Can Koselleck Travel? Theory of History and the Problem of the Universal

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ABSTRACT

The methodology and theory developed by Koselleck has been successfully spread globally. Less attention has been devoted to reflections on the conditions and possibilities of universalizing his approach beyond the geographical area on the basis of which it was developed. This article proposes to reread Koselleck's three core contributions to the theory of history—the anthropological constants, the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, and the Sattelzeit—from a postcolonial viewpoint. Empirically it is based on the history of the South Asian Muslims, exploring how Koselleck can help raise new questions, but also how the change in the geographical viewpoint may lead to a reconsideration of some of his assumptions.

KEYWORDS

anthropological constant, contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, jinns, Koselleck, Sattelzeit, South Asian Muslims, temporality

The history of concepts, as it was developed by Reinhart Koselleck (1923–2006), has experienced a successful global career in the last two decades and is now practiced from Buenos Aires to Istanbul and from Helsinki to Seoul. Koselleck's own work centered on Germany in a European context, and he remained critical of comparative approaches even within this restricted frame. However, extending his program to other languages, in Europe and beyond, does not seem problematic if we understand it simply as a methodology for investigating concepts. It might need some adjustment here and there, paying more attention to translation processes and the way they worked, adapting the methodology to the specific linguistic structure of the language under consideration and to the genres of sources, but this can be done, it has been done, and it has produced fascinating results. For Koselleck, however, his work on the history of concepts was never to be divided from his larger project of formulating a theory of history (*His-*

torik), and it is these reflections that have gathered increasing interest in recent years but are also open to criticism. If postcolonial studies had pointed out the need to question the analytical categories used in the social sciences for being at the same time universal in their claims and provincial in their origin and framing,[1] the decolonial approach pushes this agenda further and asks for overcoming the division between European theory and non-European empirical material and pleads for increased attention to theoretical reflections developed outside of Europe.[2]

This article addresses a double audience. It is a contribution to the ongoing debates on Koselleck, taking place in many different places. Here I am interested in contributing to the interpretation of his oeuvre and notably in exploring some internal tensions. This, in turn, makes it possible to evaluate which parts of Koselleck could remain of interest once we shift our regional focus to the Islamic world and to India. We do not have to accept or reject him in toto, but we can pick and choose and even keep his questions while we discard (some of) his answers.

At the most abstract level, Koselleck's *Historik* took the shape of musing about anthropological constants in a tradition influenced by Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, searching for abstract categories that precede every possible history. Koselleck returned to this project over the years and came up with different categories at different instances.[3] This will form the subject of the first section below. At the midlevel between theory and empirical research, he reflected on temporalities. Wary of the totalitarian potential of utopian projects conceptualizing a unified history (and then eliminating everything and everyone who did not fit the model), Koselleck proposed a "history in the plural,"[4] which allowed for the continued presence of dif-

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[1] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); for an alternative reliance on concepts originating in the global south see Dilip Menon, ed., *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022).

[2] Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, eds., special issue "Globalization and the De-Colonial Option," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 155–523.

[3] Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, "Koselleck, Arendt and the Anthropology of Historical Experience," *History and Theory* 49, no. 2 (2010): 212–236; Alexandre Escudier, "Von Kosellecks Anthropologie zu einer vergleichenden Topik der politischen Moderne" [From Koselleck's anthropology to a comparative topic of political modernity], in *Zwischen Sprache und Geschichte: Zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks* [Between language and history: On the work of Reinhart Koselleck], ed. Carsten Dutt and Reinhard Laube (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013), 196–235.

[4] Niklas Olsen, *History in the Plural: An Introduction to the Work of Reinhart Koselleck* (Berghahn: New York, 2014).

ferent layers of time (*Zeitschichten*)[5] and for the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous. This will be the topic of the second section. Finally, the *Sattelzeit* (saddle period) provides the tools for the interpretation of a concrete historical problem. It refers to the time roughly between 1750 and 1850, which profoundly transformed Europe and in which the key concepts marking the debate underwent a fourfold transformation, summed up as democratization, politicization, ideologization (more precisely: the potential of being used ideologically, *Ideologisierbarkeit*), and temporalization.[6] Koselleck himself remained ambivalent about the concept. On the one hand, he played it down as a heuristic assumption, meant to give coherence to the multivolume project of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and invented on the spur of the moment.[7] On the other hand, the investigation of the transformations during the *Sattelzeit* is linked to the core topics of Koselleck's work: the appraisal of the Enlightenment and modernity and their totalitarian potential. If this made him look like a conservative in the 1970s, he has gained new relevance in light of the postcolonial critique of the Enlightenment project, though the grounds for these two critiques certainly differ. This will be followed in more detail in the third section.

