historical manifestations. Early Buddhism and early Islam, for instance, are not the antitypes of Western modernity but were themselves modernities. Through this new theory, I argue that intercultural influence is transhistorical, and the agency to enact innovative social change or modernize is not a Western invention but a transhistorical human capacity. TTM reclaims the West’s theft of the cosmopolitan, transhistorical value and agency of modernization.

Key terms: theories of modernity, tradition, social change, early Islam, Western modernity, religion, secularity, Axial Age, Eurocentrism, cosmopolitanism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1970, UNESCO introduced the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, ratified by 141 member states, to counter the theft and illicit trafficking of cultural property. One of the reasons the convention considers the theft of cultural artifacts a crime is that it robs people of their history and culture. While laws targeting the theft of cultural properties exist, there is a related, regulation-elusive, insidious form of theft that is equally, if not more, detrimental, which is the theft of values. Goody's *The Theft of History* (2006) focuses on this kind of cultural theft, which he explains as the West's appropriation of world history, of several value-laden institutions: democracy, capitalism, charity, town, university, freedom, individualism, humanism, love, family, science, rationality, and civilization. Jennings (2010, p. 4) criticizes Goody for overlooking the West's theft of globalization, dedicating his book to reclaiming earlier non-Western globalizations in history. This study derives inspiration from similar studies but criticizes them for overlooking perhaps the West's most colossal theft, the theft of the agency of modernization and seeks to reclaim the transhistorical agency to modernize.

The West's theft of these values is morally wrong for another reason: It nurtures ethnic divisions and wars. The discourse of "Western values" embraced by both the progressives and conservatives of the West and the progressives and conservatives of the East allows conservative forces in non-Western regions to claim that they are opposing these values because they are "Western values" that are threatening "Russian values," "Islamic values," "Chinese values," etc. For instance, the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is, as some commentators maintain, arguably primarily a war of values between what is perceived to be Western values and Russian values (Jenkins, 2022; Kaylan, 2014; Kozyrev, 2022, p. 15; Stoeckl & Uzlaner, 2022; Troianovski & Hernández, 2022; Tsygankov, 2019, p. 3). It is actually a war between authoritarian values and cosmopolitan progressive values. Embracing values such as democracy, freedom, and love wrongly becomes Western cultural imperialism. Westernness is used as an excuse by authoritarian forces whose interests do not align with certain cosmopolitan values that happen to be egalitarian but historically stolen by the West. It is important that researchers develop a counter discourse that matches contemporary empirical breakthroughs wherein these essential values are cosmopolitan in origin and embracing them is not Western cultural imperialism.

In my region, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), there is a similar misguided anxiety about Western cultural imperialism. My experience in Morocco aligns with Kassab's (2010, p. xi) experience in Lebanon that:

The Arab mind was for me invariably associated with questions of cultural crisis, the need for and the impediments to cultural renewal, the necessity of cultural affirmation and preservation, the dangers of Western cultural invasion, the cultural glory of the past and its centrality as a source of inspiration and pride, and the lamentable cultural decline of the present, as well as questions of Islam, modernity, authenticity, tradition, and progress.

In such condition, it is tempting, adds Kassab, to suspect that there is something essentially Arab (and of course Persian, Kurdish, Turkish, Nubian, and Berber) about this predicament and something essentially Western about progress and human development. Debates about cultural malaise in the MENA region in relation to its Western neighbors, wrongly seen as representing modernity, would come to form part of Arab identity, especially since the Naksa of 1967. These debates gained a global dimension since 9/11. Such a preoccupation with the tradition–modernity nexus is thus central to the contemporary Arab–Muslim civilization (Ayish, 2008, p. 96; Bano, 2018, p. vii; Hunter, 2011, p. xvi). Partaking in the problematic discourse of “Western values,” Hallaq (2004, p. 44) expresses the same predicament as Kassab, while giving a more central position to modernity, as currently arguably misunderstood:

[M]odernity is a Western product, a fact poignantly obvious to everyone. On both popular and state levels, today's Muslims perceive themselves, and rightly so, as colonized and dominated subjects, and whatever they adopt of Western ideas and institutions is not, and will never be, theirs.

I see this research as part of this preoccupation, aiming to reclaim the stolen value and agency of modernization and contribute to a third-way approach to the current polarized intellectual impasse, a contribution that tries to build intellectual bridges between political Islam and ‘secular’ viewpoints in Arab–Muslim intellectual thought, so that the problematic discourse of “Western values” and the statements that feed on it, such as Hallaq's, become unwarranted.

1.2 Problem statement

Discussions on modernity occupy several fields of social science, including International Relations (IR); the development of historical–sociological approaches to IR centered around debates on modernity (Duzgun, 2018, pp. 1–3). In earlier research for an unfinished master’s thesis (Farhi, 2017), I aimed to explain why increasing numbers of MENA youth are leaving the Islamic and theist worldview, a trend that is part of the global rise of the ‘nones,’ people with no theist religion. Two years later, the trend was captured quantitatively by the Arab Barometer at Princeton University in collaboration with the BBC (Arabic, 2019). My ethnography of young people leaving Islam and the theist worldview lacked an appropriate theoretical framework, other than the current Eurocentric frameworks, for making sense of this phenomenon. In search of a theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon, I found theories of modernity insightful. Insights reached while searching for such theoretical framework have led me to prioritize undertaking a study that seeks to develop a new understanding of modernity. I owe much debt to Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Margaret Archer, and Pierre Bourdieu, in order of relevance, for helping me understand modernity and to Talal Asad for helping me understand secularity. However, excluding Asad, the consequences of their Eurocentrism were perhaps starker when approaching the topic of MENA non-theism. Through their lenses, one could conclude that Arab–Muslim youth are abandoning their culture and embracing Western culture.

As a student of Cultural Studies, I was familiar with the critique of Eurocentrism through postcolonial studies (e.g., Hall, 1999, p. 101; Spivak, 1999, p. 169). As a cultural Muslim and social science student, I was familiar with modernity and the history of Islam. I have had the lingering idea that a stark similarity exists between the emergence of Islam and the emergence of 17th–20th-centuries Western modernity. Equally stark is, I think, the similarity between the emergence of Islam and the emergence of seeds of non-theism in the MENA region. I have found the current theoretical approaches unhelpful in articulating these similarities and decided to grapple with relevant theoretical issues to suggest a more theoretically and empirically robust and normatively sounder theory of modernity.

1.3 Significance of the research

This thesis contributes to improving our theoretical and empirical understanding of modernity by suggesting a new theory of modernity. New historical insights have been gained in the past decades, but theories of modernity are yet to keep up with these interdisciplinary breakthroughs. Besides this theoretical and empirical significance, the study

is significant in terms of academic diversity as a contribution to Southern Theory (Connell, 2007; Emirbayer, 2013; Go, 2013; Wallerstein et al., 2003) in that a non-Western researcher suggests a theory of a phenomenon whose theorizing has been the prerogative of Western scholars. Another aspect of significance is that the study addresses the issue of Eurocentrism in IR and other social sciences. The research also contributes to the scholarly debate on the relation between Islam and modernity, which is currently dominated mainly by either conservative, such as the work of Tariq Ramadan, or (semi-)Eurocentric approaches, such as the work of Bassam Tibi (Arfi, 2012, p. 111; Brunner, 2013, p. 159; Pieterse, 1996, p. 123). The significance of the study appears also in the implications it has for contributing to a critical social theory of the MENA region, including the study of non-theism in that region.

1.4 Objectives

The main objective of this thesis was to contribute a novel and better theorization of modernity, one that argues for the existence of transhistorical common core features of modernization. This new understanding arguably allows viewing history in a different light and in so doing uncovers several features of the process of modernization and traditionalization in human history. This theorization was conducted through an appreciatively critical engagement with current theories of modernity. The thesis then illustrates the new theory through a historical comparative analysis using three cases: Axial Buddhist modernity (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islamic modernity (7th–13th centuries CE), and the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE), all considered as cultural–social and/or intellectual movements. The second objective was to contribute to solving the problem of Eurocentrism in theories of modernity without advancing another ethnocentrism. A third derivative objective was to explore the extent to which the three cases are manifestations of the same modernization process rather than the common conception that only the Western case is a modernity and the other two are its antitypes.

1.5 Research questions

To achieve the objectives stated above, I pursued the following main research questions and sub-questions:

Central questions:

- What is modernity? What are its causes and outcomes?

Sub-questions:

1. How can a rethinking of central dichotomies in social theory (tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, collectivism/individualism) contribute to a non-Eurocentric, cosmopolitan understanding of modernity?
2. To what extent are the social changes of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE), and Enlightenment-influenced post-Christian nationalism (17th–20th centuries CE) historical modernities that share the features of the transhistorical form of modernity?
3. How does the rethinking of these central dichotomies contribute to the understanding of the international phenomenon of the emergence of Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) as the replacement of several traditional practices by modern ones, an instance of modernization, not the antitype of Western modernity?

1.6 Structure of the thesis

To achieve the objectives of the study, I used comparative historical methods in their types of within-case methods and comparative historical analysis, which I discuss in Chapter 2, together with other methodological issues. In Chapter 3, I heed calls for more attention to the topics of modernity and history in IR scholarship and proceed to provide an alternative understanding of the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism. After that, I offer a critique of current theories of and approaches to modernity. In Chapter 4, I build on this critical review to suggest a new theory of modernity. In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I apply the suggested theory to the three selected cases. In Chapter 8, I summarize the new theory and provide a comparative analysis of the three cases using the methods of narrative comparison. In Chapter 9, I discuss conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology selected for the study to meet its objectives, comparative historical methods, and how it made possible an explanation that is both generalizable across cases (transhistorical) and historically sensitive. In line with this methodology is the use of a post-Humean notion of causation suitable for qualitative research, including qualitative generalization. I end the chapter with a discussion of relevant ethical issues.

2.2 Method: Comparative historical methods for cross-case analysis

To answer the main research questions and the sub-questions, I used comparative historical methods. I was inspired by the methodology of Skocpol's (1979) *States and Social Revolutions* as summarized by Lange (2012, pp. 129–131), given the similarities between her work and this research.

Skocpol (1979, p. 35) used comparative historical analysis of the cases of France, China, Russia, Japan, Prussia, and England to “generalize about social revolutions” and “to develop, test, and refine causal, explanatory hypotheses about events or structures integral to macro units such as nation–states.” As such, I used the methods of comparative historical analysis in analyzing the three selected cases, combining within-case methods with comparative methods to achieve methodological synergy. To illustrate the theory, I selected the three cases of Axial Buddhist modernity (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islamic modernity (7th–13th centuries CE), and the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE).

The Axial Age is a concept that was first introduced by Karl Jaspers and further developed by others to refer to a profound transition in human cultural history that took place in the period of the middle centuries of the first millennium BCE in much of Eurasia. It involved the establishment of new powerful societies with more population density matched with a cognitive innovation (Donald, 2012, p. 73). This era has several possible cases to explore as modernities, but I limited my analysis to the case of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE), which is viewed through the lens of the new theory. The analysis of this case explores the traditional structure–culture of late-Vedic India from and against which Buddhism emerged in the 6th century BCE, how Buddhism challenged Vedic religion, eventually modernized the latter's archaic structure–culture to address its legitimation crisis, and how the modernization of Buddhism was eventually institutionalized and traditionalized

first by the Buddhist monks and later by king Aśoka between 273–232 BCE, who adopted it as state worldview while also introducing infrastructural modernization.

For the second case, the analysis examines the emergence of early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) mainly in the time of 600–750 CE and less so in its subsequent development; the space is Arabia, Syria, and farther afield (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. xii). The case is viewed through the lens of the suggested theory, treating it as a modernization movement that was a child of Axial theoretic culture. It investigates how the Roman- and Sassanian-led globalization drew Arabs into a late-antique structure–culture that widened their social time–space and facilitated their awareness of the ideational backwardness and moral illegitimacy of their pre-Islamic Arabian structure–culture resulting from the rise of a sedentary, capitalist, individualistic lifestyle, thereby prompting their communicative reflexivity against the traditional structure–culture of their people and allowing them to draw on foreign cultural, especially Roman, influence to modernize their structure–culture, which brought it to par with and eventually superseded surrounding civilizational developments. After that, I examine how ideational, moral, material, and institutional modernization was followed by scientific–technological modernization, and how the modernity of early Islam later underwent institutionalization and traditionalization under the Umayyad and Abbasid empires up to the 13th century CE.

In the third case, I examine what is falsely considered the first modernity in history, the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) and analyze how it was not only a latecomer to the experience of modernization but was enabled by its involvement in an Eastern-created and -led globalization. Thanks to this globalization, the social time–space of Europeans widened, which facilitated their awareness of the ideational backwardness and moral illegitimacy of the structure–culture of Christendom, allowed the flow of the superior ideas, institutions, and technologies of the East, especially Islamic, Indian, and Chinese, and prompted Europeans’ communicative reflexivity to modernize. After that, I zoom in on the French Revolution as paradigmatic of Western nationalist modernity to examine the modernization that French society underwent following the revolution, especially how Christian state institutions and emotional rituals were replaced with the institutions and emotional rituals of ‘secular’ nationalism. I end with a discussion of the traditionalization of the main outcomes of the modernizing revolution.

These three cases were examined on their own as well as compared with one another. For the first, within-case methods were used to explore the determinants of a certain phenomenon for a certain case through an analysis of the processes and characteristics of that

case (Lange, 2012, p. 21). These include primary and secondary within-case methods. Primary within-case methods are employed to derive evidence for within-case analysis before the case is analyzed by an additional method. Primary within-case methods include historical methods, ethnographic methods, linguistic methods, internal comparison, and archaeological methods. Since I drew on secondary data from previous research on the three cases, primary within-case methods belong to the work of the studies I drew on. As such, only secondary within-case methods were relevant and thus employed, namely causal narrative, process tracing, and pattern matching (Lange, 2012, p. 69). The first two were used to examine causation and the third to discover the extent to which the suggested theory matched the cases.

Besides the examination of the cases internally, I conducted a comparison between them in Chapter 8 using the methods of comparative historical analysis in their type of small-N narrative comparison. Comparative historical analysis is usually used to compare between two and ten cases using narrative or Millian comparison. It is employed to pursue “a structural view and explore meso- and macro-level processes,” as well as to develop causal explanations and analyze similarities and differences between cases to arrive at the causes that several cases share (Lange, 2012, pp. 5–6, 19). Narrative comparison employs narratives to compare phenomena that are difficult to operationalize numerically. The three types of narrative comparison are process-oriented, mechanistic, and ideal-typical comparisons (Lange, 2012, pp. 115–116). Millian comparison was not used because, first, it is usually used when there are too many variables and not enough cases, which is not the case in this study. Second, Millian comparison is not suited to phenomena with multiple causes (Lange, 2012, pp. 108, 110). Comparative historical analysis allowed me to develop “explanations” of modernity that are “at once generalizable across cases and historically sensitive,” similar to the experience of Skocpol (1979, p. 35).

Thus, the combination of within-case methods with comparative historical analysis not only improved the evidence for the study but also allowed me to deal with the social science dilemma of balancing the particular and the general, that is, the ideographic and nomothetic explanations (Lange, 2012, p. 2).

2.3 Causation, explanation, and generalization in qualitative social science and IR

In this section, I draw on methodological advances that attempt to reclaim causal analysis, and with it explanation and generalization, for qualitative research in IR and other social sciences, by advocating a post-Humean conception of causality. I also discuss how I

drew upon the work of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer to develop the abstract and transhistorical aspects of the theory I proposed.

The field of IR has been polarized between those who pursue causal analysis and those who dismiss it as a form of scientism, a polarization that is also called the rationalist–reflectivist or the positivist–postpositivist divide. The rationalist positivists seek to explain and generalize about international relations while the reflectivist post-positivists think that it is possible only to understand meanings of contexts of actions. The differences between these two approaches stem from fundamental differences in comprehending the nature of the social world (Kurki, 2008, pp. 4–5). In her *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis*, Kurki (2008) traces the roots of this dichotomy to the influence of the Humean discourse of causation in natural and social science. In the last couple of decades, new strands in the philosophy of social science, namely pragmatism and philosophical realism, have sought to challenge this dichotomy, to which Kurki’s work belongs (2008, p. 10).

Building on the achievements of both pragmatism and philosophical realism in social science but focusing on IR, Kurki (2008, p. 8) seeks to “liberate IR theorising from the grip of the dominant Humean discourse of causation and to reclaim an alternative conception of causal analysis for the purposes of world political research.” She (2008, pp. 10, 12) does this by drawing on the Aristotelian understanding of causation (material, formal, efficient and final causes) so as to, unlike the Humeans, give the concept of cause a deeper ontological basis, disentangle it from that of the efficient cause, and widen the assumptions attached to it.

Philosophical realism departs from Humean causation by refusing to substitute ontology for epistemology, arguing instead that the existence of the world is independent from our attempts to comprehend it (Kurki, 2008, p. 10). The implication of this is that “[c]auses are seen to consist in the real causal powers of ontological entities, not in regularity relations of patterns of events” (Kurki, 2008, p. 11). This conception allows one to bypass the Humean fallacy of reducing “what is” to “what is perceived.” Such an understanding of causal analysis allows social scientists to “recognise the reality and causal nature of such aspects of social life as rules, norms, ideas, reasons, discourses, as well as, importantly, of ‘structures of social relations’” as opposed to their consideration by interpretive social theory as non-causal (Kurki, 2008, p. 11). For qualitative research, argues Kurki (2008, p. 11), “interpretive and discursive approaches should be recognised as playing an important role in world political causal explanation.”

A post-Humean conception of causation is a rather simple conception of cause, “seen as a broad concept referring to a variety of things, actions, processes, structures or conditions

that we can talk of as being responsible for directing outcomes, actions, states of affairs, events or changes” (Kurki, 2008, p. 16). It is “something that we all, including the reflectivist theorists, engage with continuously,” adds Kurki (2008, p. 16). It is this kind of causal conception that underpins this study.²

With the qualitative conception of causation and explanation suggested above comes the possibility of qualitative generalization. In their synthesis of recent methodological advances, Goertz and Mahoney (2012, p. 46) observe that “[t]he causes-of-effects approach leads them [qualitative researchers] to explanations that simultaneously apply to a group of cases and to each individual case within that group” following the qualitative principle:

A good general explanation of Y is also a good explanation of individual cases of Y. With this principle applied to this study, a good general explanation of modernity is also a good explanation of the three selected cases of modernity. One of the examples Goertz and Mahoney (2012, p. 46) use to illustrate this principle is Skocpol’s study (1979), from which this thesis derives inspiration. However, as far as scope and generalizability are concerned, this thesis differs from Skocpol’s work as a source of methodological inspiration in that Skocpol theorizes a category or an essence, the modern social revolution. My study, instead, differentiates between the form of modernity, which is content-neutral and transhistorical, and the specific manifestations of modernity, which are the content or contextual, historical instantiations of the abstract phenomenon of modernity. To further illustrate what I mean by the transhistorical and how it differs from the historical, Neumann (2019, p. 154) explains that meddling in peoples’ business is a “transhistorical phenomenon,” but an external polity’s exact intervention between some of the three elements of the state (territory, subjects, and the administration) is “a question of historical variation.”

The abstract, form-oriented aspect of my suggested theory has its sources in Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer’s work on social change. In his structuration theory, Giddens (1989, p. 295) stresses that, “[t]he main tenets of structuration theory [...] are intended to apply over the whole range of human social activity, in any and every context of action.” Archer’s influence on my study lies in her differentiation between the meta-theoretical and theoretical levels or the formal and substantive levels of her Social Morphogenesis approach: “The former constitutes the conceptual framework to be used in

² Given that this thesis adopts Habermasian pragmatism, it should be noted that, as far as causation is concerned, I draw on Kurki’s (2008, pp. 79–80) critique of Habermas’ Humean conception of causation while she appreciates his attempt to combine explanatory and interpretive approaches under the banner of critical social sciences.

sociological analysis, while the latter refers to its application in any actual study of a given social phenomenon, or set of phenomena, and is constituted by statements referring to that particular part of social reality” (Maccarini, 2013, p. 42). Bourdieu’s analysis in *Distinction* is centered on the concepts of habitus and field, with the aim of “uncover[ing] transhistorical invariants, or sets of relations between structures that persist within a clearly circumscribed but relatively long historical period” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 36). He rejects the critique that his work on *Homo Academicus* applies only to the case of France, since it misses that it aims “to show that the opposition between the universal and the unique, between nomothetic analysis and ideographic description, is a false antinomy” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 36). *Homo Academicus* seeks, rather, to “grasp particularly [sic] within generality and generality within particularity” in order to “uncover[...] some of the universal laws that tendentially regulate the functioning of all fields” (Wacquant, 1989, p. 36). The abstract or form-oriented aspect of my suggested theory, as different from its specific, contextual aspect, comes also from the form-oriented aspect of Habermas’ Communicative Action Theory, to be explored in the next chapters. In the words of Calhoun (1992, p. 31), Habermas’ theory is underpinned by the “reliance on a transhistorical capacity of human communication” as well as “the validity claims universally implicit in all speech” thereby giving his theoretical contribution “a transhistorical, philosophical grounding for a general theory of communicative action” (Lee, 1992, p. 402).

2.4 Epistemology: Habermasian pragmatism

Epistemologically, this thesis subscribes to pragmatism as articulated by Habermas, who was influenced by leading pragmatists, especially American pragmatists, who influenced IR (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009, p. 715; Griffiths et al., 2009, p. 199; Hellmann, 2009, p. 639).

Postmodernist or radical constructivism is considered less relevant for the analysis because it appears to deny the possibility of generalization and universalism and downgrade the possibility of empirical evidence and normativity. Critical realism, like pragmatism, offers an alternative, but its leading figure’s later turn to spirituality and theology (Creaven, 2001) and his followers’ further development of such turn, by attempting to bring God or the gods back to social science (Archer et al., 2004), seems to contradict my approach of *methodological atheism*. Habermas’ *methodological atheism* is an approach to the study of religion that allows for the appropriation of theological concepts for the purpose of argumentative discourse but assumes that social science must stay “uncoupled from the event of revelation” (Calhoun et al., 2013, p. 319). Said (1996, p. 109) expresses a similar academic

principle that “conversion to and belief in a political god of any sort” is “unfitting behaviour for the intellectual.”

Pragmatism recognizes that reality is mediated by language and that the aim of social science is to get closer to it, and that it is wrong to deny a priori the possibility of universal and transhistorical patterns, and that the aim of social science is first to understand and explain and only then critique (Reed, 2011, pp. 165, 167). Pragmatism rejects both reductionist naturalism and postmodernism’s “relativism with regard to truth or morality” (Fultner, 2014, p. 8). It also leaves room for the possibility of historical progress or cultural evolution (Baert, 2005, p. 123; Edgar, 2006, pp. 119–122; Fultner, 2014, p. 8). Habermas’ epistemology departs from positivists in that it recognizes three types of science or inquiry corresponding to three knowledge interests: the first is a natural science grounded in our ability to labor, the second is a social or cultural science grounded in our ability to use language, and the third is normative inquiry grounded in our desire for freedom or emancipation.

2.5 Ethical issues

The ethical issues that concern a study involving human subjects is expressed mainly in the principle of Do No Harm. This study does not directly deal with human subjects but raises a different kind of ethical issues that indirectly relates to the principle.

Given this study involves the critical study of state Islam, it can be positioned in the debate about the difficulties surrounding the study and teaching of Islam in Western universities since 9/11. The study of Islam has become entangled with the Global War on Terror and surrounding issues such as immigration and Islamophobia, posing dilemmas to the academic community. On the one hand, some researchers aim to correct the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims seen in some research and media outlets. On the other hand, the quest to remedy the harm done to Islam and Muslims exposes these researchers to the accusation that they are engaging in apologetics for and conservation of the religion. The lingering question is whether scholars should engage with the complexities of the tradition including research outcomes that might be used or misused by anti-Muslim forces (Morris et al., 2013, p. 2).

This study recognizes these dilemmas and seeks to navigate them ethically. One of my motivations is to move beyond the polarization that characterizes the academic study of Islam between those who seek to conserve or protect it from critical inquiry and those who denigrate it. This study aims to avoid the pitfalls of the two. It is neither conservative nor

apologetic or simplistic, neither Islamophobic nor blasphemous. In this regard, the study is also an attempt to build intellectual bridges between political Islam and ‘secular’ worldviews in the MENA region, in some form of third way between these polarizing positions.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

To conclude, this study used comparative historical methods in their type of secondary within-case methods, namely causal narrative, process tracing, and pattern matching, and combined these with comparative historical analysis of three cases in its type of small-N narrative comparison involving process-oriented, mechanistic, and ideal-typical methods. The study is underpinned by a post-Humean conception of causation and a pragmatist epistemology that allow for qualitative generalization and explanation, suiting the suggested theory’s transhistorical underpinnings deriving from its theoretical influences. Lastly, I recognized the ethical issues involved in an unorthodox study of state Islam and stated my approach to navigating them ethically.

Chapter 3: Critique of current theories of and approaches to modernity

That theme of change is a favourite of some Eurocentric historians who see the west as 'inventing invention'. (Goody, 2006, p. 263)

3.1 Chapter introduction

Classical and contemporary theories of modernity have attracted much criticism for being Eurocentric (Delanty, 2006, p. 266; Mouzelis, 2008, p. 145). That modernity originated at a certain time (17th century) by a certain ethnic people (Europeans) in a certain place (Europe) is a conception that has won consensus among scholars and laypeople, whether those who celebrate modernity, are critical of it, or even those who are antagonistic to it. In this study, I argue that this conception is empirically false and normatively problematic. It has two main problems. First, it rests on a problematic understanding of the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism. Second, it fails to differentiate between modernity as a form or process and modernity as content, which I cover briefly in this chapter but detail in the next.