Koselleck traveled a lot, camera always at hand, as the photographic archive in Marbach documents. All of his travels, however, were within Europe, with the occasional trip to the United States. In spite of their universalistic rhetoric, his theories of history were meant to explain European history. But if Koselleck did not himself travel to the Islamic world or to Asia, either in body or intellectually, does this mean that his theories, too, remain regionally bound and are meaningless beyond the frame for which they have been developed?

This article proposes to reread Koselleck's three core contributions to the theory of history mentioned above—the anthropological constants, the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, and the *Sattelzeit*—from the perspective of the history of Muslim South Asia. The aim is twofold. On the one hand, it is important to be aware of the European foundations of these

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[5] Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, trans. and ed. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Sean Franzl (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

[6] Reinhart Koselleck, "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* [Basic Concepts in History: A Historical Dictionary of Political and Social Language in Germany]," trans. and ed. Michaela Richter, *Contributions to the History of Concepts 6*, no. 1 (2011): 1–37, see 9–15 for the *Sattelzeit* and its four categories.

[7] Reinhart Koselleck, "A Response," in *The Meaning of Historical Terms and Concepts: New Studies on* Begriffsgeschichte, ed. Hartmut Lehmann and Melvin Richter, Occasional Papers No. 15 (Washington DC: German Historical Institute, 1996), 59–70, here 67, https://www.ghi-dc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GHI_Washington/PDFs/Occasional_Papers/THE_MEANING_OF_historical_terms.pdf (accessed 7 January 2020).

theories and concepts and to reflect on where they might shape our perception of the histories we describe with their help. I would like to think that Koselleck would have agreed. After all, he wrote many articles on how concepts shape the interpretation of the world of the actors who use them, and this obviously also holds true for the conceptual historian. If we are looking for a *Sattelzeit* (or in other contexts, for feudalism), the chances are high that we will find it. This is a general problem, but it becomes more virulent if the area for which the theory was developed and the one to which it is applied diverge. On the other hand, this is not a call for limiting the scope of a theory to the empirical problem on the basis of which it was created or for dumping it all together in the name of the fragment and of radical incommensurability. This would not only ignore the centuries of communication and interaction between different regions, it would also prevent historians from communicating and developing common frameworks in order to share their findings and make them meaningful beyond their empirical basis. Rather than asking whether Koselleck's theories are right or wrong, I would suggest exploring their power to raise interesting questions, always keeping in mind their potential dangers. We need theories, and if we aim at writing global histories, we need theories that move beyond the local and the specific. Even if Koselleck does not provide them for us, perhaps he can inspire us to come up with alternatives. It goes without saying that he neither will nor should ever be the only inspiration, even for historians of concepts.

Anthropological Constants

The importance Koselleck gave to concepts and language has often led to reading him as a part of the linguistic turn. However, from his early articles onward, Koselleck always emphasized the crucial importance of keeping apart what happened in history from its representation and interpretation.[8] Against Hans-Georg Gadamer, Koselleck argued that while language and texts pertained to the domain of meaning and lent themselves to hermeneutic approaches, there remained a history beyond mediation, which followed different rules. Discovering these rules, and through them not only the history that happened but also the conditions of possible history (*Bedin-*

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[8] Reinhart Koselleck, "Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte," in *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), 9–32 (English translation: "Social History and Conceptual History," trans. Kerstin Behnke, in *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002], 20–37).

gungen möglicher Geschichte), was the task that he set for a theory of history (*Historik*).[9]

The degree of universality for which Koselleck was striving was only possible, so he explained, by not deducing these conditions from past happenings—if they set up the conditions for possible histories, they are not themselves submitted to historical change. He does not make the alternative explicit. Taking Georg W.H. Hegel and Martin Heidegger as his starting points, however, makes it probable that he was thinking about a philosophy that would not be derived from experience. Nevertheless, as soon as he started to elaborate his categories, the historian took over from the philosopher. The examples and quotes he himself provides are anything but anterior to historical experience. Rather, they reflect Koselleck's intellectual heritage and his own experiences, specifically during the Nazi regime, World War II, and as a prisoner of war, which he partly shared with his (German) audience.

In spite of these claims, Koselleck did not offer a thoroughly structured design, but continued to experiment with a varying number of fundamental oppositions in different contexts, depending on the questions that were foremost in his mind.[10] In the following, we will discuss three groups of categories (which were sometimes grouped together by Koselleck, but not always) from the perspective of the history of North Indian Muslims. If we take Koselleck's claim seriously that these are anthropological constants—that is, transcending experience and its interpretation in language—they can be discussed not only for modern Europe but also for the Mughal era and for British rule. For the readers interested in Koselleck, this might offer some insights into how far his anthropological constants were both less constant and less anthropological but rather intimately linked with the history of modern white men. For the readers committed to the writing of the history of the Indian or the Islamic world in a global context, this might provide some warning signs where Koselleck might lead us astray, but it is also an indication that his questions in relation to the theory of history, if not his answers, still remain a valid challenge.

The first category is centered around the opposition of the before and after, which for Koselleck is not only central to the concept of history, which can only move in one direction, but is directly derived from human

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9 Reinhart Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," in *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2003), 97–119, here 99 (English translation: "*Historik* and Hermeneutics," in *Sediments of Time*, 41–59, here 43); Reinhard Koselleck, "Sprachwandel und Ereignisgeschichte," in *Begriffsgeschichten*, 32–56 (English translation: "Linguistic Change and the History of Events," trans. Stephen Duff, *The Journal of Modern History* 61, no. 4 [1989]: 649–666).

10 For a post hoc systematization of these categories, see Escudier, "Kosellecks Anthropologie."

mortality—here Koselleck is drawing on Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death.[11] The orientation of life toward death implies generativity, the reproduction of life, which leads to several generations sharing the same space without having lived through the same experiences. Put this way, the categories of before and after seem self-evident. No one would dispute human mortality or argue that time is flowing backward. We cannot return to the time when those who passed away were still with us or even to the tasks that were due yesterday. But already from within Koselleck's own reflections, things are more complicated than this clear-cut opposition suggests. The before and after is overlaid by repetitions and simultaneities,[12] and the importance given to generations already pulls in a different direction. Here, they are linked to the inevitable advance of history through death and generativity; at other places, they are rather a part of natural, recurrent time: the cycle of life from birth to death, repeated over and over again. Moreover, a uniquely linear history—the image most strictly based on the distinction between the before and after and the unidirectionality of time—was, he tells us in other contexts, an interpretation dating from the eighteenth century that ignored what he called the enduring structures of repetition.[13] This is not to argue for a modern European linearity as opposed to premodern and Oriental cyclical theories. Pure linearity is as impossible to conceive of as pure cyclicality, it is the ratio and the way in which the two are mixed that calls for interpretation—moving beyond the conciliatory metaphor of the spiral, which still implies forward or upward, even if it is no longer linear.

Islamic philosophy of history, in its North Indian version, shows evidences of both elements. The history of the world from creation to doomsday is not repeatable nor is the life of the individual anything but unique. This linear timeline, however, encompasses many cycles. History before the Prophet consisted of a series of repetitions, of God sending prophet after prophet with the ever-same revelation, and the peoples again and again corrupting the purity of that revelation and falling from the original purity. The revelation of the Quran transformed these cycles without abolishing them. After Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, there could be no new revelation and no new prophet. As this did not abolish the tendency of human history toward decline, the role of the prophet was now taken up by the renewer (*mujaddid*)—a minor one for every century and a major one for each millennium. In India, Ahmad Sirhindi was regarded as the renewer of the

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[11] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 99–101.
[12] Helge Jordheim and Einar Wigen, "Conceptual Synchronisation: From Progress to Crisis," *Millennium* 46, no. 3 (June 2018): 421–439. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829818774781.
[13] Koselleck, "Einleitung," in Zeitschichten, 9–16; Koselleck, "Zeitschichten," in *Zeitschichten*, 19–26 (English translation: *Sediments of Time*, 3–9).

second millennium (*mujaddid alif sānī*).[14] Besides this theological reading of history, there existed countless interpretations, which were not "secular" in today's meaning but were less interested in the history of salvation than in dynastic or regional histories.[15] At the more popular level, the presence of the past, which did not work according to the logic of the before and after, was created by saints whose life span extended over many centuries and who remained receptive to the supplications of the believers, even in their graves, and by *jinns*.[16]

The second category of opposition refers to the distinction between inside and outside, which is constitutive for historical spatiality[17] and for the creation of communities. The opposition between friend and foe, which Koselleck takes from Carl Schmitt, is a specific case of this distinction.[18] Again, once we look for the presence of these categories in Indo-Islamic history, we have no problem finding them. Next to metaphors relating to the family, the language of friendship and even love was of central importance in political interactions, be it at an individual court or in the relations between courts and realms.[19] The figure of the traitor, the person crossing the boundary, marks the reality of opposition.