3.2 History, modernity, and IR

Duzgun (2018, p. 1) notes that historical–sociological IR places ‘modernity’ center stage. Modernity is a transnational and global phenomenon at a level higher than the nation–state (Go et al., 2021, p. 48). Buzan and Lawson (2015, p. xv) express their frustration that modernity is not receiving enough attention in IR. They (2015, pp. 4–5) acknowledge that the occurrences of major material and ideational transformations in world history is not new, but the changes brought about by the global modernity of the 19th century happened at different depths and scales from previous periods such as the agrarian era with its material and ideational changes in the form of Axial Age breakthroughs. I share Buzan and Lawson’s emphasis on the importance of the 19th-century global transformation for IR’s understanding of the contemporary international system, but in pursuing the objectives of this study, I also combine it with historical approaches to IR, especially those with an emphasis on ancient international relations.

In their *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, Cohen and Westbrook (2000, p. 4) express their dissatisfaction with the ahistoricity of much IR scholarship and the short span of those with a historical approach; with few exceptions,

“generalizations about international relations” are derived from a narrow timeframe, usually, from the 19th and 20th centuries. They (2000, p. 4) add:

If we assume that sovereign collectivities have engaged in more or less regular international contact for at least 4,500 years, it can be seen that modern scholars have tended to restrict their attention to about 200 of those years, or only 4 percent of this immense span of time.

These scholars invoke the adage that studying history is educative for understanding the present, such as whether a feature of the contemporary international system is transitory or permanent in international life, and that some contemporary issues can be comprehended by a return to earlier historical eras (Cohen & Westbrook, 2000, pp. 5, 11). I place this study in this historical approach to IR.

3.3 Critique of dichotomies underpinning classical and contemporary theories of modernity

The first main problem with current theories of modernity is that they are underpinned by a problematic understanding of the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism.

3.3.1 Tradition/modernity, premodern/modern

To offer a theory of modernity, one assumes a certain understanding of that which is not modernity, tradition. Current theories of modernity rest on the binary of tradition/modernity, also articulated as premodern/modern. It is the view that the era of tradition came to be replaced by the era of modernity, whose beginnings could be traced to the 17th-century European Enlightenment, as influenced by the Greco-Roman civilization. It is common among these theories that they take for granted the meaning of *tradition*. In this section, I take Giddens’ theory of modernity, being especially pioneering and influential, as representative of this problematic approach. I dig deeper into Giddens’ understanding of tradition and contrast it with a different revisionist and influential approach that contradicts, and highlights weaknesses in, Giddens’ understanding of tradition and by extension his theory of modernity. This revisionist approach supports the theory I advance in this study.

In his understanding of modernity, Giddens interchangeably uses the terms ‘post-traditional society’ and ‘detraditionalization.’ For him (1990, p. 38; 1994, pp. 100–101), the rise of Western modernity ushered in a post-traditional society, wherein tradition has undergone such a radical change that it has become “sham.” Tradition is asked to justify its

value so much so that it has acquired its *raison d'être* from the reflexivity of the modern. Sham traditions have two manifestations: either as “discursively defended and articulated” to justify their worth against other options “as in those defences of religion” or as fundamentalisms involving “the assertion of formulaic truth without regard to consequences” (Giddens, 1994, p. 100). In traditional societies, truth does not derive from the “referential properties of language” but from ritual speech; ritual speech contains no truth or moral claims, weakening the possibility of dissent and existing merely as habitual repetition, adds Giddens (1994, pp. 64–66).

The globalization of Western modernity spreads information from Western expert systems to non-Western parts of the world, in some cases driving in those places “the evacuation of tradition” (Giddens, 1994, pp. 95–96), in the sense that tradition loses its “rationale” (Giddens, 1991, p. 206). Modern expert systems differ from traditions by resting on institutional reflexivity. “Institutional reflexivity became the main enemy of tradition,” asserts Giddens, in that the “claims of reason replaced those of tradition” (1991, p. 20). The relation between modernity and tradition, according to Giddens (1994, p. 91), is that “modernity destroys tradition.”

Giddens’ theory of modernity assumes that one can theorize modernity without theorizing tradition, however problematic that assumption is. He is a theorist of modernity, not of tradition. Giddens (1994, p. 65) draws support from Pascal Boyer’s work (1990) in his understanding of tradition, and both scholars dismiss Shils’ (1981) work on tradition that contradicts theirs. Giddens (1994) does so in pages 62 and 108, and Boyer (1990) cites Shils cursorily in pages vii and viii.

Central to any conception of tradition is how it relates to the notions of modernity and truth. Drawing on Boyer, Giddens argues that “tradition [...] presumes a kind of truth antithetical to ordinary ‘rational enquiry’” (1994, p. 66), that the “claims of reason replaced those of tradition” (1991, p. 20), and that “modernity destroys tradition” (1994, p. 91). On the contrary, Shils (1981, p. 105) argues that it is not that the Enlightenment has brought the end of tradition; rather, “a tradition received, a tradition annulled, a tradition created and transmitted, a tradition annulled” As such, “the success which the Enlightenment achieved was owed to its becoming a tradition” (Shils, 1981, p. 325).

A central point of disagreement between Giddens (1994, p. 108) and Boyer (1990, pp. 4–5) on the one hand and Shils on the other is whether there exist factual traditions, meaning traditions containing claims to truth. Contrary to Giddens and Boyer, Shils (1981, pp. 23–24) posits that “many traditions are explicitly factual or descriptive,” which he illustrates from the

Biblical story that claims that a founder of a religion went into the wilderness for forty days, making it a factual tradition whether or not there is empirical evidence for the claim. Moving from religion to science, Shils (1981, p. 105) stresses that “[scientific] paradigms are traditions.” In his understanding of the traditionality of science, Shils draws on Thomas Kuhn’s concept of paradigm shift; he (1981, pp. 105-106) then equates the “founder of a great religion” with the “great scientist”:

Both are said to annul the tradition which has been presented to them. Both are aware of the inadequacy of what has been received and they aim to supplant the inadequate account by one which is fundamentally more adequate.

In fact, in the case of religion, the followers of the founder of a religion are more anti-tradition than the followers of the new scientific ideas of a scientist (Shils, 1981, p. 106). Shils (1981, p. 22) further explains: “The confidence in the powers of reason and science became a tradition accepted with the same unquestioning confidence as the belief in the Judeo-Christian accounts of the origins and meaning of human existence had been earlier.”

In the language of the theory advanced in this study and keeping the metaphor of destruction used by Giddens and Shils, it is not that modernity destroys tradition (as argued by Giddens and Boyer) or that it fails to do so, but that the driver of modernity (the communicative reflexivity of agents) destroys a tradition only to introduce a new one, the traditionalized content of what was once a modernity. Modernity and tradition are different not in terms of essence or kind but in the stages of the ‘life cycle’ of the same thing, just as the new and the old are different states of the ‘life cycle’ of the same thing. To use a thought experiment, a group of humans existing in a certain space and time invented practice X. At this stage, practice X is an innovation. It is modern. This modern innovation made the life of these humans easier and better, for instance, so they conserved it and handed it down to their children, who are now born into it, take it for granted, and live by it. So too did their grandchildren. Now, this practice X is no longer modern or new. Its essence is the same, but it is now a tradition. Thus, logically modernity is not separate from tradition. They are different stages of the life cycle of the same thing, but crucially also is that modernity inevitably precedes tradition since just as something cannot be old without first being new, something cannot be traditional without first being modern, not the other way around as the current paradigm states.

In this section, I have presented two different approaches to the tradition/modernity dichotomy and have taken a stand that helped clear the way for the development of the theory I suggest in Chapter 4.

3.3.2 Religion/secularity

In this section, I problematize the dichotomy of religion/secularity. I draw on a line of scholarship that casts doubt on the legitimacy of the category of ‘religion’ (Asad, 1993; Bell, 2006; Fitzgerald, 1997, 2003; Josephson, 2012, 2013; Nongbri, 2013; Riesebrodt, 2003; Shaw, 1990). Nongbri’s (2013) *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*, my main source, offers a good synthesis of this trend. I start with the conventional approach to the dichotomy that underpins current theories of modernity and then introduce the approach underpinning the theory I suggest in Chapter 4.

The approaches to religion advanced by Durkheim, Geertz, Bellah, and Habermas are examples of this problematic usage of the category ‘religion’, that arguably fails to comprehend the phenomenon in question. Durkheim refrained from defining religion, but he understands it as social solidarity and community spirit (Christiano & Swatos, 2000, pp. 9–10). Geertz understands religion as a system of symbols that together offer an imagined reality that, while it co-exists with the pragmatics of everyday life, is distinct from it, so much so that to have a religion is to step into another world to live in (Geertz, 1973, pp. 87, 90). Bellah builds on Geertz’s understanding of religion in his *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011, pp. xiv–xvii). For him (Bellah, 2011, pp. 44–117), religion involves ritualistic practices that have their roots in “animal play” or more concretely mammalian “play.” Religious ritual is that type of play the practitioners of a religion engage in when they secure the pragmatics of daily life necessary for animal survival and join the “other world” of religious ritual as rooted in animal play. Habermas has a similar understanding but stresses that religion is “limited in the degree of its freedom of communication” and thus not in good harmony with the Enlightenment-introduced communicative rationality and the open public sphere it is supposed to regulate; secular society evolved from traditional society in that the authority of an achieved consensus is replacing the authority of the holy (Habermas, 1987[1981], p. 77; Habermas, 1992b, p. 233; as cited in Furseth, 2011, pp. 98–99).

What these influential scholars of secularity and religion have in common is the taken-for-grantedness with which they use the two categories of ‘religion’ and ‘secularity’. To counter this, arguably, facile approach, it is important to re-examine “how we have come to

talk about ‘secular’ versus ‘religious’ at all” (Nongbri, 2013, pp. 4–5). Nongbri (2013, p. 5) specifies that “these two words grew out of Latin predecessors, and the ancient words did point to a dichotomy, but not what is typically understood as the modern secular/religious dichotomy.” Nongbri’s argument is not that the dichotomy is a Christian feature that is wrongly imposed on other cultures, as some critics of secularism argue. Even in Christian theology, the dichotomy did not have the modern meaning that was politically added to it in modern times to carve out a private sphere for religion. “These words described different kinds of Christian clergy, with *religiosus* describing members of monastic orders and *saecularis* describing Christian clergy not in a monastic order,” specifies Nongbri (2013, p. 5). This applies also to ancient statements that some use to highlight the religious/secular divide such as “Render unto Caesar . . .” This pushes him to ask how modern people came to view the world “as divided between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ in the modern sense” (2013, p. 5).

One of his influences in answering this question is Talal Asad’s work. As Asad (2001, p. 221) affirms: “I would urge that ‘religion’ is a modern concept not because it is reified but because it has been linked to its Siamese twin ‘secularism.’” Asad argues that the ideology of secularism tells us that there exists religion in the form of a plurality of religions, and then in the modern time religion became private; secularity was thus born in the modern age as a neutral state of affairs that safeguards the peaceful co-existence of the diversity of religions, a state of affair whose roots some trace to Christian theology. All religions are naturally bound to occupy their natural place of the private realm of faith, says secularism. Instead, Asad (2001, p. 221) argues that, like theist religion, secularism is a set of beliefs,

whose function has been to try to guide that rearticulation and to define ‘religions’ in the plural as a species of (non-rational) belief. [...] Secularist ideology, I would suggest, tries to fix permanently the social and political place of ‘religion’.

The workings of secularism as a belief system or ideology is that “only by compelling religion, as concept and practice, to remain within prescribed limits can the transcendent power of the secular state secure liberty of belief and expression” (Asad, 2001, p. 221). Asad’s aim here, and my aim as well, is not to critique secularism but to show through the metaphor of the Siamese twins that religion and secularism as categories are conjoined twins whose birth happened simultaneously for political purposes during the rise of the Western modern nationalist state.

Drawing on Asad and others, Nongbri (2013, pp. 2–3) succinctly summarizes the argument I attempt to borrow here:

[I]t has become clear that the isolation of something called “religion” as a sphere of life ideally separated from politics, economics, and science is not a universal feature of human history. In fact, in the broad view of human cultures, it is a strikingly odd way of conceiving the world. ... [T]he act of distinguishing between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ is a recent development. Ancient people simply did not carve up the world in that way. In the academic field of religious studies, the claim that religion is a modern invention is not really news.

The idea I am trying to arrive at here is that like the phenomenon the modern concept of ‘religion’ tries to describe, secularism too is a set of beliefs, or to use Habermasian words for this purpose, it is a set of validity claims to truth and rightness, that was born out of the modern nation–state.

Having established that secularity is not some neutral state of affair, and that religion is a modern concept, thereby problematizing the religious/secular distinction, I would like to further take a stand vis-à-vis the content of Western modernity. At this point, I draw on scholarship that uses the concept of religion to explain the content of this Western modernity, (secular) nationalism. I keep an element of Greetz’ definition of religion, which Bellah shares, which is that belief in gods or God is not central to the definition of religion; one can speak of non-theist religions (Bellah, 2011, p. xiv; Geertz, 1973, p. 90). Now it is easier to see “religion and nationalism as analogous [...] by simply characterizing nationalism as a religion” (Brubaker, 2015, p. 103). Hayes (1926, p. 106; quoted in Hart, 2000, p. 40) argues that:

[T]he role of the modern state is primarily spiritual, even other-worldly, and its driving force is its collective faith, a faith in its mission and destiny, a faith in things unseen, a faith that would move mountains. Nationalism is sentimental, emotional, and inspirational.

He expands on the idea in a book format by the title *Nationalism: A Religion* wherein he affirms that “nationalism, like any religion, calls into play not simply the will, but the intellect, the imagination, and the emotions” (Hayes, 1960, p. 164).

Hayes wrote about nationalism as a religion in a negative connotation, perhaps owing to the book’s context of the Two World Wars. Writing in the turn of the millennium, Smith

(2003) explains nationalism as a religion without the negative connotation and with more sophistication (Brubaker, 2015, p. 103). In his *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Smith (2003) argues that “religious sanctity, the category of the sacred in traditional religions, has become transmuted in the nationalist belief-system into a secular authenticity.” He (2003, p. 40) adds that nationalism is “‘religion of the people’, a religion that is equally binding, ritually repetitive, and collectively enthusing—the defining qualities of all religions, in Durkheim’s view—as any earlier religion had been” whose aim is “an inner-worldly salvation.” He arrives at the conclusion that “the nation is best regarded as a sacred communion of the people, devoted to the cult of authenticity and the ideals of national autonomy, unity, and identity in an historic homeland” (2003, p. 254).

Anderson in his famous analysis of nationalism makes a similar analogy between theist religion and secular nationalism. He observes that the 18th-century disintegration of Christian paradise and the absurdity of salvation has made the transformation of human fatality into continuity only more necessary, not less as was expected. What came to fill the void that “the ebbing of religious belief” left has been nationalism (Anderson, 2006, p. 11).

The aim of this section is to disagree with the theories of modernity that take the categories of religion and secularity at face value, seeing the rise of secularity and the privatization of religion as central to what modernity is. This is done by problematizing the distinction of religious/secular. It is argued that religion is not a phenomenon separate from other spheres of life and dominated the time prior to Western modernity but came to occupy a less active and public position with the rise of secularism. Rather, religion and secularism are Siamese twins of modern invention. I further discussed how the phenomenon that supposedly came to replace theist religion, secularism, regardless of the name it receives, is not a neutral state of affairs but shares the same inner workings of that which it distances itself from, religion, that nationalism or secular nationalism is too a religion, whose institutions and emotional rituals came to replace Christian state institutions and emotional rituals.

I would like to end the section by taking a stand vis-à-vis secularism. The intention behind drawing on the scholarship that sees secularism as a kind of religion is not to denigrate it but to try to arrive at an adequate understanding of what it is, which then makes it possible to understand how it ought to be. I share Talal Asad’s view that, quoting Connolly’s *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (1999, p. 19), “secularism needs refashioning not elimination.” Asad (2001, p. 222) advocates embracing the virtues of secularism while redressing its vices. Its vices manifest in responding dogmatically to the various “antiseccularist tendencies” across

the contemporary world. Instead, the secularism needed is one that can tolerate mutual engagement with the religious that human interdependence requires.

3.3.3 Collectivism/individualism, capitalism and rationality

Another dichotomy underpinning theories of modernity is collectivism/individualism. It is the claim that social life before Western modernity was collectivist, and western modernity brought individualism first to the West and then to the world. The argument I make in this section is that collectivism is present in modern societies as does individualism, and individualism is not a Western invention and was present in non-Western societies prior to Western modernity as did collectivism.

In *The Theft of History*, Goody (2006, p. 240) lists individualism as one of the virtues that the West stole and monopolized. One problematic argument has it that the rise of the novel and the autobiography are examples of the rise of individualism. A stronger feature of individualism is the rise of the capitalist spirit of entrepreneurship. The virtuous appeal of the claim of the rise of individualism in the West lies in its associated virtues of the freedom of personal choice and the individual responsibility that comes with it unlike bowing to the collective will. This freedom of choice manifests in all aspects of life from education to the economy, and the nuclear family, all believed to be European. It is a notion that conjures the image of the self-sufficient individual charting his life course against the world as in the European mythical heroes of Robinson Crusoe and Faustus (Goody, 2006, p. 257).

It is especially strong in neoliberal imagination that the economy rests on the shoulders of individual entrepreneurs (Goody, 1996, p. 120; 2006, p. 257). In this vein, Margaret Thatcher's following remark is often invoked that "no such thing as society, only individual men and women." As far as capitalism is concerned, being one of the problematic explanations of the rise of modernity in Europe, Goody joins scholars who trace its roots to the Bronze Age. In his words, "as Braudel realized, 'capitalism' in a broad sense (mercantile exchange) developed in the Bronze Age and continued to do so right up to the appearance of its industrial form" (Goody, 2010a, pp. 8, 112). Goody (2006, p. 257) moves on to show that the values of individualism, freedom, and equality are not confined to Europe.

Western scholarship does not claim ownership of the value of individualism for its own sake. It is not any individual but a rational individual. The backdrop of the theft of the value of individualism is the theft of the value of reason. Goody's (1996, pp. 4–5) interpretation of the ethnocentrism of Weber, his predecessors, and followers is that while

Hegel saw the inferiority of the non-West as natural, a bluntly racist idea, Weber and his followers gave it a cultural interpretation seeing Europe as possessing special kinds of authority, rationality, and economic ethic that gave rise to capitalism while caste, kinship, and religious fervor stalled the East. These scholars wrongly trace these European virtues to Greece and Rome. The story has it that the post-Renaissance's drive towards rationality in knowledge and economy gave rise to the Scientific Revolution, the Age of Reason, and the Enlightenment, culminating in industrialization and other aspects of modernization (Goody, 1996, p. 5). Concerning science, Feist (2008, p. 187) stresses that "science in its barest form involves pattern recognition, causal thinking, hypothesis formation, and hypothesis testing. All humans in all cultures do these things and have in some form for millions of years." As to reason in general, in the assessment of Findlay and O'Rourke (2009, pp. 355–356), "the eminent cultural anthropologist Jack Goody (1996) has submitted Weber's entire doctrine of a lack of rationality in the East to a devastating critique."

Instead of the theory of the European miracle, Goody's (2010a, pp. 8, 113) project explains the Eurasian miracle as being built on the thesis that an alternation of advantage existed between post-Bronze Age societies in Eurasia, stemming from the Bronze Age of the Near East being a shared origin of the East and the West.

As far as the theory I suggest is concerned, it subscribes to Habermas' intersubjectivist paradigm. It is a reaction to dissatisfaction with the philosophy of conspicuousness that furnishes the idea of individualism (Finlayson, 2005, pp. 28–31; Maccarini & Prandini, 2010, p. 95; Thomassen, 2010b, p. 588). Habermas argues that the process of individualization is necessarily expressed through linguistically mediated interactions, giving the ego an intersubjective core (Habermas, 1992a; as cited in Maccarini & Prandini, 2010, p. 95).

3.4 Critique of contemporary theories of and approaches to modernity

Contemporary social science inherited a preoccupation with modernity from classical sociology, especially the works of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, who each had a slightly different interpretation of its workings (Dawson, 2013, pp. 15–16; Giddens, 1990, p. 11). In this section, I critique postmodernism for being doubly Eurocentric, contemporary theories of modernity for being Eurocentric, and postcolonial responses for being semi-Eurocentric.³

³ I do not cover classical theories for space limitations and because they have been superseded by the contemporary ones. I cover Postmodernism since it takes a stand vis-à-vis modernity.

3.4.1 Postmodernism: Doubly Eurocentric?

Big social changes swept the mid-to-late 20th century, including decolonization, the Cold War and its aftermath, and intensified globalization. For many social science and humanities scholars, these marked the start of a new era. Different scholars gave it different designations, such as the post-industrial society, the consumer society, the information society, and the post-capitalist society (Giddens, 1990, pp. 1–2). Postmodernity is perhaps the most radical interpretation of this era.

Postmodernism's announcement of the death of modernity has been strongly criticized by those who take issue with its attempt to lay to rest the Enlightenment values and the project of modernity, including Giddens, Habermas, Bauman, and others, each giving the new era a different designation that suggests not a beyond but a continuation of its project in a way that comes to terms with the naivety of the Enlightenment. These designations include Habermas's "unfinished project of modernity" (1981) as joined by Benhabib (1995), Giddens' late or radicalized modernity (1990), and Bauman's "liquid modernity" (2000). In this section, I build on these critiques of postmodernism to argue that in their relativist championing of supposed cultural differences, the postmodernists assume the Western origins of modernity, and by extension the agency to change, thereby partaking in the theft of the agency to modernize. Admittedly postmodernism brought much needed philosophical and social critique; yet I argue that one of its vices is its double Eurocentrism, first by wrongly assuming the Westernness of modernization-affecting agency and other human values, and second by denying non-Western cultures the ability to exercise agency and partake in related values under the banner of celebrating their alleged cultural difference.

Postmodernism is a general intellectual movement that has influenced the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences. Any attempt to define it runs the risk of misrepresenting it, but its vanguards share some intellectual tendencies. Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty, among others, have often been considered the spokespersons of the movement, their poststructuralism, anti-universalism, anti-foundationalism, subjectivism, and anti-rationalism. Jean Francois Lyotard was one of the main proponents of the movement and the popularizer of the term "the postmodern" through his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984). Lyotard's characterization of the postmodern condition is that it involves "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1984, p. xxiv). The main metanarrative is "the Enlightenment narrative" which encompasses the Marxist and Hegelian metanarratives (1984, pp. xxiii–xxiv). The problem of this metanarrative is the naivety with which it is

pursued. It is that, hinting at Habermas, “the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end—universal peace” as regulated by “the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds” (1984, pp. xxiii–xxiv). The “beginning” of “the new language game of science” for Lyotard was Plato (1984, p. 28). Lyotard’s critique has the aim of “wag[ing] a war on totality [...] [and] activat[ing] the differences” (1984, p. 82). This aim of postmodernism as charted by Lyotard and others is further espoused by his followers. The editor of *The Cultural Studies Reader* introducing Lyotard’s essay “Defining the Postmodern” understands the postmodern condition as the recognition that:

[T]he [universalist] ideas of progress, rationality, and scientific objectivity which legitimated Western modernity are no longer acceptable, in large part because they take no account of cultural differences. (Lyotard, 1999, p. 142)

The double Eurocentrism in Lyotard’s reasoning is, first, that rational and scientific thinking is essentially Western beginning with Plato and, second, it is essentially alien to non-Western cultures. What Lyotard proposes is not to expect the non-West to join these supposedly essentially-Western values, so that non-Westerners are expected to remain who they are, non-rational, non-scientific, and unchanging. The difference between the Eurocentrism of Weber and other modernist scholars and the postmodernists is that while both the modernist and the postmodernists agree that these values are essentially Western, the former believe in their universal appeal while the latter see them as essentially Western and irrelevant to the non-West.

On this topic of postmodernism’s relativism, I subscribe to Benhabib’s (1995, p. 242) assessment:

Here are all the weapons in the arsenal of the cultural relativist: the assumption that reflexivity of cultures and the drive toward legitimation are foreign, ‘western’ elements; that the western epistemologist must solidarize with the ‘others’ by assuming the attitude of a detached and bemused observer, etc.

As I have discussed earlier, for all the virtues of postmodernism, I largely subscribe to its critique by Habermas (1981, 1987), Benhabib (1995), Bauman (2000), and Giddens (1990), which, for space limitations, I cannot cover here.

3.4.2 Critique of contemporary theories of modernity

Several other social scientists and philosophers shared the postmodernists' call for a new way of making sense of the new era but considered the changes a heightened phase of the same era of modernity. They did recognize the problems of early Enlightenment thinking but refused to lay the worldview to rest in the way that the postmodernists attempted. This dissatisfaction with both the classical theories of modernity and postmodernism encouraged this camp of scholars to revive the theorizing of modernity (Giddens, 1991, p. 1; Heaphy, 2007, p. 1; Turner, 1999, pp. 18–19).

The main attempts at a new understanding of modernity in contemporary social science include Habermas's "modernity [as] an unfinished project" (1981); Giddens' "late modernity," also called "radicalized modernity," "reflexive modernity," "high modernity," or "post-traditional society" (1990, 1991, 1994); Beck's "reflexive modernization" or "risk society [as] a new modernity" (1992, 1994); Appadurai's "modernity at large" (1996); and Bauman's "liquid modernity" (2000). Other theories include Dussel's "trans-modernity" (2002); Dirlik's globalizing modernity (2003); Mouzelis' "non-Eurocentric [modernity] [...] [that] first appeared in Western Europe" (2008, p. 156); Rosa's "social acceleration" as "a new theory of modernity" (2013); and Archer's "morphogenic society" as a potential replacement of "late modernity" (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017a; Maccarini, 2013).

In the following, I limit my coverage to the theories of Habermas, Dussel, and Giddens, given their pioneering conception compared to arguably later restatements of the same ideas.

Habermas's unfinished project of modernity

Perhaps the intellectual position Habermas is most famous for is his defense of the Enlightenment and its application in modernity at a time of great skepticism towards it from those Habermas calls the traditionalists, the anti-modernists, and the postmodernists. This defense is articulated succinctly in his essay "Modernity: An Unfinished Project" (1981) and more elaborately in his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (1987).