This, however, is only one of multiple ways of conceptualizing belonging (certainly in North Indian Islam, but also in Europe), one which juxtaposes homogeneous communities and distinguishes them through a boundary. More common, at least until far into the nineteenth century, was a concept of belonging based on the identification with or the submission to a center—another way of conceptualizing friendship and love. The Other can be a "thou" in the parlance of Martin Buber, a person addressing whom the "I" becomes aware of its subjectivity or even more radically: through whom it becomes a subject. This "thou" is not ejected from the "I" but constitutes

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[14] For the importance of Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), claimed as the Mujaddid of the second Islamic millennium, see Yohannan Friedmann, *Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1971); and Arthur Buehler, *Revealed Grace: The Juristic Sufism of Aḥmad Sirhindi* (1564–1624) (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011).

[15] Shahzad Bashir, ed., *Islamic Pasts: Histories, Concepts, Interventions*, Special Issue, History and Theory 58, no. 4 (2019).

[16] Anand Vivek Taneja, *Jinnealogy: Time, Islam, and Ecological Thought in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Margrit Pernau, "Fluid Temporalities: Saiyid Ahmad Khan and the Concept of Modernity," *History and Theory*, 57, no. 4: 107–131.

[17] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 104–106 (*Sediments of Time*, 47–49).

[18] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 102–104 (*Sediments of Time*, 46–47).

[19] Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

its true core.[20] In turn, this allows for the co-existence of a multiplicity of centers, to which individuals and groups can relate. The feelings (and practices) of belonging were stronger the closer they were to a center, without ever completely excluding the influence of alternative ones. They became more diffuse the more the distance from the center grew, and others gained traction.

A number of case studies would lend themselves to a further investigation of these concepts. The Sufis and scholars of Delhi in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are a case in point. At first sight, the lines were clearly drawn between the different lineages. The orders of Chishtis and the Naqshbandis could be distinguished by their theological positions and by their pious practices; the proponents of the traditional sciences, with their emphasis on logic, grammar, philology, and mathematics, opposed those for whom the study of the revelation and the hadith were central. All of these were real distinctions and mattered to an extent that could exceed the ex-change of barbed poems. The categories of the inside and the outside, even of friends and foes, can be found here if we look for them. At the same time, multiple initiations into Sufi lineages were the rule rather than the exception since the eighteenth century. Also, the quarrels between the Khairabadis, the foremost family in Delhi standing for the traditional sciences, and the Madrasa Rahimiyya, the North Indian center for Islamic reformism and hadith scholarship, did not prevent them from sending their pupils across the city to take classes with each other.[21]

On the political level, the history of maps would be an interesting entry point. Mughal maps were either based on central points of reference, mostly cities, or on roads linking these points of reference. It was only the colonial cartographers from the eighteenth century onward who were interested in boundaries dividing provinces and territories and who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, used color to demarcate the lands directly ruled by the Crown (pink) from those under the nominal suzerainty of Indian rulers (yellow).[22]

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[20] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Smith (New York: Scribner, 2000) (German original, 1919).

[21] For more details, see Margrit Pernau, *Ashraf into Middle Classes: Muslims in Nineteenth-Century Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 29–57.

[22] For Mughal cartography, see *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, ed. J.B. Harley and David Woodward (*The History of Cartography* vol. 2, no. 1) (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992). For the colonial transformation, see Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ian Barrow, *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping in India, c. 1765–1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The third category of opposition distinguishes between above and below; here Hegel's opposition between master and slave provides the framework.[23] What is interesting is less the claim that power is ubiquitous and marks relations even between equals, but rather the images associated with it. Again, the categories of above and below can be found in North Indian writings dealing with hierarchy and power. This should not lead us to overlook another categorization, which was at least as important, if not more: the distinction between levels of closeness and distance (which, for Koselleck, are not pertinent to questions of hierarchy, but are shortly alluded to as a special case of the inside and outside).[24]

The architectural design of Mughal palaces typically distinguishes between two halls for audiences: the *dīvān-e ʿām*, where commoners were received, and the *dīvān-e khāṣṣ*, for those close to the emperor—a bodily closeness that could either be derived from an emotional proximity or from the power position of the courtier, which entitled him to approach the ruler. Miniatures of the *darbārs*, the imperial courts, represented this influence-through-closeness by carefully allocating to each and every attendant his proper place (these formal levees were, as a rule, only attended by men).[25] The way the *Encyclopedia of Islam* translates *khāṣṣ* both as private and as political or relating to the state, is not a contradiction, but rather flags the fact that power, and even political power, was imagined as an inside.[26] This does not exclude vertical notions of hierarchy. In the *dīvān-e ʿām*, the imperial throne was not only protected by rails from too close a proximity to the common crowd, but it was also raised about two meters above the platform. The same distinction between spaces according to a diminishing degree of publicness was replicated up to the present at the level of the palaces of nobles as well as in mansions and houses.

Power, in this imagery, is marked by the right to keep a distance and avoid proximity and, even more so, touch. Viewed from the opposite side, it was power that gave someone the right to come closer and touch. *Ačhūt*, untouchable, thus carried an implication of purity and holiness, guarding against touch, before it became the common designation for untouchability in the 1930s. Again, these forms of categorization do not exclude each other. The emphasis on proximity in *ačhūt* goes hand in hand with the use of verti-

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[23] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 108–109 (*Sediments of Time*, 51–52).
[24] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 105 (*Sediments of Time*, 47–48).
[25] Ebba Koch, *Moghul Art and Imperial Ideology: Collected Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[26] Cengiz Orhonlu, "Khāṣṣ," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 4, 2nd ed., ed. E. Van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 1094–1097.

cal categories, such as the opposition of *uñč-nīč* (high-low), at the same time, in the same discourses, and often by the same people.[27]

It might be argued that offering examples that run counter to Koselleck's foundational anthropological categories, confounds two levels of discussion; the one looking at constants that precede empirical history, the conditions of possible history, and the other focusing on actual history and its interpretation. However, none of the categories that Koselleck discusses can be read as pertaining only to a "real" history, as opposed to its interpretation by its actors—a reflection on the conditions of possible histories cannot divest itself from experiences, at least not without foregoing the plurality of histories so dear to Koselleck. We all stand to gain if the experiences on which meta-historical discussions draw were expanded beyond Europe—these counterexamples show that these constants are neither constant nor necessarily the central categories at the basis of all histories. Going a step further, we might question the strategy itself through which Koselleck aimed at discovering these anthropological constants. What seems a matter of common sense to him, understanding the world through categories that exclude each other and draw on oppositions on an "either-or" rather than an "as well," might well need to be de-anthropologized and historicized if we want to avoid confounding the universal and the European and reducing the rest of the world to a history of lack because they fail to live up to the universal standards set for them.

The Contemporaneity of the Non-contemporaneous

Hardly any of Koselleck's reflections on temporality were met with more success than the two images with which he strove to argue for the plurality of histories: the sediments of time (*Zeitschichten*), which pointed to the continued presence of earlier temporal layers at any present moment,[28] and the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.[29] We will leave the former

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27 See Ramnarayan Rawat, "Genealogies of the Dalit Political: The Transformation of Achut from 'Untouched' to 'Untouchable' in Early Twentieth Century North India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 53, no. 3 (2015): 335–355. A big thank you to Ram for our many discussions on the imagery of the above-below and distant-close.

28 Olsen, *History in the Plural*; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and Sean Franzel, "Introduction: Translating Koselleck," in *Sediments of Time*, ix–xxi.

29 Helge Jordheim, "'Unzählbar viele Zeiten': Die Sattelzeit im Siegel der Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen" ["Uncountable many times": The Sattelzeit in the seal of the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous] in *Begriffene Geschichte: Beiträge zum Werk Reinhart Kosellecks* [History conceptualized: Contributions to the work of Reinhart Kosellecks], ed. Hans Joas and Peter Vogt (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2011), 449–480.

for another occasion and focus on the latter here. The figure of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous was first used by art historian Wilhelm Pinder (1926) and was made famous shortly afterward by Ernst Bloch (1935).[30] Koselleck returned to this figure again and again. Within any given society, the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous can refer to the different ways actors experience history. First, generations co-exist at the same moment in the same space, but although they share a present, they experience it differently, depending on the events that marked their childhood, youth, or early life. Pinder pointed to the importance of generations for artistic styles, Koselleck in turn underlined that National Socialism and World War II were not the same experience for someone born before World War I, like most of Koselleck's teachers; for his generation, who joined World War II as very young men; or for those born during the war. Nor did they make sense of the postwar world, contemporaneous to all of them, in a similar manner.[31] Generations, thus, refer to the experiential and interpretative side of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.