Habermas' defense of modernity involves a critical appreciation of its good and dark sides. Dissatisfied with the diagnosis offered by the traditionalists, the postmodernists, and the anti-modernists, Habermas suggests distinguishing cultural modernization from social modernization. He ascribes modernity's pathologies to social modernization, which is the encroachment of the instrumental and strategic actions of the market and the state on the

communicative action of the lifeworld. This in turn leads to pathologies that neoconservatives wrongly attribute to modernity itself, such as hedonism, narcissism, loss of meaning, anomie, and personality disorders. The problem with cultural modernity is that expert cultures have dominated increasingly differentiated value spheres (science, morality, and art) under the logic of different validity claims (truth, rightness, and authenticity). These expert cultures have become increasingly cut off from laypeople, added to “the relentless erosion of traditions,” leading to cultural pathologies that Habermas calls “desolation” and “cultural impoverishment” (d'Entreves, 1981, pp. 3–4). Commenting on Habermas’ assessment of modernity, d'Entreves (1981, pp. 3–4) concludes that:

Faced with the aporias of cultural modernity, a number of critics have decided to give up the entire project of modernity by recommending either a return to premodernity (neo-Aristotelianism in Germany, some forms of communitarianism in the USA), or a plunge into a technocratic postmodernity (neoconservatives), or an escape into antimodernity (philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Bataille, Foucault, Derrida).

Against these, Habermas argues that the aporias of modernity can be addressed by challenging modernity on its own terms (d'Entreves, 1981, p. 4). These aporias can be traced back to the encroachment of money and power with their instrumental and strategic reasoning on the communicative reasoning of the lifeworld, which leads Habermas to call for the liberation of the lifeworld from its colonization by the state and the economy. As to the impoverishment of cultural modernity, the differentiated spheres of science, morality, and art expressed in the form of expert cultures should be relinked with the communicative praxis of the lifeworld.

This study is much indebted to Habermasian thought in general and to his “theory of modernity,” as Finlayson (2005, p. 62) rightly calls it, in particular. Yet, his thought is most useful to my study when coupled with insights from other scholars that remedy the weakness of his work. My approach to the dichotomies discussed earlier in this chapter applies to Habermas’ ideas. To avoid repeating the discussion of the dichotomies, I take one example of Eurocentrism in Habermas. For Habermas, communicative rationality and the public sphere where it plays out emerged in 18th-century Europe (Finlayson, 2005, p. 10; Thomassen, 2010a, p. 8) culminating into secular morality, all being the legacy of Judeo-Christianity (Finlayson, 2005, pp. 67–68). Habermas takes the categories of religion and secularity at face value and with them those of tradition and the irrationality of the East and the rationality of

the West, making his project complicit in the West's theft of history (Goody, 1996, 2006, 2010a, 2010c).

Habermasian insights are most useful for a cosmopolitan critical social theory when coupled with the revised understandings of these dichotomies. Thinking against Habermas with Habermas is needed to make Habermasian insights suited for a cosmopolitan critical social theory.

Dussel's trans-modernity

Interested in the problem of Eurocentrism in theories of modernity, Dussel attempts to "radicalize some theoretical options" concerning the origin of modernity by using the idea of "trans-modernity" (2002, p. 221). He (2002, p. 227) critically appropriates the concept of "world system" to argue that the beginning of modernity lies in the need for civilizations to respond to the "modern challenge," a response headed by Spain, Portugal, China, and Hindustan, which dominated the world system until the 18th century. The industrial revolution that followed the Enlightenment helped Western Europe to catch up (Dussel, 2002, p. 230). This approach allows Dussel (2002, p. 221) to conclude that the prominence of Europe is just two centuries old; as the newly invented television spread, Euro-American global cultural influence rose, but is just few decades old. This view is also possible because Dussel objects to seeing the Enlightenment as the crucible of modernity, which is rather the capitalist world system of the 15th century (2002, p. 223).

In addition to the problematic approach of restricting modernity to economy, even if one accepts it, it is factually inaccurate. For this claim, I draw on the collaborative edited book *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (Frank & Gills, 1996). It aims to pose "a more humanocentric challenge to Eurocentrism," arguing that "the existence of the same world system in which we live stretches back at least 5,000 years" (Frank & Gills, 1996, p. 3). Dussel seems to be part of the camp of scholars who regard the modern world system as different from previous world systems in terms of capital accumulation being its *differentiae specifica*. My reference argues that "this same process of capital accumulation has played a, if not the, central role in the world system for several millennia" (Frank & Gills, 1996, pp. 3–4). Dussel's conception of modernity highlights the problem of Eurocentrism in theories of modernity but arguably does not provide a better alternative.

Giddens' theory of modernity: Structuration theory at play

Giddens applies his understanding of structure and agency and time–space transformation as outlined in his structuration theory in providing a better understanding of modernity than did classical sociology (Elliott, 2010, p. 91). The modernity that classical sociology examined was different than the modernity of contemporary sociology in terms of scale, which is captured by the modified terms “high modernity” and “radicalized modernity.” He criticizes the classical theories of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber for being one-dimensional and inadequate for comprehending the changes of the new century. Giddens' approach (1976) prioritizes the nature of modernity, and that nature helps illuminate its institutions.

Using a dualistic conception of structure and agency, he saw much emphasis on structure in these works and less so on agency. To remedy this and other issues, Giddens (1984) introduced structuration theory. It has two main concepts: the duality of structure and agency and time–space distanciation (Bryant & Jary, 1991, p. 18). Structuration theory argues that structure and agency are co-constitutive in that structure shapes agents but also agents shape structure (Giddens, 1984, p. 25).

The three sources of modernity's dynamism under the discontinuist approach

The discontinuist approach to understanding modernity

One of the characteristics of theories of modernity is that they split human history in two halves, before and after the emergence of modernity in Europe in the 17th century. Giddens pays special attention to this “discontinuist” approach or “the discontinuities of modernity” (1990, p. 1; 1991, p. 14). He distances his theory from previous discontinuities in human history such as the transition from tribal to agrarian social organization, expressing his disinterest in such discontinuities and his interest instead in “accentuat[ing] that particular discontinuity, or set of discontinuities, associated with the modern period” (1984, p. 239). This seems though like an ahistorical bias towards the present and perhaps a facile way to avoid dealing with the issue of the theory explaining other discontinuities in human history, so much so that the theory of an unprecedented modernity cannot be sustained.

The discontinuist approach is infamous among scholars who assume the existence of other discontinuities in human history and those who assume the existence of much continuity throughout history and the existence of both discontinuity and continuity across human history. Giddens states that his source of inspiration for the discontinuist approach is

Ernest Gellner. The approach boils down to the idea that “human history is not, to use Gellner’s term, a ‘world-growth story’” (Giddens, 1984, p. 237). Reading past this statement, one understands that with this they both mean that human history is a West-growth story. Human history witnessed scant progress that Giddens describes it as being in “a stable state” until this pattern is broken by the West’s rise to world pre-eminence, a phenomenon which gives quite a different quality from anything before to Western modernity, stretching through a small period of some two or three centuries (Giddens, 1984, p. 239). Having made this judgement, Giddens moves on to limit the business of sociology to explaining this discontinuity. In another source, he acknowledges that it is his desire to focus on this discontinuity “whatever continuities may exist with what went before” (Giddens, 1982, p. 107; quoted in Kilminster, 1998, p. 124), suggesting that “he is simply wanting to privilege discontinuity, as a preference, for unstated reasons” (Kilminster, 1998, p. 124). Kilminster argues that Giddens’ commitment to discontinuity is much more than an empirical argument; it is also moral and emotional. It comes from his leftist conviction that there needs to be a break with the past. Giddens is contributing to making the discontinuous modern world place a caesura upon the preceding era, which it seems inevitably to destroy (Kilminster, 1998, p. 125). Giddens sets his approach against that of evolutionary theories of social change. Kilminster argues that Giddens overlooks that long-term developmental change can be studied in non-evolutionist ways. Kilminster (1998, p. 126) adds that social development implicates both continuity and discontinuity without the need for inevitability or teleology.

Giddens further defends the approach of the Great Divide between the pre-modern and the modern by specifying three differences: the pace of change, the scope of change, and the nature of modern institutions. The pace of change argument has it that the era of modernity brought about a pace of change that is distinct from earlier eras to the extent that change has become “extreme.” The scope of change refers to the extent of the spread of social change that it “crash[es] across virtually the whole of the earth’s surface.” The nature of modern institutions is so that “some modern social forms *are simply not found in prior historical periods*” (Giddens, 1990, p. 6, emphasis added). These are the modern city, the nation–state, and capitalism. I have covered earlier arguments that the core of modern capitalism continues from capitalism’s ancient forms (see section 3.4.2).

On the nation–state, I draw on studies that emphasize that the difference between ancient and modern states is not big enough to see them as essentially different. Bederman (2001, pp. 16–21) provides a good overview of the controversy on the relevance of the concept of State and State system to antiquity. He hints at the issue of Eurocentrism in the

denial of the existence of the state and international law in antiquity by those who think that these are “the unique product of the modern, Enlightenment mind” (2001, p. 17). To avoid going into the details of this controversy, I subscribe to the view of those scholars who argue that “ancient States were sovereign and territorial, and they embraced community as the basis of a peaceful, international social order” (Bederman, 2001, p. 18). They were “polities that could justly be called States in ancient times,” added to the argument that the rise of urbanization, population expansion, and agricultural economy best accounts for “the development of nation–states in antiquity;” thus, many contemporary scholars have agreed that both the State and international relations existed in ancient times (Bederman, 2001, pp. 20, 21).

The shaky idea that “nations are both modern and initially arose in Europe” is still influential, though, and revisionist studies continue to be published that “draw [...] attention to evidence that indicates that nations are found in antiquity and the Middle Ages, and throughout the world” and “long before the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) and the French Revolution”, as does Grosby in his *Nations and Nationalism in World History* (2022, p. 118). Grosby (2022, p. 28) sees the claim that “nations can only be modern” as a kind of “historiographical prejudice that ignores too much evidence.” Rather, he (2022, p. 23) argues for the use of “nation” as a “transhistorical category” (2022, p. 29) in which it is defined as “a social relation of a relatively extensive, yet bounded territorial community of kinship.” It is wrong to assume that loyalty of the individual to a nation can only exist in some form of liberal democracy under the category of citizenship since such loyalty existed in antiquity (Grosby, 2022, p. 29).

As such, those institutions of capitalism and the nation–state that Giddens casts as essentially modern are ancient. Differences do exist between their ancient and contemporary forms, but they are of degree not kind.

The three sources of modernity’s dynamism: Time–space distancing, disembedding, and reflexivity

A proper understanding of modernity, argues Giddens, has to account for its nature before its institutions because its nature underpins its institutions. Modernity’s nature is its dynamism, which comes from three sources: time–space distancing, disembedding, and reflexivity (Giddens, 1990, pp. 17–54). Time–space distancing refers to the stretching of time and space across wider scopes in a way that connects absence and presence (Giddens,

1990, pp. 14, 53). The mechanisms that “lift out” social relations from their contexts and re-enact them across vast stretches are referred to as disembedding mechanisms, such as the abstract systems of expert systems and symbolic tokens (Giddens, 1990, pp. 22, 28, 53). Expert systems are the knowledge generated by the natural, social, and human sciences and disseminated to laypeople. An example of symbolic tokens is money; they flow in space across localities (Giddens, 1990, p. 28). Giddens highlights the centrality of the concept of disembedding by putting it in headings and summaries used in *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), but inside the text is its counterpart of re-embedding, which is the re-enactment of once disembedded social relations to local time and place (Giddens, 1990, pp. 79–80). This applies also to the concept of distanciation or separation, whose counterpart is recombination of time–space (Giddens, 1991, pp. 16–17). To further clarify his understanding of time–space transformation, he adds the concept of the emptying of time and space. Time becomes empty of locality when it is detached from place. The mechanical clock for instance has emptied time from space and made it abstract, argues Giddens. The emptying of space refers to the reduction of the privileging of local space owing to globalization as reflected in the use of the global map, such that local space is no longer privileged, adds Giddens (1991, pp. 16–17).

Giddens’ (1991, pp. 23–27) understanding of time and space is further clarified when he discusses the mediation of experience. He starts with the idea that almost all human experience is mediated, and memory and language are the primary media, language being the original mode of time–space distanciation. Giddens’ commitment to the discontinuist approach made him go to great lengths, using six concepts, in his clarification of the transformation of time space, that is, to sustain the idea that an unprecedented form of the transformation of time–space happened in 17th-century Europe. This claim resurfaces in his discussion of the working of globalization; in a blunt, triumphalist, Eurocentric tone, he (1994, p. 96) claims that:

The first phase of globalization was plainly governed primarily by the expansion of the West, and institutions which originated in the West. No other civilization made anything like as pervasive an impact upon the world, or shaped it so much in its own image.

Similar statements run across Giddens’ work, perhaps a result of, in the words of Goody (2010b, p. 103), his approach of a “long-established dichotomous view of tradition and modernity” and, in the words of Smith (1982; as quoted in Jary, 1991, p. 158), a “ruthless

dichotomous logic.” Writing on globalization a decade and a half after Giddens, archaeologist Jennings (2010, p. 4) adds globalization to other stolen values and institutions by the West and argues that it is false to consider globalization “a Western creation of the last five hundred years.” Building on Goody’s work (2006), he (2010, p. 4) elaborates that “Goody does not consider globalization in his book, but globalization just might be the greatest theft of history,” that is, “[Western] modernity’s greatest theft.” To argue that today’s globalization is “just the latest in a series of globalizing eras in human history,” Jennings (2010, p. 4) examines the Uruk, Mississippian, and Wari civilizations as cases of previous phases of globalization.

That globalization is a Western creation of the modern world is important for Giddens’ overall theory of modernity, hence his placement of the examination of time and space at the very core of contemporary social theory (Urry, 1991, p. 160). Globalization is a certain configuration of time and space; in Giddens’ understanding, it involves time–space distancing. It is the stretching of societies over certain spans of time and space, such that different regions and contexts become connected across the globe (Giddens, 1990, pp. 63–64). In conditions of globalization, that is, time–space distancing, social action growingly depends upon interactions with actors absent in time–space (Urry, 1991, p. 165). Time–space transformation and modernity have “intimate connections” (Giddens, 1990, p. 17). The link between the exact forms of this transformation, called time–space distancing and disembedding, and the third element of modernity, reflexivity, is that the first two prompt or cause reflexivity. Reflexivity is the exercise of agency resulting from reflection in light of incoming information (Giddens, 1990, pp. 17–54; 1991, p. 19). A history with a series of globalizations is also a history with a series of the occurrence of change–affecting reflexivity, of social change, of agency, of modernities, an approach that contradicts Giddens’ theory of modernity.

The third and central source of modernity’s dynamism: Reflexivity

Time–space distancing and disembedding are the two sources behind modernity’s dynamism as they prompt the dynamic core of modernity: reflexivity (Giddens, 1991, pp. 15–17, 20). Giddens (1991, p. 20) sums up the implicit causal relation between these three elements and thus the logic of modernity as follows:

Modernity is essentially a post-traditional order. The transformation of time and space, coupled with the disembedding mechanisms, propel social life away from the

hold of preestablished precepts or practices. This is the context of the thoroughgoing reflexivity which is the third major influence on the dynamism of modern institutions.

He (1990, p. 38; 1991, p. 20) defines reflexivity as “susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge.”

The distinction between the reflexivity of the pre-modern time and that of originally-Western modernity is that in pre-modern civilizations reflexivity was faint, “largely limited to the reinterpretation and clarification of tradition” (Giddens, 1990, pp. 36–37). Modern reflexivity has “a different character” in that it involves “system production,” meaning modern reflexivity involves change-affecting agency (Giddens, 1990, p. 38). This information comes from expert systems, the natural and social sciences, but social science has a special relation to modernity. This is because while natural science generates knowledge about nature, social science generates knowledge about society that leads to “the chronic revision of social practices in the light of knowledge about those practices” (Giddens, 1990, p. 40) to the extent that “institutional reflexivity became the main enemy of tradition” (Giddens, 1994, p. 93). Modern reflexivity is thus an exercise of change-affecting agency. Giddens implies that scientific knowledge is Western, the social change it causes is Western, and so progressive change is originally Western. It might be true that contemporary knowledge institutions are more sophisticated than anything humanity has created, but they resulted from cumulative historical learning and had their roots in the East (refer to the next Chapters). Also, ancient societies had their own expert systems providing new information causing change. Innovative social changes in the past can equally be explained with structuration theory and reflexivity. It is again an issue of degree not of kind.

Reading Giddens’ understanding of all that precedes Western modernity, one gets the image that change was absent, and change-affecting agency is thus a Western invention. The reader might wonder why only the West invented the agency of change-affecting reflexivity, and the plausible but implicit explanation in the theories of modernity of Western scholars might point in the direction of racist ‘science’ that claims the West has a cognitive advantage. Unlike bluntly racist literature, it is not stated explicitly in these theories of modernity. I am developing here Goody’s comment on Giddens’ dichotomous understanding of change-generating reflexivity as absent in the East and the past:

This notion [Giddens’] of ‘How Natives Think’ is even cruder than the much-criticized approach of Lévy–Bruhl since it no longer enquires into differences but is

based purely on the supposed absence of reflexivity, *of thinking*. Pre-moderns are seen not as active agents but as passive actors, who accept what culture hands down to them as tradition. (Goody, 2010b, p. 103, emphasis added)

This exaggerated image of constant change in so-called post-traditional contemporary society leads Giddens (1990, p. 53) to equate it with riding a “careering juggernaut.” Indeed, there has been enormous social change in the last centuries at a scale that is perhaps larger than before, but, disagreeing with Giddens, Jennings (2010, p. 32) comments in his study of ancient globalizations that “the feeling of being trapped on a runaway world may be nothing new,” and that “there have been other eras of great social change that were triggered by surging interactions across large parts of the Earth.”

3.4.3 Critique of semi-Eurocentric theories of modernity: Postcolonial multiple modernities

Classical and contemporary theories of modernity received much criticism from postmodernist and postcolonial scholars who attempt to pluralize modernity (Delanty, 2006, p. 266; Mouzelis, 2008, p. 141). Sharing a rejection of Eurocentrism, these approaches could be classified into those with objectivist and relativist underpinnings. Objectivist approaches water down the Eurocentrism in theories of (Western) modernity while recognizing or implying its superiority. Relativist approaches can be positioned in the extreme side of the critique of Eurocentrism, starting from the premise that the values of liberal democracy, rationality, individualism, human rights, and secularism are essentially Western; to consider them universal is a homogenizing, imperial gesture (Delanty, 2006, pp. 267–268; Mouzelis, 2008, pp. 146–147).

Göle’s paper “Snapshots of Islamic Modernities” (2000) exemplifies the relativist approach of multiple modernities. She opens her essay with the acknowledgement that thinking about modernity in the plural necessarily introduces “a relativistic conceptualization as between different experiences” (2000, p. 91). She aims to examine how Western modernity is reacted to in its “margins” and joins “the project of multiple modernities” as a challenge “to the monocivilizational narratives of ‘Western modernity’” (2000, p. 91). The margins Göle (2000, p. 93) examines are in the Islamic World, and the relation is between Western modernity and the “Islamist project.” Her (2000, p. 93) argument is that Western modernity is neither embraced nor rejected away from its “very centers;” rather it is “critically and creatively reappropriated by new religious discursive and social practices.” She concludes that “Islamism [...] [is an] asymmetrical reproduction[s] of modernity” (2000,

p. 115). Göle (2000, p. 92) uses the relativist underpinning of the idea of multiple modernities to overcome the restrictions of “social scientific language” to challenge the narrative of modernity of “the idea of future-oriented progress and individual emancipation.” This allows her to argue that Islamism is a variety of modernity among many.

Wagner (2012) belongs to the objectivist approach to the criticism of Eurocentrism in modernity but warns about relativism in the postcolonial approach. In his chapter “Multiple Modernities and the Spectre of Relativism,” he (2012, pp. 32–33) laments that the essentialist and relativist assumptions of the theory of multiple modernities build hard cultural walls between civilizations. Another problematic aspect of this approach is that “theorists of multiple modernities [...] normally do not claim that all modernities are equally modern” (Wagner, 2012, p. 33). I share Wagner’s worry about this relativism. I also partially join Bhambra (2016, p. 37) and Go (2016, p. 109) in stating that:⁴

[T]his theory of multiple modernities falls short even if the aim is clear [...]. As Bhambra (2007) observes, there remains a lingering Eurocentrism in the approach: what counts as “modern” is still dependent upon the European model. Multiple modernities turn out to be merely variants of European modernity, emerging initially from “Western civilization” and then diffusing to other “civilizations” (Bhambra 2007: 67). The approach thereby marshals an essentialism that would make Orientalists blush with pride.

To avoid this relativist pitfall, Wagner (2012, p. 33) suggests “re-theorizing modernity” in a way that keeps the idea of multiple modernities without the problem of relativism by invoking the Axial Age civilizations whose “normative principles” had “a potentially universalizable nature.” Wagner’s approach is part of a new line of scholarship that is skeptical of both Eurocentrism and relativist postmodernism. Wagner’s re-theorized modernity sees “modernity as experience and interpretation” (2012, p. xi). This means that the institutions of Western modernity, capitalism and democracy, are experienced and interpreted differently around the world.

In re-theorizing modernity, Wagner draws on Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities (1987, 2000; Eisenstadt & Schluchter, 1998). Eisenstadt pioneered this non-relativist but plural conceptions of modernity. Unlike the predictions of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, he (2000, p. 1) observes that postcolonial societies have resisted the “homogenizing

⁴ Dirlik (2003, pp. 284–285) makes a similar point.

and hegemonic assumptions of this Western program of modernity.” What they did instead was appropriating the “original Western project,” a project that for Eisenstadt is “the crucial (and usually ambivalent) reference point” (2000, p. 2). The cases Eisenstadt uses to illustrate his arguments are the “various nationalist and traditionalist movements that emerged in these [non-Western] societies from about the middle of the nineteenth century until after World War II, but also, as we shall note, of the more contemporary fundamentalist ones,” so that movements with “even anti-modern themes [...] all were distinctively modern” (2000, p. 2). Eisenstadt seems to conflate here the idea of modernity with the idea of contemporaneity so that whatever is contemporary is modern, even a fundamentalist movement predicated on a revival of some ancient ideas is classified by his approach as modern, not revivalist. Yet, he still makes the caveat that Western patterns of modernity “enjoy historical precedence and continue to be a basic reference point for others” (2000, p. 3), a Eurocentric caveat I take issue with in this thesis.

The virtue of this approach of multiple modernities is their recognition of the plural nature of modernity, but it remains, as Delanty (2006, p. 271) argues, under-theorized. I would add that it also shares with other theories the discontinuist approach that makes the idea of originally-Western modernity possible. As does Jennings (2010) in pluralizing globalization in his *Globalizations and the Ancient World*, in the next chapters, I take the idea of plural modernities back in history with a different theoretical approach.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I positioned this thesis in calls for both more attention to modernity and history in IR research. After that, I presented a non-Eurocentric alternative approach to the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism. Next, I offered a critical review of postmodernism, current theories of modernity, and postcolonial reactions to them, for being doubly Eurocentric, Eurocentric, and semi-Eurocentric respectively. The discussion also touched on and embraced non-Eurocentric approaches to the history of rationality, science, capitalism, the nation–state, and globalization.

Chapter 4: Towards a non-Eurocentric, transhistorical theory of modernity: The Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (TTM)

4.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I present a new theory of modernity, the Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (henceforth TTM), that integrates insights from approaches to social change, especially the works of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer.⁵ In the first section, I focus on their theorization of the interplay of structure, agency, and culture for explaining social change, especially Giddens' use of structuration theory in explaining modernity. In the second section, I integrate Giddens' insights on the transformation of time–space as it relates to social change but also suggest the concept of *the widening of social time–space*. In the third section, I discuss links between the transhistorical dimension in the theories of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer and the transhistorical form of the theory of modernity I suggest as well as how the *form of modernity* differs from the *content of modernities*. I end the section with a discussion of the concept of *communicative reflexivity* as a synthesis of Habermas' focus on communication, Giddens' focus on reflexivity, and Archer's historical approach to reflexivity.

4.2 Structure, agency, and culture: Social change and stability

Social theory includes a variety of approaches to the triangle of structure/action/culture, also referred to as political economy/interest/ideology, social/subjective/symbolic, or external environment/action/internal environment (Giddens, 1979, p. 49; Porpora, 2013, p. 26; Reed, 2017, p. 23). Giddens (structuration theory), Bourdieu (theory of practice), Habermas (communicative action theory), and Archer (theory of morphogenesis) all theorize and take a stand vis-à-vis this interplay, at times using different vocabularies. I use the terminology of structure, action or agency, and culture but borrow from their insights on the triangle past their terminological differences.

As a general entry into TTM, I borrow from structurationist approaches the general focus on the analysis of “stasis and change in the reproduction of institutionalized practices,” particularly the constraints social institutions put on, but also the possibilities they provide for, knowledgeable agents (Giddens, 1989, p. 298). In the case of stasis, the practices, say of the marriage institution, are “simply accepted as what is ‘done’ in the area;” however, in the

⁵ In developing this theory, I am indebted to the works of these four scholars, but for space limitation, I cannot offer an exposition of their approaches, which abounds in the literature. Instead, I delve straight into the relevant insights I borrow from them.

case of change, skillful, strategic thinking is required as when the practice is challenged for whatever reason (Giddens, 1989, p. 298).

The first element of TTM is thus the concept of structure. In my understanding of structure, I draw on the concept as used by Giddens in structuration theory and Archer in the theory of morphogenesis and its equivalent in Bourdieu and Habermas as well, but without using the latter's respective terms of 'field' and 'capital' and system. Giddens tells us that structure has no existence other than being embedded in the actions taken by agents in the form of day-to-day practices, largely durable but potentially fragmentary and even contradictory, however trivial practices might seem, all forming the structural properties of social systems. So embedded, structures are rules and resources.