Second, however, there is also a contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous referring to the realm of historical structures. Here Koselleck drew on Ernst Bloch and his argument that changes in German economy, social relations, and politics were not synchronized. Not all historical trans-formations, Koselleck underlined, happened at the same pace. Beyond the non-contemporaneity between different sectors that Bloch noted, this may also explain the differences between cities and their rural hinterland, which make travel through space seem like moving into a different time and age.[32] This is true also for changes in social history and in the history of concepts, where social changes may at times precede their linguistic interpretation, and concepts may at other times anticipate experiences.[33]

Koselleck's intention to carve out a space for plurality and to avoid concepts of unilinear progress leading to a well-defined modernity (or to

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[30] Beat Dietschy, *Gebrochene Gegenwart: Ernst Bloch, Ungleichzeitigkeit und das Geschichtsbild der Moderne* [Broken present: Ernst Bloch, non-simultaneity and modenrity's image of history] (Frankfurt a.M.: Vervuert, 1988); Elke Uhl, "Gebrochene Zeit? Ungleichzeitigkeit als geschichtsphilosophisches Problem" [Broken time? Non-simultaneity as a problem of the philosophy of history], in *Geschichtsphilosophie und Kulturkritik: Historische und systematische Studien* [Philosophy of history and cultural criticism: Historical and systematic studies], ed. Johannes Rohbeck and Herta Nagl-Docekal (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003), 50–74.
[31] Koselleck, "Historik und Hermeneutik," 107–108 (*Sediments of Time*, 50–51).
[32] Reinhart Koselleck, "Art. Fortschritt" [Article: Progress], *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1975), 351–423.
[33] Koselleck, "Sozialgeschichte und Begriffsgeschichte."

an equally strict definition of any other period)[34] is not something scholars working on non-European histories would find contentious, on the contrary, most of them would completely agree. However, it may be asked how effective the figure of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous is for achieving this goal. To classify a specific phenomenon as a remainder from an earlier period or as an anticipation of what is still to come, necessitates an even more precise definition of the characteristics of every period. This becomes even clearer when Koselleck expands the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous into a comparison of societies that share the same present although they "really" belong to different epochs, as, for instance, the hunters of the Stone Age, who seem out of place in an age where other people already travel to the moon.[35] Here, the stages of development that Koselleck examined in other places as a historical category belonging to the temporal figures used by the Enlightenment to make sense of changing experiences suddenly become an analytical category, which seems to transcend history. Instead of a pluralization of the historical present and an avoidance of periodization, the category thus works to reinforce the unique timeline that all societies must traverse. This timeline leads from a well-defined Stone Age to an equally clear-cut modernity, a timeline in which the present of the Orient shows Europe its past, while the European present is an indicator for what awaits the Orient in the future. These periods, conceived as ideal-types, allow for divergence rather than diversity.[36]

The question of the denial of contemporaneity, implicit in the figure of the stages of development, as well as its inherent Eurocentrism, has been intensely debated.[37] This has led to the suggestion of multiple modernities (though it is never quite clear how different they could be from European

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[34] Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 151–171.

[35] Reinhart Koselleck, "Über die Theoriebedürftigkeit der Geschichtswissenschaft" [On the need for theory in historical science], *Zeitschichten* (1972), 298–316, reference to Stone Age, 307; Reinhart Koselleck, "Zeiten der Geschichtsschreibung" [Times of historiography] *Zeitschichten* (1982) 287–297, reference to Stone Age, 292.

[36] For an excellent critique of the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, see Achim Landwehr, "Von der 'Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen'" [Of the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous"], *Historische Zeitschrift* 295, no. 1 (2012): 1–34.