Social action follows rules, and rules involve power and manifest in differential access to resources. Resources can be allocative, which Marxism tends to emphasize, or authoritative. The first refers to the means of production and the goods, and the second refers to the structuring of social time-space, of life chances, and of the body. He further specifies that structure is like language in that both exist virtually and come to life only in the instance of speech for one and social action for the other. Just as agents draw on the rules of language to perform speech, so too agents draw on their knowledge of social structure to perform social interactions. In both instances, language and social structure are reproduced in the act of speech in the first case and social interaction in the second. This means that structure and agency are co-created and co-constituted at the moment of interaction (the duality of structure). Structuration is the mechanism through which both structure and agency are continuously produced and reproduced through social actions (Craib, 1992, pp. 22–23, 29–39). When actors draw on these structures in concrete settings of interaction, the latter are referred to by Giddens as social systems. The difference between structure and social system is that the first is the virtual or abstract rules and resources, while the second is the actual instantiation in social action of the abstract structure (Giddens, 1984, p. 37). Contradiction and conflict, which are inherent in social systems, constitute the seeds of system change (Craib, 1992, p. 33). Closely linked to the idea of systems is that of institution. Structuration theory understands institutions not as organizations but as social practices that are imbedded in time and space, such as the marriage institution (Craib, 1992, p. 34).

Giddens' concepts of structure as the virtual rules and resources and social system as its instantiation are quite similar to those of Bourdieu's habitus, field and capital. This comparison can be extended to the overall approach to social change; Elliott (2010, p. 97) assesses that "like Giddens, Bourdieu is interested in the habits of whole societies."

Like Giddens and Bourdieu, Habermas' project of *Communicative Action Theory* was part of scholarly efforts to respond to the problem of structure and agency in social theory (Archer, 2017b, p. 102). Habermas' terminology for the structure/agency/culture trio is lifeworld and system. I reiterate Archer's (1996, pp. 296–297) interpretation of the term lifeworld as referring to and conflating agency and culture and the term system as referring to material structure. As such, central to Habermas' theory is the duo of lifeworld and system.

While I refer to Bourdieu and Habermas here briefly, I subscribe to Archer's critique of their approach to social change and that of Giddens in the form of her morphogenetic approach (Archer, 1996, p. 290; 2017b, p. 102; Elliott, 2010, pp. 94–93; Porpora, 2013, p. 31). Unlike Giddens' duality of structure, Archer insists on maintaining analytic dualism, although she makes three distinctions (structure, agency, culture) not just the two of Giddens (structure and agency). Archer posits that although structure and agency interrelate, they are separate ontologically and should remain separate analytically. In Archer's approach, structure refers not to rules and resources but to social relations among actors or social positions occupied by these actors (Porpora, 2013, pp. 26–27). The two other confluations that Giddens and Bourdieu make but Archer rejects are the confluations between structure and culture and between culture and agency. Concerning the first, while anthropologists have been accustomed to including all things human under the category of culture, sociology in general, and the morphogenetic approach in particular, distinguishes between culture as the realm of the ideal, the (inter-)subjective, and the discursive, and structure as the material, objective, and extra-discursive (Porpora, 2013, p. 27).

Having presented the concept of structure and culture and their different articulations in Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer, I present that of agency in the four scholars as it relates to the issue of social change and stability. In structuration, knowledgeable agents draw on structures in their interactions, maintaining them and thereby being shaped by them but sometimes also shaping them. Structure and action are co-constituted in that agents draw on the rules and resources, the stuff of structure, to reproduce and transform them. However, reproduction is the norm, which happens through the routinization of social practices, as routinization provides ontological security so necessary for agents (Craib, 1992, pp. 42–43). Agency is the action an actor takes that has intended and unintended consequences. Actors reflexively monitor their actions through two levels of consciousness: discursive (rationalization of action) and practical consciousness (stock of knowledge). Actors are also influenced by unconscious pressures to sustain ontological security and reduce anxiety (Turner, 2013, pp. 145–146).

Social change stems from agency. The possibility of change is inherent in structure–cultures since they have enabling and constraining features (Craib, 1992, p. 33). Giddens (1984, p. 179) argues that explanations of social change should account for the purposive, reasoning actions of agents in material and social contexts as they navigate the constraining and enabling features involved in these contexts.

In some empirical instances, one might find especially relevant Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa and hysteresis in his approach to social change. Doxa concerns social stasis. It is the taken-for-granted set of deep-seated beliefs that work without the need to be asserted as dogma (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 15). As such, “the tradition is silent, not least about itself as a tradition,” and it goes uncontested (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 167–168). Bourdieu argues that change is built into the concept of habitus and field and can be gradual or abrupt. For gradual change, there is a match between field and habitus, making change happen in expected ways, what Kuhn calls normal science in the field of academia. Radical change happens when there is a mismatch between habitus and field as the habitus that allows the individual to navigate the familiar is found unfit to a field whose rules and regularities are fundamentally changed (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 160).⁶ The hysteresis effect takes us to the process through which this field moved from being dominated by doxa to experiencing heterodoxy, until the new heterodoxy becomes the new doxa. Changes in the field, adds Bourdieu (1996, p. 239), emerges from within the structure of the field, that is, from “the synchronic oppositions between antagonistic positions (dominant/dominated, consecrated/novice, orthodox/heretic, old/young, etc.).” Elsewhere Bourdieu (1977, pp. 168–169) describes the disruption of doxa as:

the critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically.

Bourdieu (1977, pp. 168–169) cites cultural contact or political and economic crises as common causes of the rise of heterodoxy against a doxa, adding that the natural or conventional nature of social facts can be contested when the social world no longer seems a natural phenomenon.

⁶ Bourdieu (1990, p. 90) illustrates this with the example of the fictional character Don Quixote who experienced the negative consequences of having an old habitus that mismatches a changed economic and social context.

Concerning the concept of agency and its relation to social change in Archer's morphogenetic approach, like structuration theory, it breaks down into a conceptual schema following Marx's dictum that "men [and women] make their history but not under circumstances of their own making." Here, agents make social change or keep the status quo under structural, and, adds Archer, cultural circumstances they find themselves in (Porpora, 2013, pp. 28–29).⁷

I will end my presentation of the morphogenetic approach to agency and its relation to social change and stability with two important points in which Archer and her followers rightly depart from Giddens and Habermas. Concerning the problematic aspect of discontinuity in Giddens' structuration theory, Archer's approach (2013, pp. 4–5, emphasis added) explicitly states that "every theory about the social order necessarily has to incorporate SAC: structure, agency and culture" because "social life comes in a SAC—*always and everywhere*." This approach acknowledges discontinuities in human history, but these are "created morphogenetically by continuous actions of actors acting from within their originally structured positions" (Porpora, 2013, p. 33).

Concerning Habermas' thesis of the uncoupling of the lifeworld and system, and related to the point above, I draw on Archer's critique of it and her alternative. I share Archer's interpretation of Habermas who takes the lifeworld to be universal while the system emerges from the lifeworld as it evolved in rationality, grew in complexity, and uncoupled from the lifeworld. In her words (1996, p. 308), "for the latter [Habermas] it is only possible to distinguish between the two [lifeworld and system] once the System has historically become 'uncoupled' from the Lifeworld, a process attributed to evolution and dated in 'modernity.'" This prompts Archer to ask an important question for TTM: "this [the simultaneous differentiation of the lifeworld (rationalization) and the system (complexity)] raises questions about what came before the uncoupling, about the place of culture within it, and in relation to agency?" For Habermas, it is an "interweaving of system integration and social integration" in archaic societies (Archer, 1996, p. 308; Habermas, 1987[1981], p. 308). This kind of society has "a collectively shared, homogeneous lifeworld" and "reproduces itself as a whole in every single interaction" (Habermas, 1987[1981], p. 157). This means that this kind of society was characterized by social stability and experienced little or no social change; Habermas joins Giddens and the Eurocentric scholarship that assumes the West

⁷ It is important to note here that the morphogenetic approach, just like structuration theory, does not include nomothetic laws that predict the actual, content-informed consequences of human action, as both assume the impossibility of predicting human agency given its creativity.

invented change (Goody, 2006, p. 263). Archer (1996, p. 308) then asks a more important question for TTM: “why does the mere fact of its being shared deprive culture of all transformatory potential and agents of any interest in transforming it?” Habermas’ (1987[1981], p. 159) answer is that:

to the extent that the mythical understanding of the world actually steers action orientation, action oriented to mutual understanding and action oriented to success cannot yet be separated, and a participant’s “no” cannot yet signify the critical rejection of a validity claim.

I draw on Archer’s (1996, p. 311) criticism of this statement that “[t]his development is dated late in modernity,” but it is easy to provide examples where complex “counterintuitive culture” as in “ancient Hinduism” can occur in “pre-modern settings.” This is to object to Habermas’ central idea that the interplay between the lifeworld and the system is an invention of 17th-century Western modernity. Rather, this interplay is “universal and inevitable;” it “has always been the case: there is nothing whatsoever that is contemporary about it, beyond substantive issues” (Archer, 1996, pp. 311–314). In addition, Archer (1996, p. 313) seems critical of Habermas’ placement of Western Enlightenment at the center of human history, stating that

the methodological effect [of Habermas’ account of the uncoupling of the lifeworld and the system] is to dichotomise the pre-Enlightenment dark ages, unamenable to analysis in terms of the interplay between social and system integration, as distinct from enlightened times when the outcome of the so-called ‘enlightenment project’ depends upon how the antagonism is resolved.

However, Archer develops her own version of Eurocentrism as I discuss below.

4.3 The widening of social time–space, social change, and stasis

In this section, I present the concept of *the widening of social time–space* as a critical synthesis of Giddens’ work on the transformation of time–space. He devises the following concepts: time–space distancing or separation of time and space, recombination of time and space, disembedding mechanisms or displacement, re-embedding, emptying of time and space, and the mediation of experience. Giddens introduced these concepts as parts of his discontinuist approach to human history, the Great Divide between modernity and what precedes it. Giddens introduced this understanding of the transformation of time–space as

being central to what modernity is, that is, what drives its dynamism, in so far as it causes its overriding principle of reflexivity.

In theorizing the transformation of time–space, Giddens has as his starting point the birth of reason in Western Enlightenment the first time in human history and thus puts the West at the center; in that space and time starts all theorizing and projects outwards to the non-West. For Giddens, this theorizing of time–space is a theorizing of the working of globalization.

Given that the transformation of time–space is central to the dynamism of modernity, how globalization is theorized is important for approaching the problem of Eurocentrism in theories of modernity. Unlike Giddens’ approach that sees globalization as starting in 17th century Europe, I draw on a plural approach to globalization that speaks of a history of globalizations; the phase Giddens theorizes as the first in human history is one among many that preceded it. As such, the transformation of time–space is a transhistorical phenomenon. While the last couple of centuries witnessed increased time–space distancing culminating in intensified globalization, it is a difference in degree not in kind in comparison to previous eras.

In spite of my critique of Giddens’ conceptualization of the transformation of time–space, TTM derives much insight from this conceptualization. Linked with insights derived from other approaches, and in relation to all other aspects of critique mentioned in this and the previous chapter, I introduce the concept of *the widening of social time–space* to remedy the shortcomings I discussed in Giddens’ conceptualization. I retain the concepts Giddens introduced but only under the overarching concept of the widening of social time–space.

The concept takes as its starting point Giddens’ understanding of the mediation of experience. All human experience is mediated through socialization via language, with “language [being] the prime and original means of time–space distancing” (Giddens, 1991, p. 23). Language, being a time machine, and as it relates to memory, allows social practices to be handed down across generations and the differentiation between past, present, and future (Giddens, 1991, p. 23).

Different types of media impact the transformation of time–space and the scope of social change differently; for “modernity is inseparable from its ‘own’ media: the printed text and, subsequently, the electronic signal” (Giddens, 1991, p. 24). Printing was one of major influences on the rise of the modern nation–state and its related institutions (Giddens, 1991, p. 25). The invention of writing significantly increased the widening of social time–space for societies that possessed it, as writing increases time–space distancing and creates an

awareness of past, present, and future, in which “the reflexive appropriation of knowledge can be set off from designated tradition” (Giddens, 1991, p. 24). Giddens underscores that although writing flourished in “pre-modern civilisations,” it was limited to elite circles while pre-modern reflexivity was limited the clarification and reinterpretation of tradition (Giddens, 1990, pp. 37–38). It was only with the use of mechanical printing that writing could be mobilized to prompt the “essential element of the reflexivity of modernity and of the discontinuities which have torn the modern away from the traditional” (Giddens, 1990, p. 77; 1991, p. 24).

Having presented Giddens’ ideas, I introduce a non-anthropocentric conception⁸ of the widening of social time–space that argues, contra Giddens, that even language is not the primary means of time–space distancing. The original and primary means of the widening of social time–space is information, including non-linguistic information, which allows us to account for instances of the use of non-linguistic information for long-distance social interaction. One can take for example the Inca Empire and its use of the khipu technology for information storage and transmission, researched in, for example, *Narrative Threads: Accounting and Recounting in Andean Khipu* (Quilter & Urton, 2002). The book analyzes how the Inca empire stretched its social interactions across wide distances, thereby widening its social time–space using only non-linguistic information. The threads of the khipu allowed the communication of accounting and narrative with absent actors across wide distances. In the case of writing, mass printing is not necessary to cause change, for information stored in writing, composed of validity claims, can circulate through non-writing forms, such as preaching to those without access to the then new medium of writing.

This example brings us to an important principle in Giddens’ approach to time–space, that of presence–availability. He tells us that it is important for social analysis to note the degree of co-presence in a society. In high presence–availability, many social actions need agents to be present for them to take place, stemming from the corporeal nature of the agent, the physical properties of space, and the nature of existing transportation technologies. Given his disinterest in so-called pre-modernity, Giddens highlights the enormous transformations of social time–space that occurred in the West in the last couple of centuries. Media technologies help lift out social interaction from the physical locales and expand it across different locales, bypassing the need to be bodily present to act socially. Indeed, major

⁸ This conception is true also for non-human animals with culture, but I do not expand on this aspect due to space limitations.

changes happened such that a separation of communication from transportation technologies ensued, such as the electromagnetic telegraph making the literal mobility of the human body no longer necessary for social action to occur. As far as the occurrence of social action is concerned, these recent inventions mainly refine the process of inserting presence into absence through media and information. Indirect actors can still assist direct agential actors in affecting social action without the latter's presence. Indeed, given its complex road systems, "[i]n the Inca Empire no one was far from a road, and long-distance runners, called chaskis, sped along this vast road network bringing news and instructions, like electrical impulses delivering data on today's internet" (Stenn, 2020, p. 286).

This brings us to Giddens' concept of power containers. Time-space distancing for Giddens is closely linked to uses of power and domination. The information storage capacity across time and space of a certain type of society determines the degree of power a society has. For Giddens, in a primitive society, memory is the only information storage device, but with the development of writing, the city has become a container of power given its mobilization of the information storage device of writing. The city and later the state exert their religious, military, and administrative power through the mobilization of writing and paper and later other forms of the mediation of experience, intensified by the mechanization of transportation, the separation of transportation from communication, the invention of printing and electronically recorded information, and the expansion of documentary activities such as the accumulation of information as in the pursuit of official statistics (Urry, 1991, p. 166). Again, recent media technologies refine the process, but it is not different in kind. In the Inca empire, for example, "the knotted-cord-toting Inca administrative officials were central players in the instantiation of state power and control throughout the empire;" they were the ones who

performed the calculations and recorded the statistics that formalized, rationalized (according to an Andean logic), and sustained the political power of states in the central Andes, culminating in the great administrative machinery at the heart of the Inca Empire. (Urton, 2018, p. 620)

In relation to other critical aspects introduced in this and the previous chapter, I argue that modernity as a transhistorical phenomenon is inseparable from the mediation of experience, but different historical occurrences of modernity might be connected to different media. The transformation of time-space is important for the dynamism of modernity only in so far as it causes the central feature of modernity, reflexivity. In principle, it should be

possible for an innovation or modernization to take place without the widening of social time–space.

The concept of the widening of social time–space starts from the basic premise that the senses, memory, and information create and extend a person’s social time–space. I use here a thought experiment to show that without these senses a person has no social time–space and no feeling of time–space. With the senses and memory, the person receives information from the external world, stored in memory. It is at this point that the person acquires a social relation with the external world surrounding her (space and time), the past, present, and future for time in the case of human animals. Now that she has the senses, memory, and a mind processing information, she is a social being and her social time–space either widens or is constant, depending on the degree of her social activity and the amount of information available but crucially important the information storage devices at her disposal. While the current new media technologies supercharge the mediation of experience and time–space distanciation, it is a transhistorical process that requires only the combination of the senses, memory, and information, which are shared among human and non-human animals, although sophisticated in the former.

This conception, as opposed to Giddens’, does not take the West as its starting point and is freed from the Great Divide dichotomy between supposedly unprecedented Western modernity and what is preceding it. It is a basic starting point for a conception of a globalization that is plural and transhistorical. Research on ancient forms of globalizations (Jennings, 2010) stresses that the stretching of social relations across the entire surface of the world is *not* a condition for speaking of globalization. It is “(a) a surge in long-distance connections that (b) creates a global culture” (Jennings, 2010, p. 121). The globe of a person is the perceived time–space and its social dimension, their perceived edge of the globe. This globe can be a small tribal or inter-tribal space but also an interplanetary space. The globe of a member of an ancient tribe is the perceived space and time and its social dimension. It is worthy of analysis how it came to be, stagnates, or widens and the effect these have on their structure–culture. The senses, memory, and information are the original means of the widening of social time–space.

4.4 Communicative reflexivity and the interplay of modernization and traditionalization: A transhistorical form with historical content

Subscribing to the Great Divide thesis between the pre-modern and modern, current theories of modernity do not make the distinction between form and content.⁹ TTM differentiates between modernity as the abstract, transhistorical, universal social phenomenon (the form or analytical category) and the actual historical instantiation or occurrence of the phenomenon.

TTM sees the transhistorical abstract side of modernity as an empirical reality that is captured by the approach to social change underpinning the theory in Section 4.2. This transhistorical side is in line with Mouzelis' distinction between social theories aiming for generalities II and those aiming for generalities III. He says that,

the anti-foundationalist attack against law-like, universal, transhistorical social theories is more relevant and effective when applied to Generalities III than Generalities II. For instance, Parsons' analysis of the concepts of role or institution, Giddens' development of his duality-of-structure schema, Bourdieu's notion of habitus—all these are obviously transhistorical conceptualizations [Generalities II]. They are supposed to be useful in the analysis of different types of society or social situation, regardless of time and space. [...] In the first case [Generalities II] the universal conceptual tools may lead to *context-sensitive, historically-oriented comparative investigations* that can throw much light on how social wholes are constituted, reproduced and transformed. (Mouzelis, 1995, p. 2, emphasis added)

It is this type of transhistorical theory [generalities II] that TTM aims for based on the transhistorical conceptualizations of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer (refer to Section 2.3). As Archer (2013, pp. 4–5, emphasis added) affirms, “every theory about the social order necessarily has to incorporate SAC: structure, agency and culture” because “social life comes in a SAC—*always and everywhere*.” Unlike Giddens' square emphasis on so-called modern discontinuity, Archer's approach stresses that discontinuities exist in the past and can be comprehended morphogenetically (Porpora, 2013, p. 33). For TTM, this

⁹ I use the terms form and content not in the way Kant and Georg Simmel use them but in a more literal sense akin to how Habermas uses the terms when he differentiates between discourse ethics as a formal procedure (form) and the actual content of a given instance of discourse (content: specific validity claims) (Mangion, 2011, p. 298).

means that agents modernize and their modernization becomes tradition; the process is repeated (refer to Section 3.3.1 on TTM's approach to the tradition/modernity dichotomy).

Now I revisit the agency part of the trio of structure, agency, and culture that I started in the first section to zoom in on the central driver behind modernity's dynamism, behind social change, as theorized by Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer. I recall from Giddens that time-space distanciation and disembedding prompt reflexivity and the three are the sources of modernity's dynamism. Critiquing the two first sources of dynamism, I grouped them under the concept of the widening of social time-space in the previous section.

The widening of social time-space is one of the causes of reflexivity. Giddens under-theorizes reflexivity. To remedy this, I draw on Archer and Habermas. Archer (2012, p. 11) takes issue with "[the] account offered by Beck and Giddens" which states that history was dominated by tradition until the arrival of Western modernity that prompted the birth of reason and with it reflexivity. Instead, she argues that reflexivity "must have a pre-history," elaborating that "there must have been a time before which homo erectus or his kinfolk had learned to speak and to be capable of mentally about their intentionality" (Archer, 2012, pp. 10–11).

I appreciate Archer's (2012, p. 11) consideration of reflexivity as a transhistorical experience but disagree with the analytical distinctions between communicative reflexivity, autonomous reflexivity, meta-reflexivity, and fractured reflexivity. She (2012, pp. 10–46) attaches communicative reflexivity to so-called premodern times and the other types to Western modernity and after, wherein her Eurocentrism surfaces, caricaturing an activity that is as fundamental to social life as communication, and attaching it to conformity while considering change-affecting reflexivity a product of Western modernity. For her, before Western modernity, people were dependent on community so much so that they lacked the autonomy of character and the level of critical thinking capable for innovation which is associated with autonomous and meta-reflexivity.

It is unfortunate that Archer attaches the term communicative reflexivity to conformity and the past. This flies in the face of Habermas' commonsensical placement of communication at the heart of social life, social analysis, and utopia. In fact, significant social change happens through extensive communicative, collective effort. I therefore refuse to give up on the term communicative reflexivity and use it to combine Giddens' emphasis on reflexivity and Habermas' emphasis on communication and its content (validity claims). As such, my term *communicative reflexivity* has the effect (driver of change and stability) that Archer's similar term has (driver of stability). Communicative reflexivity is agents' reflection

undertaken communicatively in light of incoming information composed of claims to truth, rightness, and aesthetics. It is an exercise of agency that might result in either reproduction (maintenance) or transformation (change). Change requires the exercise of more agency than maintenance, just as it is easier to conserve something than to innovate it.

As such, the two sources of the dynamism of modernity are the widening of social time–space and communicative reflexivity. Underpinning this understanding is a transhistorical conceptualization of the relation of the trio of structure, agency, and culture to social change and stability. This is a transhistorical, form-oriented understanding of modernity. Modernization and traditionalization happened in different times and spaces before Western modernity and can happen any time and space there is structure–culture because modernization-affecting agency is not Western. This way TTM contributes to correcting the misconception of seeing modernization-affecting agency as originally Western, that is seeing “the west as ‘inventing invention’” (Goody, 2006, p. 263) and reclaims the theft of modernization-affecting agency—an agency that is rather transhistorical and cosmopolitan.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I present the elements of the Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (TTM) as a critical synthesis of the approaches to social change of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer, as underpinned by my approach to the dichotomies of tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism. As a theory of social change, TTM has at its core the interplay of structure, culture, and agency. Structure–cultures have constraining but also enabling features. Usually knowledgeable agents navigate these structure–cultures in familiar contexts, but sometimes they find themselves in unfamiliar situations that require an exercise of their change-affecting agency through communicative reflexivity. These situations might involve a widening social time–space (as in cultural contact) and/or unfamiliar social circumstances such as social crises. The change agents bring about when dealing with these unfamiliar circumstances is either discarded or conserved through traditionalization. This interplay of structure, agency, and culture is transhistorical. My approach to the dichotomies of modernity/tradition, religion/secularity, and collectivism/individualism in Chapter 3 makes it possible to use the interplay of structure, agency, and culture to explain modernity as a transhistorical form that has different historical manifestations, thereby reclaiming the stolen value of modernization-affecting agency in current theories of modernity.

Chapter 5: Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE) as a modernity and its traditionalization

5.1 Chapter introduction

The term Axial Age,¹⁰ coined by Karl Jaspers, refers to the idea that a cultural transition in human history involving “dramatic cultural changes” occurred roughly between 800 and 200 BCE in much of Afro-Eurasia (Iran, Israel–Palestine, China, Greece, and India) (Bellah, 2005, p. 69; Donald, 2012, p. 1). The term captures the emergence during the middle years of the First Millennium BCE of influential intellectual, religious, and philosophical movements centered around key classical texts including those of the Hebrew prophets, the texts of Greek Philosophy especially Plato and Aristotle, the Chinese texts of Analects and the *Dào dé jīng*, and the Indian texts of Bhagavadgita and the Pali of Buddhism (Bellah & Joas, 2012, p. 1).¹¹ Instead of the argument that “modernity emerged out of the cultural and political programme of one Axial Age civilization, the Christian–European civilization” (Therborn, 2006, p. 49), I use TTM to argue that it is not that the Axial Age was an anticipation of (Western) modernity but constituting cases of modernities, while focusing on the case of early Buddhism in India, seen as a modernity that was traditionalized. I also draw on my approach to the three dichotomies discussed in Chapter 3. I start with examining the late-Vedic structure–culture out of and against which the modernization project of early Buddhism emerged, followed by the actual modernizing transformation of Axial Buddhism, and ending with its traditionalization beginning with the first Buddhist monks and the making of Buddhism a state ideology under king Aśoka, who introduced infrastructural modernization as well, and its subsequent survival as a tradition.

5.2 Brief remarks on the Axial Age

Axial Age scholarship has invited much criticism, but no critic seems to doubt the existence of significant innovations in ancient history (Boy & Torpey, 2013; Gregersen, 2017; Mullins et al., 2018; Rees, 2017; Shults et al., 2018; Smith, 2015; Stausberg, 2014), which is what matters for the objectives of this study, not a robust theory of an Axial Age bounded in time and space. This interest stems from TTM’s focus on the analysis of stasis and change in institutionalized practices as driven by knowledgeable agents.

¹⁰ Other designations include the moral revolution, the prophetic age, the age of transcendence, the age of criticism, the great transformation, and the revolution in worldview (Mullins et al., 2018, p. 3).

¹¹ What is of concern in this Chapter is not the great individuals behind the innovations but the actual canonization and institutionalization of their innovative ideas, which is “not an individual but a social and collective process,” signaling a society’s embrace of the texts as the source of authority and the basis of life (Assman, 2012, p. 399).

The research program of the Axial modernizations has a normative dimension to its scientific aim that was inherited from Jaspers' original formation and has now been adapted to contemporary normative issues. Jaspers's metaphor of axis is borrowed from Hegel who believed that world history is turning around the angle of the rise of Jesus. Against Hegel's ethnocentrism, Jaspers, writing in the aftermath of World War II, argues that the axis should be broadened to include other equally important turning points that occurred more or less simultaneously in that period, advancing the normative ideal of humanity's shared universal history and future (Roetz, 2012, pp. 250–252). Several prominent publications have developed the argument further, marking a renewed interest in the topic (see for example Bellah (2005, 2011), Joas et al. (2012), Eisenstadt (2012b), Arnason et al. (2004a), Habermas (2014), Calhoun et al. (2013), Morris (2010), Mullins (2018), and S. R. G. (1975)). In contemporary times, this normative preoccupation has resurfaced in the debate on the clash of civilizations. In an interview by the Swedish Sociological Association, Axial Age scholar Hans Joas expresses that one of the motivations behind Axial Age research is the “important possibility to get away from this idea of a necessary clash of civilizations” (Heidegren & Joas, 2017, p. 241).

5.3 The internal Vedic structure–culture from which Axial Buddhist modernity emerged: The simmering legitimation crisis of Vedic social order

Before delving into the modernization project of early Buddhism, it is important to examine the structure–culture against which and out of which it emerged, that is the structure–culture against which the communicative reflexivity of agents was directed. That was the structure–culture of early, middle, and late Vedic India. The case of early Buddhism “constitutes an axial challenge to Vedic religion” (Wittrock, 2012, p. 115). This took the form of contestation against the no-longer semi-naturalistic ideas and practices of the Vedic social order, which became rather conventions open to transgression (Wittrock, 2012, p. 115). Bellah (2005, p. 77) asks: “what made the Axial Age axial?” or for our case, what made Axial Buddhism Axial? which is also a question about the social structure–culture preceding Axial Buddhism. Bellah (2005, p. 77) argues for the use of a theoretical framework that can explain the shared Axiality among the cases he explores (ancient Israel–Palestine, Greece, China, and India) while “avoid[ing] these pitfalls” of “tak[ing] one of the four cases (usually Israel or Greece) as paradigmatic for all the others.” Building on Merlin Donald (1993), Bellah (2005, p. 77; 2011, p. 118) uses the “framework of the evolution of human culture and cognition.” As such, Axial Buddhism was characterized by the emergence of “theoretic

culture” in a social context dominated by “mythic culture,” thereby developing the ability to think analytically (theoretic culture), not just narratively (mythic culture) (Bellah, 2005, pp. 78, 540). In TTM, I refer to theoretic culture as communicative reflexivity.

The early and middle Vedic periods are the backdrop of Axial modernization that arose with Buddhism in the social context of late Vedic India. The social conditions of early Vedic India, roughly between 1200 and 1000 BCE, can be discerned from the Rgveda (RV) texts (Bellah, 2011, p. 485), wherein around thirty warring tribes were governed by several chieftains, out of which two groups, the Puru and Bharata, rose to prominence. Here the seeds of “a centralizing tendency” started growing which intensified at the end of the Rgvedic period (Bellah, 2011, p. 488). At this stage, rituals were led by priests but there was still no priestly class or caste (Bellah, 2011, p. 488). Tribal societies were organized around an egalitarian conception of ritual. All or most members of the tribe were expected to participate for the cohesiveness of the group. Indian society in the early Vedic period moved slowly from being tribal to developing features of an archaic society that later gave way to one dominant royal lineage, the Bharata.

The governance of population-dense archaic societies gave rise to non-egalitarian forms of ritual centered around one figure, the divine or quasi-divine king, with the participation of the select few among the elites whether priests or royal members, thereby collapsing the egalitarianism of millions or at least hundreds of thousands of years of hominid evolution (Bellah, 2005, pp. 69–70). The texts of Rgveda that were once openly composed by poets competing for rewards from affluent sponsors became the prerogative of Brahmins as the guardians and interpreters of the old texts (Bellah, 2011, p. 491).

This is the era of archaic India that precedes the Axial modernization. The middle Vedic period was dominated by the worldview of the texts of Brāhmanas, the oldest of which date to around 900 or 800 BCE, geographically centered in the region of Kuruksetra (Bellah, 2011, p. 491). A new theology was developing to match the new structure–culture of the Kuru kingdom. The Kurus (Kuruksetra) became the land of the gods, their place of sacrifice, the land of purest Vedic language, and the center of heaven and earth. Part of this intellectual development is the rise of a notion of hierarchy different from the relative egalitarianism of the tribal structure; thus was born the varna system that divides Indian society into four orders. This society is based on differentiated rules and orders that are inherited but apply regardless of kinship and tribal boundaries (Bellah, 2011, p. 496). The new priestly class became tasked with developing a more complex ritual system under the auspices of the Kuru king and his court to consolidate the varna caste system (Bellah, 2011, p. 497). This is a

“sharp break with any remaining tribal egalitarianism” since the four varnas follow the logic of functional differentiation and rigid hierarchy (Bellah, 2011, pp. 499–500).

TTM states that structure–cultures determine the rules of social action and the allocation of resources manifested in the archaic social hierarchy. This element illuminates how the ideology of the Kuru kingdom was constituted by the interplay of structure as material social relations and culture as the realm of the ideal, the intersubjective and the discursive. The Kuru kingdom was a society built on the alliance between Ksatriyas and Brahmins (brahmaksatra), who were the society’s “chief beneficiar[ies]” who “quite consciously ‘ate’ (the term for ‘dominate’ or ‘exploit’) those beneath them,” the Vaishyas and the Sudras (Bellah, 2011, pp. 499–500). TTM also maintains that such a rise in sophistication of the governance apparatus of the Kuru kingdom led to its systems of money and power with their instrumental, strategic reasoning encroaching on the lifeworld of the lower castes. TTM adds that contradiction and conflict are inherent in social systems and are the seeds of change. With the dawn of Axiality during the time of Upanisads around the 6th century BCE, an awareness of a legitimation crisis, a concept Bellah borrows from Habermas, was developing. This legitimation crisis involved a mismatch “between the developmental–logical advance and the moral–practical regression” as “mechanisms of social domination increased significantly relative to archaic societies” (Bellah, 2012, pp. 452, 574). The response to this was that “coherent protest for the first time became possible” (Bellah, 2012, p. 574). Such protest contested the validity claims of the ruling elites and manifested as “utopian projections of a good society” advanced by the different renouncers of Axial Indian society “in criticism of the existing order;” these utopians visions were “harshly critical of existing socialpolitical condition,” one of which was early Buddhism (Bellah, 2012, p. 576).

Thus, the causes that gave rise to the modernity of early Buddhism were communicative reflexivity prompted by socio-political conditions that culminated in the legitimation crisis, a reflexivity heightened by the widening of social time–space in the context of an expanding Indian empire. In their assessment of the literature on the Axial Age, Mullins et al. (2018, p. 13) observe that “many prominent advocates of the Axial Age have extended this focus on critical, reflexive thought as the major intellectual development, the prime cause that instigated all the major institutional revolutions characteristic of the period.” In judging the robustness of this claim, from a positivist perspective, Mullins et al. contend that it is an “intriguing, even compelling, way to view the period,” but they argue that the argument still lacks “clear expositions of empirical evidence” (Mullins et al., 2018, p. 13). Particularly important in their assessment is whether “these supposed cognitive developments

were actually the cause of the Axial Age's other transformations or should more properly be viewed as the result of large-scale sociocultural and political developments" (Mullins et al., 2018, p. 13). However, Axial-Age scholars do not assume that the rise of reflexive thought is detached from sociocultural and political factors, as the argument is rather more subtle. Bellah (2011, p. 371) draws on Eric Weil (1975) to stress that social "breakdown was a usual precipitating factor to the axial transformation." It does not seem that agents in secure and stable social conditions would radically assess their society, adds Bellah (2011, p. 282), highlighting that "serious breakdowns, may be the necessary predecessors of cultural breakthroughs. Necessary but not sufficient."

5.4 The external structure—culture from which Axial Buddhist modernity emerged: The widening of social time—space and the rise of communicative reflexivity

The dawn of Indian Axial modernization started in late Vedic India, in the time of the texts of the Upanisads, wherein "disciplined rational thinking begins," and "the argument is at the level of universal truth," around the 6th century BCE (Bellah, 2011, p. 513). However, the Axial modernization proper begins with the rise Buddhism (Bellah, 2011, pp. 530–531). The life of the Buddha is traditionally dated around 563–483 BCE (Fogelin, 2015, pp. 70–72). The Buddhist texts center on the then expanding kingdom of Magadha and speak of social conditions very different from those preceding them. This is a world of powerful kingdoms, vibrant cities, extensive commerce, and great wealth, and not least, a world wherein renouncers of different convictions became widespread and "argument between them highly developed" (Bellah, 2011, p. 527).

Expanding empires and extensive commerce, the social context of a widening social time—space, bring with them cultural contact and the flow of information that comes with it. In particular, that the Achaemenid Persian Empire was present in the northwest part of the South Asian subcontinent during Buddha's time allowed for the migration of people and goods and with them ideas, so much so that early Buddhism owes much to Zoroastrianism, even if the Buddha received it critically (Beckwith, 2017, p. 9; Liu, 2017).

5.5 The legitimation crisis of the Vedic social order and the modernization project of Axial Buddhism

The phenomenon of the rise of renouncers in this period is important for understanding the Axial modernization. The renouncer assumed the role of the "genuine individual, capable of choice, in a society dominated by ascribed roles and particularistic relationships;" to be a renouncer in Axial India involved choosing asceticism over the life of the householder (Bellah, 2011, p. 528). The renouncer could see society from the outside,

viewing “traditional society as imperfect” and just one among many ways to live (Bellah, 2011, p. 529). In this context of an expanding Magadha empire, many nonorthodox sects challenged Brahmanic dominance, with extensive discussion and argument between them (Bellah, 2011, p. 530). Many Buddhist texts showed that Buddha’s followers “knew a lot about the legitimation crisis of axial-age society” (Bellah, 2011, p. 583). The modernity of Axial Buddhism lies in that the Buddha and those behind the canonization of Buddhism made perhaps “the most drastic criticism of society as it is” and aimed for “the most radical utopia of all;” they “threw out the entire Vedic tradition, from the Rig Veda to the Upanishads,” “attempted to replace it with an entirely new one,” and actually “succeeded in starting something quite new” (Bellah, 2011, pp. 577, 582). Similarly, TTM argues that a central feature of modernity is what Bourdieu (1977, pp. 168–169) calls hysteresis against a doxa, in his words, “the critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion.”

Bellah quotes Indologist Richard Gombrich’s summary of the contribution of Buddhism as having “turned the Brahmin ideology upside down and ethicized the universe,” which was no less than “a turning point in the history of civilization” (quoted in Bellah, 2011, p. 531; Gombrich, 2006, p. 51). Bellah (2011, p. 583) compares Buddhism to Platonism as both driven by individuals who were “visionaries; both also as great rationalists, adept in argument, superb in dialogue; and both were before all else teachers.”

It is important for our purpose to understand the continuities and discontinuities that came with Buddhism. The central continuities with earlier traditions that Buddhism did not abandon are reincarnation, Karma, and liberation. The continuities remind us that structure–cultures have not just constraining but also enabling features. The change early Buddhists sought was enabled by the ethical principles, even if at times only pretensions, that archaic Vedic India already had. The discontinuities include the Four Noble Truths: life is unsatisfactory, suffering is caused by desire, suffering ends by ending desire, and the noble eightfold path to end suffering, leading to nirvana.

Recalling the legitimation crisis that prompted the communicative reflexivity behind Buddhism, for ordinary people living under the inherited “hegemonic Brahmin ideology” such condition was no longer natural and was “indeed overturned” (Bellah, 2011, p. 534). Buddhism dismissed the four varnas and the hereditary status of the Brahmins as illegitimate (Bellah, 2011, p. 534). Buddhist life was based on a new view of Dharma, the teaching of the Buddha, that introduced and valorized a new moral approach to life and was meant to grow not by conquest but attraction (Bellah, 2011, pp. 534, 542).

While in Vedic thought, the Brahmin or learned class is a hereditary social fact bestowing the highest status in ritual and society, in Buddhism the real Brahmin or learned person, that is the one with the highest status, is the one who follows the ethics of Buddhism. Anyone one can be a learned person of high status (Bellah, 2011, pp. 534–535). Thus, “the equality of all human beings in their capacity to follow the Path” is affirmed in Buddhism, and this “teaching is revolutionary” compared to early Indian society with its strong insistence on lineage (Bellah, 2011, p. 542).

Challenging hegemonic Brahmanism, Buddhism rejected the Vedic tradition and the authority of texts on which it was based (Bellah, 2011, p. 535). One can recall here Shils (1981, pp. 105–106) equation of the great scientist with the great prophet but also Bellah’s (2011, p. 583) equation of Buddha with Plato. Unlike the particularism of the Vedic tradition and its royalty-centered theology, the Buddhist teachings were “available to all people, regardless of status or ethnicity” stemming from the Buddha and Buddhists considered “universal teacher[s]” (Bellah, 2011, p. 537). This universalism was “the most fundamental innovation of Buddhism” (Bellah, 2011, pp. 537–538). Though the Buddhist monks were more involved in the Buddhist practice by virtue of their task, the monks (Sangha) and the laity are “equal partners in the community” mutually dependent on one another (Bellah, 2011, p. 539), while hierarchy in the monasteries was small (Bellah, 2011, p. 543). Upon his death, the Buddha declined appointing a successor believing that all the Buddhist community needed was the Dharma (Bellah, 2011, p. 543).

5.6 The traditionalization of the modernizations of Axial Buddhism

Buddhism brought large-scale innovations that amounted to a modernity, but more is required for it to be more than fashion, and that is its traditionalization through canonization and institutionalization. Of relevance here is the Mauryan dynasty (321–185 BCE) which was founded in Magadha but reached its zenith under its well-known ruler Aśoka reigning between 273–232 BCE. Aśoka is important because he was “probably the most innovative ruler in Indian history,” whose period played a creative role in the social and political thought of India (Bellah, 2011, p. 544).

This traditionalization phase involves the recognition that the Buddhist tradition was significant enough that a society took it as the basis of life. The same causes that prompted the rise of Axial Buddhist modernity are involved in its traditionalization. This is the context of a newly expansive Magadha empire, the condition of significant cultural contact and the circulation of the new ideas it stimulated. The Magadha empire reached its greatest extent

with Aśoka's conquest of Kalinga. Such an expansive empire was less restricted by the expectations of the past and more open to innovation than previous dynasties (Bellah, 2011, pp. 545–547).

The reign of Aśoka is exemplary of this innovation, and he became “heralded as the epitome of a good Buddhist king” (DeCaroli, 2004, p. 31). Because Aśoka left many rock and pillar inscriptions through which he communicated across his empire, more is known about him than any other ruler before and long after him (Bellah, 2011, pp. 545–547). A king's embrace of Buddhism means that it was highly regarded and popular during his time. Aśoka's inscriptions, influenced by Buddhism, addressed the empire's approach to the welfare of its subjects (Bellah, 2011, p. 548). They included his responsibility for the health and wellbeing of his subjects including the actions he took to improve social conditions such as infrastructure (Bellah, 2011, p. 548). Sectarian tolerance was important for Aśoka as was the principal of nonviolence, although in a moderate form compared to its absolute Buddhist conception.

Bellah (2011, p. 548) infers that Aśoka appropriated Buddhist principles and presented them in non-sectarian language, so that he could accommodate the different sects under his empire; for instance, though the Dhamma of Aśoka is “clearly indebted to Buddhism,” it is presented as a non-sectarian general teaching. Particularly, Aśoka encouraged equal respect for śramanas (Buddhist monks, but also monks of other sects) as for brāhmanas (Brahmins) (Bellah, 2011, p. 547).

Aśoka's Buddhist-influenced but non-sectarian Dhamma was universal and freed from Vedic varna and its inherited hierarchical social roles (Bellah, 2011, p. 549). Moreover, it was concerned with future lives as was this life, that is, “it is primarily political,” the foundation of the good society that Aśoka attempted and partially managed to establish (Bellah, 2011, p. 549). Aśoka acted on his universal conception of Dhamma; he appointed officials whose task was to spread the teaching inside and outside his realm (Bellah, 2011, p. 549).

The rulers that succeeded Aśoka could not uphold the empire, which were overthrown in 185 BCE by the Śunga dynasty, believed to be of Brahmin lineage. Buddhist texts speak of harsh persecution under this dynasty, and it must have been difficult for the monastery to experience the loss of royal patronage. However, it managed to survive such loss, which seems to have been thanks to non-elite donations (DeCaroli, 2004, pp. 33–34). Moreover, the enduring legacy of the modernity of Axial Buddhism is that its ethical universalism has constituted an enduring Axial challenge to the archaic heritage of Brahmanic particularism,

such that later Indic civilization continued to attempt to come to terms with a tension between Axial and archaic cultural elements (Bellah, 2011, p. 559).

5.7 Chapter conclusion

Given its ancient origins, one might be tempted to think about Buddhism as essentially a tradition, meaning that it has always been a tradition. Viewing early Buddhism through the lens of TTM, I argue that it too was once a modernity, large-scale innovations that came through the exercise of modernization-affecting agency in the form of communicative reflexivity in response to socio-political factors in a context of a widening social time–space and a legitimation crisis inherent in the tradition of the archaic Vedic social order. The innovations of early Buddhism became significant in that they survived as a tradition through undergoing a process of canonization and institutionalization by the followers of Buddhism and the first Buddhism-influenced Indian empire. While the tradition of Buddhism did not survive as a state ideology in India, its ethical universalism and the edicts of Aśoka lived on in tension with Brahmanism in India and beyond (Bellah, 2011, p. 559).

Chapter 6: Early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) as a modernity and its traditionalization

6.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, I use TTM to explain the emergence of early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) as a modernity and its ensuing traditionalization. First, I discuss the link between early Islam and the Axial Age. After that, I examine the social structure–culture, or traditions, under which early Islam emerged and which it came to replace. Next, I examine the modernization that early Islam constituted. I end the chapter with a discussion of the institutionalization and thereby the traditionalization of the modernization that early Islam brought.¹²

6.2 Axial Israel–Palestine and early Islamic modernity

The time of the emergence and development of early Islam is c. 600–750, and the space is Arabia, Syria and further afield under the Umayyad and Abbasid empires (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. xii). This second case is closely related to the first in that some scholars widen the temporal scope of the Axial Age to include Christianity and Islam as “secondary breakthroughs” of Axiality or post-Axial formations (Arnason et al., 2004b, p. 3; Eisenstadt, 2012a, p. 278). For Bellah (2011, p. 655), although Christianity and Islam are chronologically outside the Axial Age, they are comprehensible only as “developments of Israel’s axial breakthroughs.” As in the case of Axial Buddhist modernity, the transition from tribal egalitarianism to domination-centered, powerful, archaic kingdoms characterized by mythic culture and then to Axial societies characterized by theoretic culture applies to the cases of Axial Israel–Palestine and early Islam (Bellah, 2011, pp. 272, 655).

The mid 8th century BCE witnessed the rise of Israelite prophets who left written records for the first time. This century witnessed much turmoil in the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean. The commercialization of agriculture gave rise to economic growth, which widened the gap between the rich and the poor and destabilized the kinship system; for example, small farmers became debt slaves to big landholders especially in times of drought (Bellah, 2011, p. 301). Besides, the Neo-Assyrian empire (934–610 BCE) posed a great

¹² Bowersock (2017, p. 3) lists three recent studies as especially significant for the study of early Islam: Donner’s (2012) *Muhammad and the Believers*, Hoyland’s (2015) *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, and Al-Azmeh’s (2014) *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People*. My central arguments are indebted mainly to two sources, which are approached through TTM. The first is the aforementioned work of Syrian historian Aziz Al-Azmeh (2014), which “for its immense range and profundity has no equal in modern scholarship” (Bowersock, 2017, p. 6). The second is the work of sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh (1999) *The Social Origins of Islam: Mind, Economy, Discourse*, which deploys a historical–sociological approach, suiting this study, rather than the common philological approach of orientalist scholarship.

challenge to the Levantine states, including Israel and Judah. The communicative reflexivity and agency of the literary prophets manifested in “reacting strongly both to the growth of social injustice and to the problems of foreign policy” (Bellah, 2011, p. 301), leading them to call for modernizing the structure–culture of their society accordingly. Their traditional structure–culture was not only no longer legitimate but also ineffective in dealing with the new challenges. With these literary prophets, “a significant new note” emerged (Bellah, 2011, p. 302). It is a preoccupation not just with ritual sins, typical of the priests of the royal theology, but also ethical sins, particularly “the oppression of the weak and the poor by the strong and the rich,” in addition to the critique of the idea that rituals could cover for unethical deeds (Bellah, 2011, pp. 302–303). Central to this new note is the prophets’ challenge to the kings. In archaic royal theology, the king is mediator between the gods and the people, but with the Israelite literary prophets, the prophets associated with Yahweh without a mediator. Thus, prophets distanced themselves from the king’s propensity to abuse power and Hosea challenged the very idea of kingship (Bellah, 2011, pp. 303–304).

Axiality in ancient Israel–Palestine manifested best with what Bellah calls the Deuteronomic Revolution. The movement of the Deuteronomists centered around the figure of Moses and saw him as the antidote to not only the Assyrian (and Egyptian) kings, who were imposing their hegemony and cult on the Israelites, but also against the Israelite kings who showed a tendency to abuse their power (Bellah, 2011, p. 310). By drawing on Moses, who was not a king, just a prophet, the Deuteronomists could establish “the great institutional achievement of Israel,” which was “to found a society” on “a new political form,” in which people are “in covenant with God, with no king as ruler” (Bellah, 2011, pp. 310–311). The relation between Yahweh and the children of Israel–Palestine as mediated by the covenant of Moses was central to “the new society” that the Deuteronomists sought to establish (Bellah, 2011, pp. 311, 316).

Bellah (2011, p. 323) emphasizes that, “we must understand the social achievement of peoplehood without monarchy, of a people ruled by divine law,” not the arbitrary rule of a monarch, and of a community made up of responsible individuals. Such was the contribution of the literary prophets and the Deuteronomists to the modernization of their structure–culture to deal with the challenges of their era. This community of responsible individuals governed by a covenant would later become “the chrysalis of both the Christian Church and the Islamic Umma” (Bellah, 2011, p. 323). On this link between the Axial Age and early Islam, Arnason et al. (2007, p. 9) specify that “the Islamic vision of a new order” established itself on the Axial innovation of monotheism.

6.3 The internal and external structure–cultures from which the modernity of early Islam emerged: The widening of social time–space and legitimation crisis

The emergence of early Islamic modernity was partially enabled by the external structure–cultures that pre-Islamic Arabia was drawn into. The pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula was located amidst immense trade and a world order dominated by two powerful empires (Hoyland, 2015, p. 8).¹³ The Byzantine empire controlled Palestine and Syria while the Persian Sassanian empire controlled Mesopotamia and Iran. International trade had its port of entry and exit in the Red Sea (Bowersock, 2017, p. 14). Arabia was a region rich in history, culture, and commerce that any surrounding power had to keep an eye on (Bowersock, 2017, p. 15). The two powerful empires surrounding the Arabian Peninsula had Arab allies that furthered their interest in the region against those of the other (Donner, 2012, p. 23), resulting in the involvement of Arabs in the imperial system of Late Antiquity in the form of complex relations of trade and political alliances, which shaped the political and social conditions necessary for the emergence of “Muḥammad’s movement” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 118–119, 100).¹⁴

Gradually, the Fertile Crescent was incorporated into the zones of Romanity. Although subject to the contestation of the Parthians and the Sasanians, this “political Romanisation” was central to Arab involvement with imperial systems and to the emergence of Islam (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 102). During the pre-Islamic period, a distinction was made by Arabs and non-Arabs alike between transhumant camel-herders in central and west central Arabia and Arabs who joined confederations and imperial systems. Some of these sedentary Arabs were integrated into the Roman imperial system including its higher ranks of service, especially during the Roman Severan dynasty. Some of their culture was influenced by the Iranian Parthian empire but their official expression was Hellenized and Romanized (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 105). For example, the royal house of Salihids adopted Christianity, joined the Byzantine imperial system around 400 CE, and fought with them against the Sasanians in 421–422 and 440–442. Those under imperial systems perceived the nomads as lawless, and Muḥammad expressed antipathy to the Bedouin nomadic lifestyle (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 105; Bamyeh, 1999, p. 52).

The Persians of the Sassanian empire had no interest in spreading their monotheism (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 3; Bowersock, 2017, p. 30), so under their control state monotheism

¹³ A historian of the time described the Persian Sassanian and Byzantine empires as “the two eyes of the world” (Hoyland, 2015, p. 8).

¹⁴ For instance, the tribal confederation of the Jafnids allied with the Byzantine empire while the tribal confederation of the Nasrids allied with the Persian Sassanian empire (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 17).

ended in Arabia (Bowersock, 2017, pp. 33–34). The centuries of state monotheism in Arabia weakened but did not end the polytheist pagan cults that were associated with the desert tribes such as Quraysh in the city of Mecca, the tribe of Muḥammad. The Sassanians consolidated their influence in the region between 560 and 570, reaching an accommodation with the emperor of Byzantium just as Muḥammad was born around 570 (Bowersock, 2017, pp. 31–32).

Historical knowledge is scarce about the Near East and Arabia, particularly in the years between 560 and 610, the period of the birth of Muḥammad. The area that saw the emergence of early Islam, west, east, and north-western Arabia, was in the late 6th and 7th centuries dominated by Arab polytheism existing together with the ambient monotheisms of Christian, Jewish, and potentially Judeo-Christian denominations. Due to the scarcity of source materials, knowledge about pre-Islamic Arab theology and myth is “extremely rudimentary” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 165–166). The available evidence shows that late-antique pre-Islamic Arabs were exposed to foreign ideas coming from territories to the north, north-east and south, located in metropolitan centers (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 249). For instance, the idol of Hubal seems to have been borrowed from outside Arabia but given a Qurayshi character (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 249). Allah was a god among a pantheon of pagan gods and goddesses with a long history dating at least to 500 BCE (Bowersock, 2017, p. 38). Others include the goddesses of al-‘Uzza, al-Manat, and Allat, who was a feminine form of Allah and might have been his consort prior to the monotheist movement of early Islam (Bowersock, 2017, pp. 38–39).