[37] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Wolf Schäfer, ed., *Ungleichzeitigkeit als Ideologie: Beiträge zur historischen Aufklärung* [Non-simultaneity as ideology: Contributions to historical enlightenment] (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, 1994); Falko Schmieder, "Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen" [Simultaneity of the non-simultaneous], *Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialtheorie und Philosophie* 4, nos. 1–2 (2017): 325–363.

modernity to qualify or whether they are not rather different pathways to a very similar endpoint, defined by European history).[38] But the problem is of course not limited to modernity. The people living in the Stone Age in the twentieth century that Koselleck invoked may have shared some superficial similarities with the European Stone Age. Their contemporaneity with a capitalist world order, through which their resources acquire a market value and in which the state sets the boundaries within which they may live in the Stone Age, dissolves the parallels between these stages. To the extent that the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous still draws on the much-critiqued model of the stages of development, it is less than helpful.

Nevertheless, Koselleck's aim to pluralize history remains a valid one. This is especially so once we aim at forms of history writing that transcend the frame of the nation and focus instead on larger structures, whether Asia, the world of Islam, or even the globe. Here, I would suggest drawing on our experience with the history of concepts and its distinction between actors' categories and analytical concepts, keeping in mind, of course, that our analytical categories do not exist in a vacuum but are linked to a history of actors' concepts. However, it helps to keep the two apart and to clearly indicate which of them we are discussing.

Actors have always divided their history into periods—whether these followed dynastic models, religious interpretations, astrology and number-based mysticism, or, since the eighteenth century, stages of development.[39] The precise determination where on this timeline a particular society belonged, whether it was savage, barbarous, semi-civilized, or at the vanguard of history, whether it was undeveloped, developing, or developed, played an important role in the creation of a global order in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was used not only by the colonial powers but to a large extent also by the colonized themselves. Discussions abounded on how the Muslim community in India fared on this timeline: Was there hope of catching up with European nations, and if so, what needed to be done? Was the gap closing or rather widening? If modernity was to be the goal,

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[38] Dominic Sachsenmaier, Shmuel Eisenstadt, and Jens Riedel, eds., *Reflections on Multiple Modernitites: European, Chinese and Other Interpretations* (Leiden: Brill, 2002). For a more detailed critique, see Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Modernity in Colonial India: From Balance to Fervor* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 264–271.

[39] For a non-European formulation of stages of development in the eighteenth century, see *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shāh Walī Allāh of Delhi's Hujjat Allāh Al-bāligha*, trans. Marcia Hermansen (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Vasileios Syros, "An Early Modern South Asian Thinker on the Rise and Decline of Empires: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi, the Mughals and the Byzantines," *Journal of World History* 23, no. 4 (2012): 793–840.

which features of the new should be adopted, and where was it important to integrate tradition? How were the notions of progress and moving toward a future that would surpass the past and the present to be reconciled with the Islamic assumption that the most perfect political community had already existed in the past under the Prophet at Medina? In short, the idea of stages of development was a very powerful actors' category.

These debates about periodization are crucial if we wish to understand temporalities and temporal regimes. We do not have to use modernity as an analytical category, but we also cannot simply forget about it, because the actors we are investigating were obsessed with it and made it the anchor point for their hopes and fears and for their strategies to bring about a better future. Among North Indian Muslims, these debates were conducted in Urdu in the nineteenth century, but they also involved many other languages, with English assuming central importance in the twentieth century. Intellectuals and scholars not only kept themselves well-informed about discussions in Britain and carefully selected the authors and debates they engaged with, but were also in conversation with their counterparts in Beirut, Cairo, and Istanbul, with whom they exchanged letters, journals, and treatises, and whom they met during their travels.[40] This communication among intellectuals—on experiences and strategies, as well as on intellectual resources from the Islamic past—created a shared present, without brushing over differences between the regions as well as within each region.

However, the shared present of the actors was the result not only of intellectual exchanges but equally of processes of economic globalization, of the transformation of the world through global capitalism.[41] A common experience of the conditions brought about by capitalism does not imply homogenization, no more than communication and debates do. What is at stake is keeping differences thinkable without positing incommensurabilities—denying possible differences is as problematic as requiring the "Orient" to be different—and without temporalizing those differences, we encounter in our empirical material. I suggest that the figure to work with would thus no longer be Koselleck's contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, but something I would call the contemporaneity of differences—differences that are simply different, without having to carry the burden of the before or after. This allows for both an investigation of the different paces according to which the economy, the social structures, and their interpretation changed,

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[40] Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Shiblī Nuʿmānī, *Turkey, Egypt, and Syria: A Travelogue*, trans. and intro. Gregory Maxwell Bruce (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2020).
[41] Andrew Sartori, Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital, Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

as well as for the analysis of a shared contemporaneity, which does not negate the possibilities of histories in the plural.[42]