That early Islam is part of the Axial Age, especially by way of Judeo-Christianity, means they share the same underlying causes of modernization, which are theoretic culture or communicative reflexivity in response to certain social conditions, including the widening of social time–space. The causal factors behind, or the conditions that facilitated, the emergence of the modernity of early Islam make it a secondary breakthrough of Axiality.

These social conditions are multicausal. TTM tells us that agents drive social change or keep the status quo under structural–cultural circumstances that not only constrain but also enable their agency to enact social change. Thus, early Islam “did not arise from or act upon a *tabula rasa*” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. xiii–4), rather the local and international late-antique context of pre-Islamic Arabia is of central importance for the emergence of early Islam (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. xiii–4). Al-Azmeh (2014, p. 40) argues that the internal social conditions of pre-Islamic Arabia are linked with the external conditions, together enabling the

modernization project of early Islam. Al-Azmeh's following explanation (2014, p. 40) rightly has undertones of cultural evolution assumed in Bellah (2011, p. 118):

Western Arabia of c. 600 was an anachronism. In terms of religious history, it was not contemporary with surrounding territories between which it was wedged. It was a pagan reservation that had been largely passed over by developments occurring elsewhere.

Seen through the lens of TTM, the archaic tradition of polytheistic Western Arabia was vulnerable in the face of cultural and political pressure coming from modern, more developed, surrounding Axial, monotheistic, imperial civilizations, especially the Christian Byzantine and the Zoroastrian Sassanian empires, such that traditional paganism "represented an older form of continuity with Antiquity" (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 1). The early Muslim renouncers of polytheistic Arabia, particularly Quraysh, organized themselves in a socio-political movement to enact change. Muḥammad and his followers, in the words of Saleh (2010, p. 38), "wanted to end the barbarism of the Arabs," and "the Arabs were to be made similar to the peoples of the empire, the *Rum*, the Romans up north, with a book, and part of the legacy of Abraham." Saleh (2010, p. 38) adds that "it is not insignificant that Muḥammad was rooting for the Romans in their wars with Sassanid Iran (Q 30:1–5)."

According to TTM, contradiction and conflict are inherent in social systems and constitute the seeds of system change. It was not just the awareness that polytheistic Arabia was passed over ideationally and materially by surrounding civilizations, but also that it was perceived to be unjust, all forming a perception of a legitimation crisis among its renouncers, who were knowledgeable, reflexive agents. Just as Bellah (2011, pp. 573–574) insightfully extended Habermas' concept of legitimation crisis to the Axial case of Buddhism, one can extend it to early Islam. The structure–culture of polytheistic Arabia had a legitimation crisis that its renouncers perceived it as ideationally, morally, and materially inferior to surrounding civilizations. That polytheistic Arabia existed in a region of "intense communication," enabled by "the technological possibilities of the age" (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 16), widened the social time–space of its would-be renouncers and facilitated the circulation of new, foreign information. New information in turn facilitated an awareness of the legitimation crisis. The society's renouncers responded to these conditions through communicative reflexivity and modernization-affecting agency to bring about change, that is, to modernize their social structure–culture.

The early Muslim polity included “a constituency of subalterns” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 372; Bamyeh, 1999, p. 260) which was referred to in the Qur’an as *mustadafun* (the downtrodden), in addition to some aristocrats (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 375). Muḥammad himself is portrayed in the Qur’an to be from a humble background (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 260; Saleh, 2010, p. 28). On the Arabian legitimation crisis, Watt (1981, p. 261) argued that “the proclamation of a new religion was a response to the malaise of the times” caused by a “transition from nomadic to a settled economy,” which created the tendency to “replace tribal solidarity by individualism.” This individualism weakened the relative egalitarianism of tribal nomadic ideals and practices and fostered for certain segments a “private advantage” but engendered in others “a corresponding growth of discontent” (Watt, 1981, p. 261).¹⁵

Bamyeh (1999) suggests a more nuanced version of Watt’s argument. Stating that “the ‘idea’ of Islam [...] became thinkable at a particular point in time,” he (1999, p. x) examines the link between sedentarization, the rise of the use of money, and the rise of abstract thought.¹⁶ The shift from a nomadic to a sedentary economy involved a move from a barter to a money economy. Money requires the ability to abstract the world; it engenders abstract thinking (Bamyeh, 1999, pp. x–xi), or theoretic culture (Bellah, 2011, p. 118), referred to in TTM as communicative reflexivity. It was the widening of social time–space that brought money to the once-nomadic tribes of Arabia as Roman and Persian coins arrived at the Arabian scene and were adopted for long-distance trade with India, East Africa, Egypt, Persia, and Byzantium (Bamyeh, 1999, pp. 20–21). This intermediary trade became “the most important capital-accumulating occupation in the otherwise largely barren land of western Arabia” (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 30). In such a nascent capitalist regional system, exclusion of certain social segments was particularly acute for it allowed the “concentration of profit and thus facilitated the emergence of capital surplus in society and among distinct elites” (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 30).

Early Islam constituted an attempt at rectifying the hardship of “growing sedentary inequality and fragmentation” by warning about wealth being a potential source of misdeed, seeking to ethicize the conduct of individuals, and setting up systems for reducing inequality such as by abolishing usury, establishing an alms tax, and encouraging alms year-round (Bamyeh, 1999, pp. 213, 245). Not that almsgiving was not part of pre-Islamic pagan culture,

¹⁵ This is in line with the position of intersubjectivity in Chapter 3 on the collectivism/individualism dichotomy, namely that individualism was not a Western invention.

¹⁶ Bamyeh’s approach is in line with the critique in Chapter 3 of approaches, such as Giddens’, that consider capitalism to be one of the defining features of the supposedly unprecedented Western modernity.

but that early Islam sought to regulate it, not leave it to the whims of individuals, or keep it confined to one's tribe (Bamyeh, 1999, pp. 243–244). In early Islam, the different types of almsgiving became essential, one of the five pillars of Islam, in a modern social order underpinned by “cross-class and cross-tribal solidarity” (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 245). Thus, “a certain form of wealth redistribution” was crucial for guaranteeing the social integration of the different social classes and for achieving and maintaining the sought-after “grand peace” between the social segments of the Umma (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 244). This way, early Islam attempted to strike a balance between ethicizing unethical wealth accumulation while condemning poverty and encouraging ethical capitalist wealth accumulation, an ideal of balance that is reflected in the Qur'an (Hobson, 2004, pp. 37–38).

Having started my analysis with the external and then moved to the internal conditions, it is important now to revisit the discussion on the external conditions that facilitated the emergence of the early Islamic modernity (7th–13th centuries CE). Islam, or specifically “Muhammad's movement” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 100), emerged at a certain time and space in the backdrop of the Byzantine–Sasanian wars and the ensuing breakdown of the southern forts of the two empires. By this time, Arabs had been involved with the imperial systems of the two empires for centuries through complex relations of trade and political alliances (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 118–119). Although both empires influenced pre-Islamic Arabs, “it is within the structures of Romanity that Islam [...] found its conditions of possibility,” such structures being driven by the aspirations of salvific monotheism and oecumenical empire (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. xiii–4), two central features that are absent in the Iranian Sasanian empire (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 3; Bowersock, 2017, pp. 30–34). So decisive was Roman influence for Islam's emergence that, as Al-Azmeh (2014, pp. xiii–4) memorably puts it, “Islam is the end product of the translation of Romanity to the East.”

This point brings us to another aspect of the role of internal conditions. Internal conditions manifest not only in the renouncers' perception of the backwardness of their society vis-à-vis more developed ones and a legitimation crisis in relation to an individualistic sedentary lifestyle but also in the possibilities inherent in the structure–culture of the paganism and polytheism of western and central Arabia (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 40). The monotheism of Islam emerged out of Arab polytheism in analogous ways to Judaism's emergence out of the polytheism of Israelite religion (Bowersock, 2017, p. 49). Both Arab polytheism and these Axial ambient monotheisms were sources of influence for Allah's emergence as a monotheistic deity (Bowersock, 2017, p. 49), a process Al-Azmeh (2014, p. 47) calls the monotheistic “genesis of Allah.” Through this process, the deity evolved from

“an opaque and obscure being,” only occasionally invoked alongside other, more locally enshrined deities (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 283), “perhaps onto a brief betylic stage, and finally to a transcendent, cosmogenic and cosmocratic deity” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 283), acquiring during the lifetime of Muḥammad the attribute of a universal deity (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 316).

One of the enabling aspects of the structure–culture of polytheism for the emergence of the monotheistic divinity of early Islam was that the all-encompassing character of Allah was derived from the additive aggregation of names and epithets that were applied to other deities earlier; these came to be confined to Allah alone under the emerging monotheism of early Islam (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 317). Thus arrived the salvific monotheism of Islam, with monotheism being one of the two central features of Romanity. The other feature, oecumenical empire, would arrive with the Umayyad empire, discussed in what follows, with early signs in the Caliphs succeeding Muḥammad.

6.4 The rise of communicative reflexivity and the modernization project of Early Islam

I now zoom in on the agency part of TTM and further examine the purposive and reasoning behavior of the social agents of Muḥammad’s movement as they navigated the constraining and enabling features of the structure–cultures they found themselves in. The transformation of the deity of Allah, or evolution as Al-Azmeh calls it, was matched with the transformation of the profile of Muḥammad (c. 570–632) from a Meccan seer or Warner to his tribe to a prophetic Apostle of Allah (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 358).¹⁷ Before the crystallization of vested interests within the movement and around it, it was the character and genius of Muḥammad himself that supplied it with the momentum necessary for its initial maturity (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 375). Muḥammad exercised massive agency, eventually with world historical outcomes, driven by his “artful” political and mobilizational dexterity and an aptitude for innovation (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 359–360, 380). He was a child of the environment that constrained his movement in some aspects but also enabled his modernization project, thereby his movement itself shaping the structure–culture of its society to match the developments of societies surrounding it (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 359).

The movement of Muḥammad was subversive of the traditional social order and its temporal, moral, and material rhythms, with an aim for political power to establish a new society, modernizing enough that it meant the uprooting of individuals from their communal and customary context (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 372). Muḥammad’s opponents perceived the

¹⁷ The figure of Muḥammad was so crucial to early Islam that it could rightly be called Muḥammadanism, like Buddhism (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 375).

new worldview as seditious (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 372). Muḥammad and his followers announced the end of a history and the beginning of a new one, referring to the time of their people as the *jahiliyya* (the age of ignorance), which the movement sought to enlighten (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 359; Saleh, 2010, pp. 35–36). The new era that Muḥammad’s movement was announcing was modern enough in their eyes that it required a new universal calendar, the Hijra calendar starting in 622, with a perception of a new enlightened beginning (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 359).

The critique made by Muḥammad’s movement can be considered a communicative reflexivity against the doxa of traditional Arab polytheism. Al-Azmeh emphasizes that it was not the beliefs of Muḥammad and his followers that raised antagonism towards them since denunciations of one’s customs was commonplace in poetry, but that Muḥammad renounced his people’s traditions, mocked their admiration for their ancestors, derided their gods, and mobilized others to desecralize their people’s sacred and enact change based on their new foreign-inspired ideas (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 373; Saleh, 2010, p. 36). This happened in the backdrop of a social organization wherein the solidarity of the tribe strengthened its survival, and tribal loyalty provided one with identity and pride (Saleh, 2010, p. 23). Muḥammad and his followers’ behavior alarmed Quraysh that they were making alliances with foreigners, especially the Christian Ethiopian empire, against their own people (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 373). The persecution of Muḥammad and his followers led to their ostracism culminating in their exile (hijra) in Medina in 622. The movement found better conditions in Medina and became more assertive (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 379).

Capitalizing on existing means of the time, the project of early Islam developed from a seer’s crude warnings to his people into a systematic project of constructing a new worldview and social order through a mixture of abolishing some old practices, appropriating some old ones, and innovating others (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 359). Pagan cultic practices at sunrise and sunset were abolished. Pagan cultic sites were destroyed except for Mecca that was to become the center of the new Islamic social order. Gambling was associated with pagan worship and was thus banned. Dietary prohibitions, some of which associated with Judaism and Zoroastrianism, were also introduced such as swine and blood, while others were prohibited piecemeal such as wine, pigs, and scaleless fish. Animal slaughter was adjusted so that it is performed in a certain way and facing a particular direction (qibla). Ritual sacrifice was preserved from pagan times but downgraded to one yearly feast. Fasting was common among the Jews and Christians of Arabia in the pre-Islamic period and was made one of the pillars of early Islam. Thus, early Muslim polity shared the markers of belonging to a

subculture, holding certain beliefs and performing certain rituals according to certain spatial and temporal rhythms, such as prayer, fasting, manners of eating, ritual cleanness, and body markers such as male circumcision, as enabled by and evolved from pagan, Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian rituals (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 411–414).

One cannot go far just by criticizing illegitimacy in a legitimation crisis. To modernize one needs to be perceived as legitimate. One of the challenges encountered by the early movement was legitimacy. This was approached partially through “progressive Abrahamisation” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 373). For example, the Ka’ba, originally a Qurayshi setting, came to include the image of Abraham, signaling the construction of Abraham as the ancestor of the Arabs (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 178). Another source of legitimacy was the Qur’an. An important aspect of the evolution of early Islam into a tradition is through finding ‘transhistorical’ expression in the would-be canon of the Qur’ān (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 361). In addition to the external late-antique structure–culture, the Qur’an, given its poetic aura (Kermani & Graham, 2006, p. 131), was enabled by and emerged from within the structure–culture of pre-Islamic Arabian society and poetry, for poetry expressed the ideals of society (Saleh, 2010, p. 24) and contributed to the formation of an Arab identity (Hoyland, 2015, p. 25). The text itself recounts that the most common accusation against Muḥammad by the adversaries of his time was that he was performing poetry (Kermani & Graham, 2006, p. 125). In the words of James Montgomery (2006, p. 97; quoted in Saleh, 2010, p. 24), Arabic poetry is “a necessary though by no means sufficient condition” for the formation of an Arabic Qur’an.

The Qur’an was the primordial sign of Muḥammad’s legitimacy, unlike the signs sent by the gods of the pagans of the time manifesting as the wrath of the gods. Making a book central to a new society was “an idea without precedent” among the pagans, the Jews, and the Christians of the time (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 433–434). This idea should be seen in the context of the time of early Islam to appreciate the importance of the movement centering itself around the then new, sophisticated, and prestigious technologies of the alphabet, writing, and later the papyrus (Fang, 1997, p. 7). TTM tells us that these technologies are information storage devices that widen the social time–space of societies obtaining them. They are power containers, and the information storage capacity of a society contributes to the degree of power a society has.

The Qur’an as a text and later a book constituted a shift to “increasing awareness, textual self-reflexivity” in the movement’s proclamations (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 434). Relevant to this self-reflexivity, or rather communicative reflexivity, is that the Qur’an,

besides its poetic quality, is “an argumentative text,” permeated with debate, contestation, and refutation (McAuliffe, 2006b, p. 4). Gwynne (2014, p. x) maintains that “text of the Qur'an itself [...] can be analyzed by formal logic;” it is rich of the elements of formal logic, including arguments with premises and conclusions, antecedents and consequents, constructions a fortiori, justified commands, rule-based reasoning, comparisons, and contrasts. This is unsurprising given that, as shown in Bellah’s (2011, p. 118) framework of the evolution of human culture and cognition, early Islam was heir to the Axial modernizations characterized by the rise of theoretic culture with its analytical form of reasoning.

6.5 The traditionalization of the modernity of early Islam

The standardization and canonization of the Qur’an was the bedrock of the traditionalization phase of the modernity of early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE). Al-Azmeh (2018, p. 361) warns against simplistic approaches to the evolution and canonization of the Qur’an such as the “oral-to-the-written” approach; instead, the evolution of the text involved:

a series of pronouncements, presumably all of Muḥammadan inception or with Muḥammadan support, that, irrespective of their moment of inception, were reiterated on various occasions and by a variety of voices and hands, preserved in a number of redactions, mostly fragmentary ones, or ones that were later to constitute subdivisions of the integral text.

A central moment in such evolution is having segments and fragments of the Qur’an, at the initiative of Caliph ‘Uthmān (r. 644–656), collated into a coherent text while destroying other unfavorable dissenting collations (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362; Donner, 2012, pp. 153–154; McAuliffe, 2006a, p. 45). The resulting text became the symbol of the emergent polity quickly becoming a new worldview for a new empire (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362). Under the Umayyad empire, the text would undergo more standardization (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362). The canonized Qur’an became a source of jurisprudence and exegetical commentary (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362) influencing all aspects of Islamic life (Knysh, 2006, p. 211). It has since its inception come to widen the social relations across the vastness of Islamic space and time, linking its imperial spaces and its past with its present.

The stability that archaic societies derived from royal figures and their theology was derived in the case of the early Islamic movement from the charismatic figure of Muḥammad (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 380–381), a feature of Axial modernizations (Bellah, 2011, p. 323). Like the empires that resulted from the Axial modernizations, such as the Buddhist empire of

Aśoka, the Zoroastrian Sassanian empire, and the Christian Byzantium empire, so too did the early polity of early Islam, following the death of Muḥammad, develop into, not a king-centered, Arab monarchy such as the Nasrid and the Jafnid kingdoms, but a book- and prophet-centered empire (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 403).

The Umayyads inherited from the Roman and less so the Sassanian empires the principle of “universal dominion” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 500–510); thus, perhaps beyond what Muḥammad might have envisioned, early Islam became an imperial worldview and a worldview of empire (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362), like Christianity under the Romans and Zoroastrianism under the Sasanians, wherein the One Empire reflected the One God. The Umayyad empire adopted a new ecumenical currency, the gold dinar in 695, and maintained the use of the Hijra calendar, while centralizing the Meccan ritual space and its *qibla* as the universal direction of prayer (Al-Azmeh, 2018, p. 362).

Yet, the nascent polity that early Muslims formed in Medina was not fully consolidated, which manifested in the event of the Apostasy Wars (632–633) following Muḥammad’s death. These wars were driven by nomadic groups that were resistant to the sedentary mode of social organization Islam entailed (Bamyeh, 1999, p. 52). Al-Azmeh (2014, p. 381) suggests that perhaps what prevented Muḥammad’s movement, once mainly subaltern-driven, from collapsing was that the Meccan aristocracy, especially the Umayyads, had joined the new structure–culture and were poised to lead and traditionalize it for a century. Yet, it was also the Umayyads, a once anti-Muḥammad nobility, who reverted an aspect of modern Axial Islam (blood-blind universal *bay‘ah* or vote to acceptance of leadership authority) back to the “temporarily defeated traditional order” (Dabashi, 1989, pp. 66–68) of pre-Axial, pre-Islamic tribal hereditary rule (Bamyeh, 1999, pp. 259–260). This is an example of an innovation that failed to become a tradition, and a piece of the pre-Islamic tribal structure–culture resisting change.

The Islam of the Umayyad empire has acquired the ecumenical practices of Roman Christianity (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 433). With the Umayyad empire, the geographical remit of Islam expanded beyond its origin across territories with diverse conditions (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 363). The new worldview and political order that Muḥammad’s movement introduced were gradually evolving into a habitus (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 358, 403). This new habitus or traditionalized structure–culture was forming through the regulation of collective matters of social conduct and ritual practices, associated with specific times and places. The Umayyad empire engaged in a project of state-building that would further traditionalize the modernization of early Islam and introduce derivative innovations in other areas (Al-Azmeh,

2014, p. 430). Besides, the Umayyads constructed and traditionalized a “state-like rationalising polity” that sought monopoly over the legitimate exercise of physical force, the classic marker of a state, with its roots in Muḥammad’s role as arbiter in Medina (Al-Azmeh, 2014, p. 382). Thus clan-centered talion, personal defamation, and debt were gradually transferred to a state bound by formal legislation and due process, “elements of an emergent, rationalising legal order transcending custom” characterized by “growing rationalisation” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 405–406).

Thus, it was with the Umayyad empire that the adaptations, explorations, and innovations that were involved in the modernization project of early Islam began transforming into deep-seated and self-sustaining structure–cultures; “in the fullness of time, these together became traditions” (Al-Azmeh, 2014, pp. 358, 499).¹⁸

6.6 Scientific–technological modernization

The discussion above focused on early Islam as originally an ideational, moral, and material modernization, but the Umayyad empire experienced the rise of scientific–technological modernization as well, a modernization that would come to its full fruition with the Abbasid empire. The Umayyads engaged in massive imperial expansion. The imperial structure is such that it involves immense widening of the social time–space of the empire’s inhabitants. Muslim rulers of the Umayyad and Abbasid empires had a great thirst for learning and absorption of the knowledge and technologies of the peoples they encountered, not least because cross-cultural knowledge-seeking is obligatory for every Muslim (Anawati, 1970, p. 741).

Although the Umayyad empire was characterized mainly by imperial expansion (Ronan, 1984, p. 204), they had a practical interest in medical, astrological, and alchemical texts (Livingston, 2017, p. 8). They also inherited the agricultural technology of the Sasanian Empire upon its fall; they rebuilt some canals and pursued agriculture in southern Mesopotamia (Headrick, 2020, p. 124). Muslim urban life developed under the two empires thanks to developments in agricultural productivity, commercial expansion, and demographic growth. Muslim society invested in building agricultural irrigation systems for cities, such as dams, canals, and water wheels, making “indisputable progress” in agricultural innovation

¹⁸ Since my focus is on early Islam as a case of large-scale modernization that becomes traditionalized, many important topics in this period are treated cursorily or left out, such as the caliphs between the death of Muḥammad and the rise of the Umayyads, gender, tensions between the subaltern and elite segments of Muḥammad’s followers, the Sunni–Shi’i chasm, the issue of leadership succession, and the Golden Age of Islam under the Abbasid empire.

(Watson, 1983, p. 111) under an efficient administration of the agricultural sector (Headrick, 2020, pp. 124–125).

The Abbasid empire was characterized by creative intellectual expansion, especially under Caliph Al-Ma'mun (813–833) who patronized translation and scientific projects at the House of Wisdom (Ronan, 1984, pp. 204–205). Islamic science and technology under the Abbasid empire had two aspects: first Muslim societies' absorption of especially Greek, Persian, Chinese, and Indian science and technology and second their own original contribution to scientific and technological knowledge (Ronan, 1984, pp. 202–203).

Other areas that underwent modernization include art, architecture, and the industries of pottery and glass. Islamic art and architecture modernized through a cycle of adoption, adaptation, and innovation, that was reflected in the art and architecture of the central as well as the far western Islamic lands such as Morocco and Muslim Spain (Ettinghausen et al., 2003, p. 277). Under the Abbasid empire, the industries of glass and pottery in the 9th century underwent a modernization in production thanks to “the emergence of a number of new Islamic technologies—a kind of industrial ‘revolution’” (Henderson et al., 2005, p. 143).

The absorption of the knowledges and technologies of other civilizations and their further development under the Islamic empires would later provide the conditions for the rise of the Western Renaissance, Enlightenment, and eventually Western modernity (Hobson, 2004, p. 23), the topic of the next chapter.

6.7 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I examine the emergence of early Islam as a modernity (7th–13th centuries CE) and its gradual traditionalization through the lens of TTM. I locate the roots of early Islam in the rise of theoretic culture in the Axial Age and particularly the Axial modernization of ancient Israel–Palestine. Next, I analyze the internal and external structure–cultures that enabled the modernization project of early Islam. Pre-Islamic Arabia was involved in a Roman- and Sassanian-led globalization that widened the social time–space of its would-be renouncers, bringing to them not only the money economy with its cognitive abstraction that helped introduce sedentarization to once-nomadic Arabia but also the foreign ideas of superior civilizations. Sedentarization introduced individualism and economic inequality while the flow of more advanced foreign ideas made the renouncers of Arabia aware of the legitimation crisis of their society, which was not only materially unjust but also ideationally and morally inferior to foreign surrounding civilizations. Muḥammad's movement was one of the responses to this legitimation crisis, in the form of a

communicative reflexivity directed against their traditional structure–culture, thereby exercising a collective agency that would gradually ideationally, morally, and materially modernize the polytheist structure–culture of Arabia. In critiquing the illegitimacy of the traditions of their people, Muḥammad’s movement drew on foreign ideas, coming from the Sassanian empire but crucially from the Roman empire in that Romanity’s two central features, salvific monotheism and oecumenical empire, further enabled the emergence of the modernity of early Islam, so much so that Islam was a fruit of the Romanization of Arabia. The internal structure–culture of polytheist Arabia also enabled the emergence of Islam, exemplified, among other things, by Allah having been one among a pantheon of pagan gods, eventually assuming their epithets and emerging as the sole deity. Under the Umayyad empire, the modernity of early Islam underwent a process of traditionalization while also consolidating the Roman feature of oecumenical empire. With the ideational, moral, and material modernization of early Islam in place, Muslim society underwent a scientific and technological modernization as well under the Umayyad and Abbasid empires, which would prove crucial for the rise of the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE).

Chapter 7: The post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) and its traditionalization

7.1 Chapter introduction

This Chapter concerns the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE),¹⁹ which is currently falsely considered the first modernity in human history. Seen through the lens of TTM, I treat it as one among many previous modernities in history. After noting the link between the Axial Age and this modernity, I discuss the external Eastern and internal Christian structure–cultures that enabled its emergence. I then provide a general analysis of the Enlightenment as the ideational and moral manifestation of this modernity. Next, I zoom in on the Enlightenment-influenced French Revolution as paradigmatic of this modernity’s practical application, examining such practical modernization and its traditionalization.

7.2 Axial Age and the post-Christian nationalist modernity

An understanding of Western modernity requires comprehending its link to the Axial Age. For Eisenstadt (2000, p. 4), Western modernity constituted an intensification of Axial reflexivity. For Bellah (2011, pp. 394–395), while theoretic culture (communicative reflexivity) emerged in the Axial Age in dialogue with mythic culture, the replacement of mythic culture with theoretic culture “awaited the emergence of Western modernity” in the 17th century.²⁰

7.3 The external Eastern structure–cultures from which Western modernity emerged: Eastern-influenced Enlightenment modernization

The external Eastern structure–cultures that surrounded Europe partially enabled the emergence of Western modernity. The early Islamic modernity (7th–13th centuries CE) proved crucial for the rise of European modernity. An important feature of Europe between

¹⁹ I use the labels “post-Christian nationalist modernity” and “Western modernity” interchangeably.

²⁰ Bellah’s characterization of Western modernity’s link to the Axial Age is Eurocentric. No other people before could replace mythic culture with theoretic culture until the coming of Western modernity, and the replacement was abrupt and done single-handedly by the West, not that it was gradual and diffused, if ever. I make here two points to stress further that nothing unprecedented was involved in Western modernity. “All humans in all cultures do these things [scientific reasoning] and have in some form for millions of years” (Feist, 2008, p. 187), and the improvement of theoretic culture continued to take place through historical learning. I add that mythic, narrative thinking is also human and continues to surround scientific thinking even today. First, as Kuhn has showed, scientific progress happens through paradigm shifts, and no guarantee exists that what is considered scientific today would not turn out to be mythic tomorrow (Ronan, 1984, p. 13). Second, even today’s relatively sophisticated science is necessary presented in mythic form when retold in popular science writing (Schrempf, 2012, p. xiii). Increased mastery of science brought increased control of nature but also the loss of the emotional consolation that previous mythology provided. As humans need the moral and emotional consolations narratives provide, popular science writing finds itself drawing on mythological devices to serve a market in search of emotional consolation to compensate for such loss (Schrempf, 2012, p. 8).

the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th and the 18th centuries is that a “backward Europe” was located next to “the more advanced Eastern world,” especially the Islamic, Indian, and Chinese civilizations (Hobson, 2004, pp. 123, 116–127, 301). The modernization that Europe underwent beginning with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment was an attempt at “catching up with the more advanced Eastern powers” (Hobson, 2004, p. 190).

7.3.1 Oriental globalization: The widening of the social time–space of Europeans and the rise of communicative reflexivity

Europe was drawn into an oriental globalization that connected it to the more developed East, mainly by way of Italy, Muslim Spain, and the Crusades. The consequence of this oriental globalization was that it contributed to the widening of the social time–space of Europeans which made possible the circulation to Europe of superior Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies. Such oriental globalization made Europeans conscious of the mismatch between their relatively underdeveloped or backward habitus and the advanced field of the Eastern-created and -led globalization. The circulated Eastern information contributed to generating the communicative reflexivity of Europeans and made them rethink and eventually modernize their traditional social structure–culture that was also exhausted by an internal legitimation crisis.

The Islamic civilization that developed out of the early Islamic modernity constituted the Bridge of the World between 650 and c. 1800 (Hobson, 2004, p. 38). Dense urban networks of commerce rose throughout the Middle East forming major nodes in a global economic network centered around a “capitalistic sector” that was “apparently the most extensive and highly developed in history” up to that time (Rodinson, 1974, p. 56; quoted in Hobson, 2004, p. 39). The empires of the Umayyads (661–750), the Abbasids (750–1258) in the Middle East, and the Fatimids in North Africa (909–1171) connected several important nodes of long-distance trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean (Hobson, 2004, pp. 39–41).

Part of the East-created and -led global economy was a “global communications network,” an oriental globalization with an “Afro-Asian age of discovery” from 500 onwards (Hobson, 2004, p. 2). Through this global communications network and by way of Italy, Muslim Spain, and less so the Crusades, the “more advanced” Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies, especially of the Middle East, India, and China, diffused to and were assimilated in the West starting from the late 8th century (Hobson, 2004, pp. 2, 118), proving

crucial for “every major turning point of European development” (Hobson, 2004, p. 301).²¹ The European voyages of discovery and the navigational modernization that facilitated them were enabled by the diffusion of Eastern nautical techniques and navigational technologies, including the compass, maps, sternpost rudder, square hull, multiple-mast systems, the astrolabe, and potentially the lateen sail (Hobson, 2004, p. 302). In addition, the important technologies of the stirrup, the horse collar, the watermill, the windmill, and potentially the iron horseshoe and the medieval plough as well diffused from the East to the West and played a role in the economic and political revolutions of the European Middle Ages and the modernization that ensued. Italy’s advantageous geographic proximity to Afro-Asia enabled the Italian economic and navigational modernization, including Italian capitalism, especially through the diffusion from the East, especially the Middle East, of central financial ideas and practices (Hobson, 2004, pp. 119, 117).²²

The European military modernization (1550–1660) was also enabled by the diffusion of the technologies of the Chinese military modernization of 850–1290, namely the gunpowder, the gun, and cannon, reinforced by the contributions of the Islamic Middle East in this regard. In addition, the circulation of the modern, more advanced Chinese agricultural and industrial technologies to Europe by way of commercial routes prompted Europeans to be communicatively reflexive about their traditional agricultural and industrial habits, eventually resulting in the British agricultural and industrial modernization (Hobson, 2004, p. 303).²³

Moreover, the diffusion to the West of Eastern philosophical, scientific, and technical ideas, especially Islamic, but also Black African, Jewish, Chinese, and Indian, was paramount in enabling the European Renaissance and scientific revolution (Hobson, 2004, p. 302). The printing press was vital for the Reformation and the Renaissance as it further contributed to the widening of the social–time space of Europeans and the rise of communicative reflexivity; its invention though can be traced back to the Chinese printing technologies and later the Korean invention of the movable metal-type printing press in 1403, the same as Gutenberg’s press of 1440 (Hobson, 2004, p. 302). Regarding the realm of ideas proper, that

²¹ On the influence of ancient Eastern, especially African, civilizations on Classical Greek civilization, see for example Bernal (1987, 1991, 2006), Orrells (2011), and Hobson (2004, p. 2).

²² These include partnerships, contracts (e.g., the commenda), cheques, bills of exchange, banking, money-changing, interest-lending for trade and investment, contract law, and rational accounting systems (Hobson, 2004, pp. 119, 117).

²³ These Chinese technologies and techniques include the seed-drill and horse-drawn hoe, the curved iron moldboard plough, the rotary winnowing machine, crop rotation methods, coal and blast furnaces, iron and steel production methods, cotton manufacturing technologies, canals and pound-locks, and the idea of the steam engine (Hobson, 2004, p. 303).

Europeans were drawn into an oriental globalization provided them with Eastern ideas which prompted their communicative reflexivity against the relatively archaic doxa of Christendom. This communicative reflexivity manifested in the Continental European and British Enlightenment. In particular, the Islamic World revived, assimilated, and refined Greek ideas. Notable among this intellectual trend was Ibn Rushd (Averroes) whose natural philosophy was influential in Renaissance Europe and was drawn upon in the Enlightenment critique of Church doxa (Belo, 2016, pp. 10–11; Flood, 2019, p. 266). Chinese ideas were also vital for stimulating Continental European and British Enlightenment especially in matters of government, moral philosophy, art, political economy, and industrialization (Hobson, 2004, pp. 194–195). Adam Smith’s principle of laissez faire, for example, can be traced back to the Chinese critique of mercantilism and its ideal of wu–wei [laissez–faire] via François Quesnay who was the direct influencer of Adam Smith (Hobson, 2004, pp. 196–197).

7.4 The internal Christian structure-culture from which Western modernity emerged: The legitimation crisis of Christendom and Enlightenment modernization

It is important here to zoom in on an aspect of the role of Eastern ideas in the emergence of European communicative reflexivity and its manifestation in the Enlightenment. Greek and Eastern philosophy’s impact on Christianity was suppressed during the early medieval period in Western Europe until contact with the Muslim world in Spain and the Levant brought to it Aristotelian and Rushdist (Averroist) philosophy. The impact of this contact was the rise of scholasticism which attempted to synthesize the ideas of revelation and rational philosophy (Gillespie, 2008, p. 20), although both have their roots in Axial theoretic culture. However, the eventual growth of the influence of Aristotelianism and Rushdism by way of Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina (Avicenna) inside and outside the Church collapsed this synthesis and gave rise instead to a branch of philosophy independent of theology. As pagan and modern Eastern rationalism grew within the Church, a counter revivalist movement rose seeking to revive the original Christ-centered Christianity.²⁴ Church authorities tried to ban by decrees in academia the philosophical naturalism of Aristotelian Rushdist philosophy (Gillespie, 2008, p. 21; Putallaz, 2010, p. 111; William & Wallace, 1978, p. 105).²⁵

²⁴ Proponents of this revival viewed this new development with suspicion not only because of its pagan roots but now also its Islamic connection in the context of Christendom’s loss to the Islamic empire of once-Christian colonies in the Levant (Gillespie, 2008, p. 21).

²⁵ These Rushdist ideas include the unity of the intellect and the denial of God’s freedom and providence.

Partially as a reaction to the growth of Rushdist Aristotelian ideas, a new theological movement gained ground, Nominalism headed by William of Ockham. Its notion of God was released from the constraints that rationalism bestowed on him. This is a willing God, too omnipotent that he cannot be constrained by nature or reason, indifferent to goodness and evil (Gillespie, 2008, p. 29). Related in doctrine to Nominalism was Franciscan asceticism which posited that a person's worth came from their nearness to God not from their wealth and possession, an indirect attack against priestly wealth and its intertwinement with political hierarchy. Nominalism continued to grow despite the Church's attempt to suppress it (Gillespie, 2008, pp. 26–27).

Crisis prompts communicative reflexivity, and so was Nominalism's dark notion of God and the uncertainty of salvation that came with it developed in the context of the 14th and 15th centuries' catastrophes that shook the foundations of Christian Europe: The Black Death, the Papal Schism, the Hundred Years War, and economic hardship. In addition to Eastern influence (Goody, 2006, pp. 238–239; Hobson, 2004, p. 178), the criticism of the Nominalists and the Franciscans contributed to the rise of Humanism and the Reformation (Gillespie, 2008, p. 15).

Out of the rubble of scholasticism, grew Humanism alongside but also in opposition to Nominalism with Humanists such as Petrarch, paving the way for more refined notions of individuality and autonomy that Western modernity would later adopt (Gillespie, 2008, pp. 30–32). Nominalism and Humanism's impact on Christianity contributed to the rise of the Reformation headed by Luther (Gillespie, 2008, p. 32), in addition to impact from Eastern philosophy. The ideas that inspired Luther and the Reformation—that humans do not need a mediator between them and God and that God can be comprehended rationally and individualistically—were central to the works of Islamic philosophers such as Al-Kindi (800–873), Al-Razi (865–925), Al-Farabi (873–950), Ibn Sina (980–1037), Ibn Rushd (1126–98), and Al-Zahrawi (936–1013) (Hobson, 2004, p. 178).

Growing up an Ockhamist, Luther was troubled by the dark image Nominalism painted about God and the unpredictability of his salvation (Gillespie, 2008, p. 33). He also inherited from the Nominalists and the Franciscans disdain for the corruption of the Church, and an awareness of its legitimation crisis; his critique of the sale of indulgences was derived from Nominalist arguments (Gillespie, 2008, p. 33). Lutheran Reformation sought to counter the

abuses of the Church while distancing itself from and critiquing the demigod human of Italian Humanism and its incompatibility with divine omnipotence (Gillespie, 2008, p. 33).²⁶

In the backdrop of the Humanist–Lutheran debates, such as between Luther and Erasmus, other thinkers were giving up on the nature of God and his relation to person as the center of their study and putting their attention instead on nature (Gillespie, 2008, p. 35). It is documented that many of those nature-oriented thinkers were influenced by Chinese, Islamic, and Indian scientific thinking that was influential in Europe at the time, part of the communicative reflexivity that came with the widening of the social time–space of these thinkers. For instance, the Indian Kerala school of astronomy and mathematics discovered infinitesimal calculus, which is central to modern mathematics, two centuries before Newton and Leibniz’s similar discovery. A “compelling hypothesis” exists that Kerala mathematics and astronomy were transmitted to Europe through the Jesuits who were present in India between 1540 and 1670 mainly for missionary work but also the collection of Indian science (Almeida & Joseph, 2004, pp. 45, 54–55).

Moreover, the European Enlightenment championed an approach to nature and society—that human reason centers all—which had been central to ancient Chinese civilization. Many Enlightenment thinkers approvingly drew on Chinese ideas, especially its rational method (Hobson, 2004, pp. 194–195).²⁷ Besides, in their inheritance and further refinement of Greek knowledge, Muslim MENA scientists “initiat[ed] a new era of scientific inquiry” (Bloom & Blair, 2002, p. 130). As these scientists realized that the ancient knowledge they inherited contradicted their own empirical observations, they realized that better methods and instruments could lead to better results, thereby building their science on a “systematic and consistent basis according to physical models and mathematical representations” (Bloom & Blair, 2002, pp. 130–131). The result was that by the time of Roger Bacon (1220–1292), the experimental method of Muslim MENA scientists was already influential in Europe, so that “neither Roger Bacon nor Francis Bacon has any title to be credited with having introduced the experimental method” (Briffault, 1919, p. 151; Hobson, 2004, pp. 180–181). As some accounts falsely state (e.g., Gillespie, 2008, p. 39), mathematical science did not originate with the European scientific revolution (Bloom &

²⁶ Humanism and the Reformation sought but failed to come to terms with the contradictions that beset Christianity, or rather humanity, since its inception (divine omnipotence and the source of evil).

²⁷ These include Michel de Montaigne, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Voltaire, François Quesnay, Christian Wolff, David Hume, and Adam Smith.

Blair, 2002, pp. 130–131).²⁸ All in all, Islamic science remains “the most immediate predecessor of modern Western science,” the latter inheriting from the former the empirical method, the mathematization of nature, and the rationality of science (Joseph, 2011, p. 26).

Subsequent Enlightenment thinkers, including Galileo, Descartes, and Hobbes, further improved on the science they inherited from the East (Gillespie, 2008, pp. 39–40). Dissatisfied with the theological debates of the scholastics, the Nominalists, the Lutherans, and the Humanists, on the nature of God and the source of evil, and having absorbed Eastern natural science, the science of these Enlightenment thinkers was to be utilized for the practical improvement of society. Thus, the naturalism of Western modernity placed priority not on person as does Humanism or God as does the Reformation but on nature, thereby making Christian theology an obsolete form of knowledge akin to rhetoric or poetry, and seeing science as composed of physics and anthropology (Gillespie, 2008, pp. 17, 270). This shift has been conventionally understood as secularization or disenchantment (Gillespie, 2008, p. 271). It involved the dwindling of the authority of God and Christian ideas, reducing Christian institutions to “voluntary associations similar to clubs and lodges” (Gillespie, 2008, p. 271). This process intensified during the Enlightenment and its aftermath and saw the eventual replacement to a great extent of Christian state institutions by non-theist rational bureaucratic authority (Gillespie, 2008, p. 271), but also by the emotional non-theist religious rituals of secular nationalism (Anderson, 2006, p. 11; Bellah, 2011, p. xiv; Smith, 2003, p. 40).

Influenced by the East, the Enlightenment thinkers directed their communicative reflexivity against the structure–culture of Christendom and exercised their agency in ideationally modernizing their society. Theirs was gradual change and was expected to come top-down from enlightened rulers. In the Enlightenment-influenced French Revolution, however, communicative reflexivity was radical, and change was relatively abrupt and practical.

7.5 The modernization movement of Enlightenment-influenced French Revolution

I now zoom in on the French Revolution as paradigmatic of Western modernity. The causes of the modernization of the French Revolution are final causes that come under its formal cause of Christendom’s legitimation crisis. The consensus is that a variety of factors contributed to its emergence (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1294; Campbell, 2013, p. 3) both external

²⁸ For instance, Copernicus’s mathematical models of his heliocentric theory were “almost exactly the same” as the mathematical models of Ibn al-Shatir of the Maragha school 150 years before Copernicus (Hobson, 2004, p. 180).

and internal to France (Hall, 2016, p. 138). The revolution had its roots in the material, ideational, and moral legitimation crisis of the Ancien Régime (the Old Regime) exacerbated by geopolitical circumstances; out of the collapse of the Old Regime, the revolution emerged (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1296; Hall, 2016, p. 138). TTM tells us that crises, contradiction, and conflict are inductive to communicative reflexivity as humans collectively attempt to solve them by enacting change in their social structure–culture (usually in the form of modernization and less so revival) and then conserving these changes (traditionalization). In what follows, I examine these ideas.

Conflict around access to land and other economic resources was central to the formation of the French Revolution (Plack, 2013, pp. 212–213, 219). The feudal system of the Old Regime exploited landless peasants and small landowners in that the state, the lords, and the church extracted from their income between one quarter and one half. This exploitation acted as a major motivation behind peasant revolts during the revolutionary years of 1789–93 (Plack, 2013, pp. 214–215).²⁹ The legislators in Paris responded by issuing over 100 pieces of legislation to bring down the feudal system, but it required a second, a third, and a fourth wave of peasant insurrections in 1790, 1792, and 1793 for the actual fulfillment of this change (Plack, 2013, pp. 215–218). The lands of the church and the émigré nobles were nationalized, and the revolutionary government’s law of 10 June 1793 granted the poor access to land; this was a very important outcome of the revolution’s modernization project (Plack, 2013, pp. 219–220).

The bankruptcy and internal divisions of the royal government made more acute the legitimation crisis of the Christian-centered Old Regime. Prior to the revolution, France was engaging in wars that bankrupted the royal government and shook the symbiosis between the monarchy and the aristocracy. In response, the king attempted to introduce an egalitarian tax reform, but the nobility opposed it and remained unwilling to lose their traditional privileges (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1297). This situation was exacerbated by a royal government beset with internal rivalries between court factions and mismanagement, weakening the king’s legitimacy and overburdening the patrimonial nature of the state as the opposing interests of different groups clashed and hindered reform, fueling further the revolutionary spirit of the masses (Bossenga, 2007, pp. 1301–1305).

²⁹ An important revolutionary segment of French society was the peasantry, who constituted 75% of the population; only few of them were large landowners (Plack, 2013, pp. 212–213).

This royal illegitimacy happened in the backdrop of geopolitical conditions unfavorable to hereditary privilege. The regime's structure–culture of hereditary privilege was archaic compared to the international rivals of France in the 18th century so much so that it could not compete in a warring international system (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1302). It needed and eventually acquired a modern rational system of merit and talent to compete in the international scene (Bossenga, 2007, pp. 1295–1296).

Besides, the ideational modernization of the Enlightenment provided the intellectual stimulus for the revolution. This stimulus manifested concretely in the constitution adopted in the year of the revolution as prefaced by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. The constitution included the principles of representative government, sovereignty of the nation, equality before the law, freedom from arbitrary arrest, freedom of thought and expression, and the inviolability of property (Doyle, 2014, p. 181), in addition to modern reforms in the sectors of education, commerce, and the judicial system (Campbell, 2013, p. 10).

After centuries of debates and attempts to address the ideational, moral, and material legitimation crisis of Christendom, the French Revolution responded practically through a project of de-Christianization. The National Assembly abolished monasticism and refused to declare Catholicism the national religion. The properties of the Church, which amounted to one-tenth of the country's landed wealth, were nationalized and used to pay national debt. When half of the clergy and the pope refused a loyalty oath, the revolutionaries perceived them as enemies of the revolution, encouraging them to enact further de-Christianization. Christian conservative observers saw this as a normal consequence after a century of Enlightenment atheism. The link between the state and the Church was effectively severed by the turn of the 20th century (Doyle, 2014, pp. 181–182).

Part of the legitimation crisis of the Church was the legitimation crisis of the monarch. The Axial Age innovation of God, People, Covenant against divine kingly mediation that the Israelite prophets introduced and which Christianity inherited had been appropriated by Christianity-adhering kings. When Christianity with its monotheism became an old archaic worldview that was passed over by developments elsewhere and whose legitimacy was at stake, the attributes of the Christian God were transferred to the Nation, the individual, and the community. Never again were the king, hereditary elites, and churches to be the ultimate source of authority. This Axial Age innovation had been revived and further modernized. At some point, this proved too radical to traditionalize that starting from 1804 Napoleon and his offspring appropriated national sovereignty to bestow legitimacy over hereditary rule. It took

several decades of back and forth between hereditary rule and elected presidency before republicanism was firmly reinstated in 1871.

The rise of modern French republicanism was facilitated by the construction of the relatively modern idea of a public sphere independent first from the monarch and then from non-monarchic rulers. This involved the emergence of literacy and new forms of communication, such as newspapers and pamphlets, markets, salons, and coffeehouses. The rise of the press made critical reading more widely available and allowed writers more freedom as they started living on the sale of their works and could avoid patronage restrictions (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1320). Individuals could come together, as in the Jacobin Club, discuss issues of public interests, and form rational opinions about them (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1319). Thus, one of the modern outcomes of the revolution was the replacement of the closed politics of the absolute monarchy with an institutionalized authority of public opinion through the constitutional safeguards of elections and freedom of thought and expression (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1319).

Since then, the revolution engaged in a project of constructing a republican tradition with the first republic constitution adopted in 1793 and then replaced by the republic constitution of 1795 (Doyle, 2014, pp. 181–183). It is not that French secularism came to occupy the neutral position to regulate Christianity and other religions, but that secular nationalism in France became the “‘religion of the people’, a religion that is equally binding, ritually repetitive, and collectively enthusing—the defining qualities of all religions, in Durkheim's view—as any earlier religion had been” whose ultimate aim is “an inner-worldly salvation” (Smith, 2003, pp. 40, 258–259).

As an example of nontheist religiosity is the rites of death and commemoration. The secular nationalism of post-revolutionary France distinguishes between the ordinary profane cemeteries and the sacred military cemeteries of those who fall in the pursuits of their Nation's mission (Hutchinson, 2009, p. 409; Smith, 2003, p. 246). It also distinguishes ordinary cemeteries from the cemeteries of the eminent personalities that shaped French national identity, such as Voltaire, Victor Hugo, and Marie Curie. These personalities are entombed in the monument of the Panthéon in Paris, which was a Church that the revolution turned a mausoleum (Deneen, 2009, p. xiv).

7.6 The traditionalization of the modernizations of Enlightenment-influenced French Revolution

Starting from the Third Republic, the new nation of France underwent a conscious process of the institutionalization and traditionalization of the revolution's outcomes.

National education was created to replace the church as the educating institution responsible for the formation of republican citizens out of peasants. The Storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789 was turned into France's national day and is now a centuries-old tradition of celebration. National monuments and symbols were created and traditionalized, such as the republic flag, the figure of Marianne personifying the Republic, the slogan of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, the Élysée Palace, and the Place de la République.

The civic liberties that were enshrined with the Revolution underwent traditionalization, but it took some time for the revolutionaries to recognize that non-property owners were equal to property owners. Similarly, it took some time for French revolutionaries to recognize that slaves were equal to them, a recognition that took place formally in 1794 after multiple slave uprisings. Likewise, it was only in 1944 that the enlightened revolutionaries recognized that they were equal to French women. The revolution was sexist initially as the revolutionaries actively dissuaded women from joining politics, denied them the benefits of citizenship, and sought to confine their role to domestic life (Bossenga, 2007, p. 1320). Thus, democracy proper with universal suffrage did not take shape in France until the mid-20th century (Hobson, 2004, pp. 290–291).³⁰ Once male civic, racial, and gender equalities were introduced in 1870, 1848, and 1944 respectively, they became conserved traditions into which French kids are born.

Having assimilated and refined Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies, the now-powerful West later imperially appropriated Eastern resources of land, labor, and markets (Hobson, 2004, p. 311).

7.7 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I explained the emergence of the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) through the lens of TTM.³¹ Unlike conventional approaches, I treated it as one modernity among a plurality of modernities in human history and highlighted its inheritance of the communicative reflexivity that Axial modernizations brought. Also, unlike common approaches, seeing Western modernity through the lens of TTM requires that, first, much attention is given to the factors of external influence that come with the widening

³⁰ Before that, various forms of democracy existed throughout history in different cultures, but according to some contemporary archeologists, assembly-based democracy has its origins in Mesopotamia, in contemporary Syria, Iraq and Iran (Isakhan & Stockwell, 2012; Jacobsen, 1943; Keane, 2009; Schemel, 2000; Van De Mieroop, 2013, p. 287) and can be found among non-human animals (Conradt & Roper, 2007; Seeley, 2010).

³¹ In relation to the objectives of the study, my focus in this Chapter is limited to the aspects of modernization and traditionalization. Therefore, I cover cursorily or exclude many otherwise important topics relevant to Western modernity, such as its dark side.

of the social time–space of Europeans prior to the emergence of Western modernity. Hence, unlike Eurocentric accounts, the analysis of Western modernity proved inseparable from the Eastern influences that partially enabled it. Second, analyzing the external and internal structure–cultures that preceded Western modernity was as important as the modern structure–culture that resulted from it. Third, the analysis did not stop at modernization but followed its traditionalization.

Chapter 8: Summary of the theory and comparative analysis of the three cases

In this chapter, I summarize the proposed alternative theory of modernity (TTM) and provide a comparative analysis of the cases to support and illustrate the theory. I also revisit the three objectives of the study and discuss how they are achieved.

8.1 Summary of the theory: The transhistorical form of modernity and historical modernities

The first objective of the study was to contribute a novel and arguably better theorization of modernity and illustrate it with three cases. Two of these are traditionally believed to be the antitypes of modernity: early Islam and early Buddhism. I have argued that they too were modernities, while the third case of the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) is a latecomer to modernization and is but one among many modernities in history, which brings us to the second objective of the study on the issue of Eurocentrism.

The common approach to, or paradigm of, modernity assumes modernization never happened in human history before Europeans introduced it in the 17th century and then globalized it to the rest of the world. This paradigm coheres around three main dichotomies. The first dichotomy is that all human history preceding 17th–20th centuries Western modernity was dominated by tradition, and that once Western modernity arrived, it assumed dominance over, even destroyed, tradition. My argument is not that this dichotomy does not exist; I rather argue that it is misunderstood logically and empirically. Modernity and tradition are not separate entities but different stages in the life cycle of the same thing, and modernity necessarily precedes tradition, just as the new precedes the old.

The current paradigm has ignored this simple logical assertion partially because it is furnished by two other dichotomies that it misunderstands empirically and sidesteps politically. The second is the dichotomy of religion and secularity. Unlike the previous dichotomy, which needs rethinking, this one is plain false. First, it is important to assume that God is not the defining feature of religion as there are non-theist religions. Second, what is usually referred to as secularism is actually non-theist or secular nationalism. My approach to this dichotomy is that secular nationalism too is a religion. This means that Western modernity did not invent a new, content-neutral phenomenon called secularism for the first time in human history. Rather, Christianity was itself a fruit of Axial Age rationality. It later hardened into an archaic tradition and was appropriated by emperors and kings. Once it was struck by a legitimation crisis, Western modernity replaced it with the rational institutions and emotional rituals of secular nationalism. Here a new religion (secular nationalism) takes

the place of an archaic religion (state Christianity). The third dichotomy is collectivism and individualism, as it relates to capitalism and rationality. Rather than Western modernity having introduced these values, they are features of human existence and can be found in different cultures in different eras.

The Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (TTM) I suggest has a central feature that sets it apart from current theories of modernity. It differentiates between modernity as form and modernity as content. The form of modernity is just an analytical category; it is the transhistorical process that can occur any time and place where there is structure–culture. Humans create structure–cultures in time and space, and that necessarily involves innovation (modernization) and the conservation of the innovation (traditionalization). The actual modernizations and traditionalizations are historical and contextual.

Having provided a different understanding of these dichotomies and introduced the form–content distinction, it becomes easier to say that the post-Christian nationalist modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) is one among many modernities in human history. In theorizing modernity this way, I drew on the work of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer on social change. Social life happens as an interplay of structure, culture, and agency, always and everywhere, meaning transhistorically, universally, and inevitably. The transhistorical features of modernity partially come from these transhistorical features of social life. Another transhistorical feature, alluded to so far, is that this interplay happens in time and space. The scope of the social time–space of humans depends on the information storage capabilities and the communication technologies they possess. The widening of social time–space is a transhistorical feature of social life. That means that globalization is also transhistorical, hence the occurrence of many globalizations in human history. This realization brings us to another important transhistorical feature of social life, which is mutual intercultural influence.

Humans are knowledgeable agents who are born into structure–cultures not of their own making that by default constrain their agency but also enable it, so much so that they can end up changing the very structure–cultures that once constrained them. These include structure–cultures of signification, domination, and legitimation. These structure–cultures are characterized by integration but also domination, contradiction, and conflict. The latter constitute the seeds of social change. Social change and stability are transhistorical features of social life. Humans are rational, communicatively reflexive agents who navigate structure–cultures through their communicative, instrumental, and strategic reasoning. In the case of conflict, the validity claims that constitute communicative action are contested by agents. An

intense example of this happens when legitimation is contested, and a legitimation crisis occurs.

Intercultural influence that comes with the widening of social time–space can facilitate an awareness of such crisis and enable agents’ communicative reflexivity. Thus, the widening of social time–space is not a necessary but a facilitating cause for the rise of the communicative reflexivity so necessary for social change. Sometimes, the social time–space of agents widens backwardly by attempting to revert to an earlier perceived golden age as a solution to social crises. Other times, modernization is the solution, including when revival or renaissance might provide stimulus for modernization. Transhistorically, humans resort to ideational, moral, material, and technological modernization to deal with social crises. There is nothing unprecedentedly Western about it. A transhistorical feature of modernization that is crucially absent in the current paradigm of modernity is that modernization logically and empirically precedes traditionalization, not the opposite. When traditionalization does not follow modernization, it is a case of failed modernization.

TTM arguably offers an understanding of modernity that is better empirically and sounder normatively. This understanding can uncover many modernities in human history, as further discussed in the next section, so that Eurocentrism is no longer an issue. Hence, the study meets two of the three stated objectives.

8.2 Comparative analysis of the three cases

This section provides a comparative analysis of the three cases to further strengthen the ideographic findings of the within-case analyses in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 and balance them with the nomothetic findings of the comparative analysis of this section. This section’s comparative analysis shows that TTM not only explains the 17th–20th-centuries European social changes as a modernity but also the social changes of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE) and early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) as modernities. Thus, this section touches further on the second objective on Eurocentrism and meets the third objective on highlighting the shared modernity patterns between the three cases.

This argument might strike some as odd because Buddhism is believed to be a nontheist religion, Islam a theist religion, while Western modernity an anti-religious secularity. My argument is that these are surface differences that dissipate upon closer analysis. I have discussed before how God or gods are not the defining characteristic of religion, and to say that Western modernity is anti-religious is to misunderstand what religion is. Western modernity has been against state Christianity and other state theist religions, but it

itself produces its own religious sentiments in the form of secular (non-theist) nationalism. Religion is validity claims to truth, rightness, and truthfulness, which, defined this way, makes it a structure–culture, the formation of which is transhistorical. Any group of humans existing in a certain time–space have validity claims they live by. That is their religion. Early Buddhism, early Islam, and Enlightenment-inspired French nationalism are composed of validity claims to truth, rightness, and truthfulness. They are all religions but are at different ‘life’ cycles that some are more traditional than others.

Another similarity between them that is important but not crucial is that they are all legacies of Axial Age theoretic culture or communicative reflexivity. They have differences in the degree of communicative reflexivity. Western modernity has a more intensified degree of reflexivity owing to it having been a latecomer that has benefited from historical learning from the communicative reflexivity of previous civilizations.

Having discussed these broader similarities, I will organize my comparative analysis further in terms of the widening of social time–space, the existence of constraining and enabling, old, problematic structure–cultures constituting different final causes of modernization that are traced to the same formal cause of legitimation crisis, the use of communicative reflexivity to exercise the agency to enact ideational, moral, material, and technological modernization as a reaction to the legitimation crisis, and finally the traditionalization of the outcomes of modernization.

In the three cases, the social agents of early Buddhism, early Islam, and Enlightenment-influenced French Revolution all experienced significant widening of their social time–space. Early Buddhism rose in a context of expanding empires and extensive commerce. Particularly, the Achaemenid Persian Empire’s incursion into the northwest part of the South Asian subcontinent during the Buddha’s time increased the migration of people, goods, and ideas, including Zoroastrianism, which stimulated the communicative reflexivity of would-be Buddhist renouncers. Similarly, in the case of early Islam, the would-be members of Muḥammad’s movement existed in a late-antique world dominated by two powerful empires, the Roman and Sassanian Iranian empires, in a region of intense communication and commerce that allowed the circulation of new, foreign ideas to the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula, thereby facilitating the awareness of a legitimation crisis in the minds of would-be Muslims. Likewise, the Enlightenment was enabled by the Eastern-created and -led oriental globalization that pre-Enlightenment Europe was drawn into, thereby widening the social time–space of Europeans and providing them with the superior Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies that stimulated their communicative reflexivity

and awareness of the legitimation crisis of Christendom. As such, all the three cases experienced the widening of social time–space, and foreign influence was thus a crucial factor for the modernizations they underwent.

Another feature of TTM that the three cases share is that their modernizations emerged as reactions to old, archaic, and unjust structure–cultures that had constraining and enabling features. Early Buddhism emerged as a reaction to the legitimation crisis of the late-Vedic society with its unjust rigid social hierarchy centered around the semi-divine figure of the king as supported by the priestly class; both dominated the lower classes. The governance apparatus of the Kuru kingdom rose in sophistication so much so that its sub-systems of money and power encroached on the lifeworld of the lower castes. Likewise, in the case of early Islam, the pre-Islamic structure–culture was beset by a legitimation crisis in that it was passed over by surrounding developments and its sedentary, individualistic lifestyle increased class differences and made it materially unjust. In the case of the French Revolution and its crucible of the Enlightenment, the structure–culture of Christendom was externally passed over by Eastern developments and internally beset by moral corruption and theological disputes and wars, to which the Nominalists, the Franciscans, the Humanists, the Lutherans, and later the Enlightenment thinkers and French revolutionaries reacted.

All these common features discussed so far that are shared among the three cases lead to the central feature shared among them, which is the resort to communicative reflexivity to exercise the agency to modernize the old problematic structure–cultures. The widening of social time–space led to an increased awareness of the ideational, material, and moral legitimation crisis of the structure–culture of the social agents of each case, which prompted their communicative reflexivity, allowing them to capitalize on the enabling features of the old structure–culture and thereby modernize it. The early Buddhists attempted to replace the Vedic tradition with a new social order and succeeded to a significant extent. The early Muslims cast the tradition of their people as an irrational age of ignorance, desecrated their sacred symbols, and announced the start of a new history with a new universal calendar, a new worldview, and established a new social order with new rituals and practices. Like the early Buddhists and the early Muslims, the Enlightenment-influenced French revolutionaries designated the structure–culture of their people as an Old Regime that is ideationally, materially, and morally corrupt, desecrated the sacred symbols of their people, and announced the start of a new history with a new (short-lived) national calendar, a new worldview, and established a new social order with new rituals and practices.

Another feature of modernization that the three cases share is that they experienced technological modernization besides ideational, material, and moral modernization. In the case of early Buddhism, king Aśoka did not only adopt Buddhist principles in governing his kingdom, but he also modernized infrastructure. The Umayyad and Abbasid empires witnessed the rise of scientific–technological modernization in areas such as medicine, astronomy, physics, chemistry, optics, agriculture, art, architecture, and pottery and glass industries. In the case of Western modernity, absorption of Eastern science and technologies enabled Western scientific–technological breakthroughs in areas such as natural science, navigation, agriculture, warfare, and industry.

A final feature of modernity that the three cases share is that they are successful cases of modernization because the modern contributions they made proved important enough to survive as traditions. Buddhism underwent a process of canonization, institutionalization, and eventually traditionalization beginning with the first Buddhist monks and then with the first Buddhist kingdom and later Buddhist states. In the case of early Islam, the Umayyads engaged in a project for the standardization and canonization of the Qur’an and enactment of Islamic law, rituals, Islamic calendar, and other aspects of Islamic life. In the case of the Enlightenment, many of the Eastern-pioneered ideas that the Enlightenment adopted and reworked are traditions taken for granted today such as democratic governance, economic and social liberty, non-theist reason, and individualism. The French Revolution took practical steps in institutionalizing the Enlightenment ideas and the gains of the Revolution such as civic equality, republicanism, and the replacement of state Christian institutions and rituals with non-theist national ones. The traditionalization of these ideas and institutions in the three cases signify that they are held in high regard and taken as the basis of life.

That the three cases share all these features mean that they all share the central feature of modernization-affecting agency. To further touch on the second objective on Eurocentrism, the current Eurocentric theoretical paradigm on modernity has sustained for long the orthodoxy that no people have ever undergone modernization before, that Western modernity (17th–20th centuries CE) was the first ever in human history. If no other people before could modernize, it translates into the claim that no other people before could attain the level of agency or cognitive sophistication required for enacting modernization. I have shown that modernization-affecting agency is transhistorical and cosmopolitan. This comparative analysis of the three cases of modernity shows that there is nothing unprecedented and exceptional about 17th–20th-centuries Western modernity. In fact,

Western modernity is less interesting than previous modernities because, owing the stimulus for its modernization to Eastern pioneers, it is a latecomer to the experience of modernization.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and implications

9.1 Conclusions

The main research question of this study asked what modernity is and what its causes and outcomes are. Asking such basic questions about modernity means the thesis takes issue with the way modernity is currently understood. Before answering this question, it was important to rethink three dichotomies that are underpinning the current paradigm of unprecedented originally-Western modernity: tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, and individualism/collectivism. The alternative understanding I suggested is, first, that tradition and modernity are not different essences but different stages of the life cycle of the same thing, and, second, that modernity logically and empirically precedes tradition, just as something cannot be old without first being new. In addition, the current paradigm misunderstands the categories of religion and secularity. The approach I adopted is that this dichotomy is false since religion cannot but be a structure–culture in time and space, was not in the past a separate sphere of human affairs but encompassed all spheres of life, and secularity is not a neutral state of affairs but is actually ‘secular’ or non-theist nationalism, which cannot but be a structure–culture, a religion, that is. Moreover, the current paradigm of modernity rests on a simplistic understanding of the dichotomy of individualism/collectivism that is related to the false conception that Western modernity invented rationality and capitalism, so that the rational capitalist individual is seen as an originally Western invention. My approach has it that individualism is not a Western invention and has its roots in the Axial Age if not earlier, together with rationality and capitalism, and that collectivism too is a feature of contemporary Western societies. A better alternative to this dichotomy is Habermas’ concept of intersubjectivity.

Having rethought these dichotomies, it becomes easier to think about modernity differently. This is so because, to answer the first research sub-question,³² our new conception of the modernity/tradition dichotomy allows us to assume that modernity precedes tradition, and a thing that is modern becomes traditional if it survives. Also, the false conception of secularity as a neutral state of affairs that Western modernity invented no longer stands in the way of discovering modernities in history because it is not neutral secularity but non-theist or ‘secular’ nationalism, which too is a religion. Besides, modernization is not conditional on individualism and capitalism, even if these together with

³² Sub-question 1: How can a rethinking of central dichotomies in social theory (tradition/modernity, religion/secularity, collectivism/individualism) contribute to a non-Eurocentric, cosmopolitan understanding of modernity?

rationality are ancient in origin. I can now answer the main research questions.³³ To this end, I introduced the Theory of Transhistorical Modernity (TTM) through a critical appreciation of the theories of social change of Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas, and Archer. TTM differentiates between modernity as form, which is the transhistorical analytical category, and modernity as content, which is its historical instantiation. Modernization is a transhistorical feature that occurs when humans live in time and space. There is nothing Western or unprecedented about it. The transhistorical feature of modernity comes from the transhistorical feature of the interplay of structure, culture, and agency. Social agents are born into structure–cultures, much of which are preserved innovations in the form of traditions that were once modern. These constrain but also enable agents’ agency to change them. Profound change in the form of innovation or modernization comes especially in times of crises, where there is pressure on agents to change problematic structure–cultures, usually manifesting as legitimation crisis. An awareness of a legitimation crisis can be facilitated when agents exist in a context of a widening social time–space, as in the case of a globalization. The widening of social time–space is not a necessary condition for prompting the communicative reflexivity of agents against the problematic structure–culture, but profound instances of modernization involve it so much so that foreign intercultural influence seems to be a transhistorical feature of human societies. Thus, the widening of social time–space and the perception of a legitimation crisis are potential but unnecessary causes, and finally change-affecting communicative reflexivity is a necessary cause of modernization. The outcome of modernization is innovative change in the structure–culture, and in successful cases of modernization, a further outcome is the traditionalization of the modernization.

As to the second research sub-question,³⁴ findings from the within-case and comparative analyses show that the selected three cases are adequately explained by TTM since they are all instances of modernization. The three modernities of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE), and Enlightenment-influenced post-Christian nationalism (17th–20th centuries CE) all share the features of modernization. First, early Buddhism, early Islam, and Enlightenment-influenced French nationalism as an aspect of Western modernity all took a stand against old, problematic structure–cultures and replaced them with new structure–cultures, the three of which conform to the adopted

³³ The main research questions: What is modernity? What are its causes and outcomes?

³⁴ Sub-question 2: To what extent are the social changes of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE), and Enlightenment-influenced post-Christian nationalism (17th–20th centuries CE) historical modernities that share the features of the transhistorical form of modernity?

definition of religion. Second, the three cases are all legacies of the Axial Age modernizations with their theoretic culture or communicative reflexivity. Third, the three cases experienced significant levels of the widening of social time–space prior to modernization, which made them absorb foreign cultural influence. Fourth, they were reactions to old, relatively backward problematic structure–cultures with constraining and enabling features. Fifth, the three cases differ in the final causes behind their modernization, but these causes are covered by their shared formal causes of modernization, which are the widening of social time–space, the awareness of a legitimation crisis, and the reaction to it in the form of communicative reflexivity. Sixth, in the three cases, social agents exercised their modernization–affecting agency. Seventh, the three cases share the outcome of ideational, moral, material, and technological modernization. Eighth, all the three cases are instances of successful modernization in that many of the outcomes of their modernization underwent a process of traditionalization. Hence, to answer the second research sub-question, the three cases of Axial Buddhism (6th–3rd centuries BCE), early Islam (7th–13th centuries CE), and Enlightenment-influenced post-Christian nationalism (17th–20th centuries CE) are all modernities that survived into traditions and thus historical examples of the transhistorical form or category of modernity. As such, Western modernity is just one case among many modernities in history, perhaps a less interesting case given that, owing much of its modernization stimulus to Eastern influence, it is a latecomer to modernization.

The third research sub-question³⁵ zooms in on the case of early Islam and asks about the extent to which it is a modernity like Western modernity. The current paradigm of unprecedented Western modernity commonly casts Islam as the Other of Western modernity, its classic antitype. The suggested theory of modernity and the within-case and comparative analyses show that although the two surfacely seem different and even opposed, further analysis shows that they were outcomes of the same modernization processes. Both were outcomes of theoretic culture (communicative reflexivity) that has its roots in the modernizations of the Axial Age. Both were social movements reacting to own old, backward, illegitimate structure–cultures in the form of modernization of these structure–cultures. The social agents behind the two movements had their awareness of and communicative reflexivity against old structure–cultures stimulated and eventually influenced by exposure to foreign, more developed structure–cultures in a context of a widening social

³⁵ Sub-question 3: How does the rethinking of these central dichotomies contribute to the understanding of the international phenomenon of the emergence of Islam (7th–13th centuries CE) as the replacement of several traditional practices by modern ones, an instance of modernization, not the antitype of Western modernity?

time–space (globalizations). In the case of the modernity of early Islam, pre-Islamic Arabia was drawn into a globalization led by the Roman and Sassanian empires and was thereby influenced by the two and other surrounding structure–cultures, with Romanity having the decisive influence so much so that Islam is a fruit of Romanization. Western modernity (17th–20th-centuries) was a fruit of Easternization in that Christian Europe was drawn into an Eastern-created and -led globalization that widened its social time–space and gave it access to the more advanced Eastern ideas, institutions, and technologies. In addition to Indian and Chinese influence, the influence of the Islamic civilization proved crucial for the emergence of Western modernity. Thus, foreign influence is a feature the modernities of early Islam and Enlightenment-influenced French nationalism share. Both modernities drew on foreign influence to make original modernizations in the realm of ideas, institutions, and technologies. Both eventually traditionalized the modernizations. Thus, both were outcomes of the exercise of modernization-affecting agency.

9.2 Implications

The theoretical and empirical results of this study have implications for the field of IR. In Chapter 3, I joined scholars who call for more attention to modernity in IR scholarship and combined this call with calls for deeper historical approaches to IR for a better understanding of international relations. By taking a historical and transhistorical approach to modernity with three historical cases, I argued that a better understanding of the international phenomenon of modernity is achieved, which in turn sheds new light on contemporary issues, as I discuss next.

Since one of the objectives of this study was to suggest a new theoretical understanding of modernity, one of the implications of the suggested theory is that it is a contribution to what some call Southern Theory (Connell, 2007; Emirbayer, 2013; Go, 2013; Wallerstein et al., 2003). Connell's (2007) work on Southern Theory is most useful when combined with Emirbayer's (2013, p. 134) appreciative critique of it. Connell, Emirbayer, and Alatas (Wallerstein et al., 2003, pp. 460–461) take issue with, on the one hand, the division of labor in the social sciences wherein the North theorizes while the South applies the theories of the North, and, on the other hand, the marginalization of Southern theories. They urge Northern scholars to see Southern Theory not just as texts to learn about but also learn from and engage in global mutual learning to make social theory more dialogic. Theorizing on modernity, as I argued in Chapter 3, has been dominated by Northern scholars so much so that, to my knowledge, no non-Northern fully-fledged theory of modernity has

been attempted. Non-Northern approaches to modernity have been limited to reactions to Western theories of modernity. I think it is important that theorizing on a phenomenon that affects West and East is not the prerogative of Western scholars but is inclusive of a diversity of voices.

Related to this is another implication for non-Eurocentric cosmopolitan scholarship. My contribution challenges Eurocentrism without advancing another ethnocentrism. It aims for a cosmopolitan understanding of modernity and is itself a fruit, not of parochial ethnic motives, but of dialogic learning that, while appreciatively critical of Eurocentric theories of modernity, is indebted to these Western theories. I see this study as part of Benhabib (2008, p. 18), Habermas (Gabriëls, 2018, p. 568), and Said's (1996, p. 109) encouragement for the cultivation of cosmopolitan researchers who are sensitized to the problem of inter-civilizational conflict and who aim to secure an equality-based interaction between world civilizations. Different scholars sought to counter Eurocentrism differently, but the value of modernization-affecting agency has been believed to be justly Western that attempts to come to terms with it remained limited to relativizing and softening it. My approach to modernity reclaims the value of modernization-affecting agency, which could arguably be the final nail in the coffin of Eurocentrism.

To reclaim this agency has implications in turn for the relation between Islam and modernity. Eurocentrism is one of the hurdles standing in the way of progressive change in the MENA. The discourse of "Western values" that claims ethnic ownership of value-laden norms resonates with the regime-opposing fundamentalists as well as the regime-supporting conservatives. These two stand on the other side of the discourse of ethnic purity and superiority, resisting progressive change and equating it with Westernization and cultural imperialism, a discourse that casts change as Western and keeps MENA youth confined between the hammer of conservatism and the anvil of the charge of Westernization. Western youth have nothing to restrict their creativity as change-affecting agency is believed to be ethnically theirs; they are taught not to *what* to think but *how* to think. MENA youth have their creativity restricted so much so that creative endeavors outside of Islamic theism—a confined space—is seen as Westernization. Unlike their Western peers, MENA youth are in this regard taught, by their own and surprisingly by some Western forces as well, what to think not how to think. In this study, I have sought to reclaim the transhistorical value of change-affecting agency. I have argued that both change-affecting agency and foreign influence and intercultural learning are transhistorical and anciently cosmopolitan. Not only that, but Islam itself was to a significant extent a fruit of foreign influence, of Romanization

or Westernization, and too was 17th–20th-centuries Western modernity a fruit of Easternization. MENA youth should not be denied, by their own and others, the agency to think within, beyond, and outside Islamic theism, and for that they can derive inspiration from early Buddhism, the 7th-century early Muslim movement, and similar, all fruits of communicative reflexivity, change-affecting agency, foreign influence, intercultural learning, and originality.

To take the last point further, TTM can have implications for a critical social theory of the MENA region in general and for understanding the current crisis of the Islamic–Arab civilization in the pre- and post-Spring eras. First, it can be used to build bridges between proponents of political Islam and proponents of ‘secular’ thought in the region given that it has elements that allow it to be a third way between the two. TTM is critical of Eurocentrism and allows us to be appreciative of Islam’s contribution to humanity, seeing it as an Enlightenment compared to the age of ignorance it came to replace in the 7th century. Islam is not the Other of Western modernity but was itself a modernity that was partially a fruit of Romanization, and it itself later contributed to making Western modernity possible. These elements matter for political Islam. It is possible today to derive formal inspiration from the movement of early Islam by seeing it from the lens of TTM as a progressive modernization project that absorbed foreign influence but developed it in original ways. As such, even a nontheist philosophical change within Islam is not cultural imperialism but can be in the spirit of early Islam because such spirit is communicative reflexivity, foreign influence, intercultural learning, and innovation, not its specific theist content, with the Qur’an being a historical document of rational argumentation and poetic beauty, thus deriving inspiration from early Islam in terms of form but using this formal inspiration to innovate content, while learning from contemporary world cultures just as early Islam did from its contemporary world cultures. These elements matter for the ‘secularist’ side. Second, the crisis of Arab–Muslim civilization has preoccupied MENA intellectuals for more than a century, which Kassab (2010) aptly surveys in its pre-Spring phase in her *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*. The hope that was placed on the Arab Spring has faded away, as the spring has turned into a winter (Feldman, 2021, p. x). It has perhaps become apparent that the crisis has deep roots and the road out of it and into emancipation is rugged. The study is part of a broader project that focuses on seeds of deep, structural–cultural, long-term transformation, that might supplement or be an alternative to the kind of social revolutions that gave rise to the Arab Winter.

9.3 Limitations

One of the limitations of this study, which several peer-reviewers remarked, is that its scope is bigger than that of a masters' thesis. I tried to reduce the impact of this by choosing a 60-credit thesis, but I still struggled to keep it within the word limit as almost every draft chapter was double or triple the planned length. Some might view this as a limitation, perhaps in the sense that length reduction was done at the expense of more detail or that it is too detailed.

Another limitation is that some might view the thesis as having too broad a scope. This is so because the study concerns an IR phenomenon that is broad in nature. The classic and current influential theories of modernity are broad in scope too, and so is the alternative theory I suggest. By combining within-case with comparative analysis, I tried to strike a balance between the micro and macro.

Another limitation is that the suggested theory is critical of Eurocentrism, but my main influences are Western scholars. In Chapter 3, I expressed dissatisfaction with postcolonial approaches to modernity for being semi-Eurocentric. Theorizing modernity has been the prerogative of Western scholars, and their work improved my understanding of modernity. My approach to the criticism of Eurocentrism is not to shun Western voices but to have a dialogic, critical approach to them. Therefore, my study is indebted to these Western voices in the form of critical appreciation.

9.4 Recommendations for future research

Looking at history and the present through the lens of TTM opens avenues for further research. The explanation of the rise of early Islam as a modernity can be explored in more detail, and so can the case of Western modernity. Also, the two modernities of early Islam and Western modernity can be compared in further detail to counter the perception that they are opposites. This research can also contribute in the future to understanding the rise of non-theism in the MENA (Arabic, 2019), which is currently understood in Eurocentric undertones (see for example, Cottee, 2015; Orenstein & Weismann, 2016; Vliek, 2018). Besides, the implications outlined above can be explored in detail.

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