The *Sattelzeit*

Koselleck designed the *Sattelzeit* as a concept to hold together the monumental encyclopedic project of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*. The origin of the metaphor is not entirely clear. It might refer to the saddle of a horse, which allows a rider to have a leg on each side; it might also refer to the saddle of a mountain range, which directs the gaze toward the two landscapes divided by that range. This would dovetail with Koselleck's description of the period as Janus-faced, looking backward and forward at the same time.[43] But even if the term itself and its characterization through the four categories of process—politicization, democratization, ideologization, and temporalization—should perhaps not be taken too seriously,[44] Koselleck's interest in understanding the roots of modernity and of our present world in the hundred years from 1750 to 1850 was abiding. This does not turn him into a proponent of a theory of modernization, certainly not in the sense this concept was used in the postwar period. But neither did he doubt that the changes brought about by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were of world historical importance, certainly for Europe, but by implication also for the rest of the world.

In the end, while the concept of the *Sattelzeit* raised interesting questions, the answers it suggested were perhaps less convincing. Only a few of the articles in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* limit themselves to this era.

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[42] Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Orit Bashkin, Christian Bailey, Oleg Benesch, Jan Ifversen, Mana Kia, Einar Wigen, Rochona Majumdar, Mohinder Singh, Angelika Messner, Myoungkyu Park, *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) is an attempt to put this into practice. The book investigates the concepts of civility and civilization as an entangled history, exploring four European and nine Asian languages in the time between 1870 and 1920. This temporal frame focuses on the simultaneity, which is basic for processes of encounter and entanglement, but it keeps the possibilities for plural histories open by neither neglecting differences where we found them nor measuring them against benchmarks defining periods.

[43] Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 1, ed. Reinhart Koselleck, Werner Conze, and Otto Brunner (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972), xiii–xxvii (English translation: "Introduction and Prefaces to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*," 7–25); Florian Zemmin, "The Janus Face of Kātib Çelebi: Reflecting on the Ottoman Saddle Period," *Turcica* 50 (2019): 327–354.

[44] Jordheim, "Against Periodization."

Many, at least among those analyzing the most important keywords, begin their exploration in Greek antiquity and take it almost up to the present, whereas the categories of politicization, democratization, ideologization, and temporalization form more of a background than provide structure to the work, even within the geographical and cultural context for which they had been designed. Moreover, for a couple of years, discussions have been going on about a follow-up project to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, taking it into the twentieth century.[45] This might point to the possibility of a second *Sattelzeit*, or perhaps even to multiple *Sattelzeiten*, partly divesting modernity and especially European modernity of its foundational uniqueness.

Jan Ifversen has instead suggested replacing the concept *Sattelzeit*, loaded through its link to questions of modernity, with the more neutral concept of crisis. Concepts change constantly, but they do not always change at the same pace. A conceptual crisis would be a time in which conceptual changes are both accelerated and radical.[46] They are preceded and followed by periods of relative stability. Instead of imposing the classical four process categories on a *Sattelzeit* as a unique event, it would be more in tune with Koselleck's general program of histories in the plural (though not with his interest in modernity), to look at different periods of crisis and to adjust these characterizations to the context, pluralizing them in turn. This would also facilitate a research strategy that does not look for unilineal processes, but, as Willibald Steinmetz has recently suggested, regards them as reversible and replicable.[47] It might be taken even further in using the process categories and their opposites as marking out, not a line in which concepts could move back and forth, but a field in which concepts could not only shift in all directions, back and forth, but also go off at a tangent or move in circles.[48]

What would be periods of crisis and of accelerated semantic changes in North India between the 1750s and the 1950s? Politically, three events are usually foregrounded: the beginning of colonial rule in the territory between

[45] "*Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* Reloaded? Writing the Conceptual History of the Twentieth Century: Roundtable Discussion" (Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Kathrin Kollmeier, Willibald Steinmetz, Philipp Sarasin, Alf Lüdtke, and Christian Geulen), *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 17, no. 2 (2012): 78–128. This project is now housed at the Zentrum für Literaturforschung in Berlin and has taken up its work in 2022.

[46] Jan Ifversen, "Time Bandits, Historians, and Concepts of Bad Times," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 12, no. 2 (2017): 1–11.

[47] Willibald Steinmetz, "Multiple Transformations: Temporal Frameworks for a European Conceptual History," in *Conceptual History in the European Space*, ed. Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freeden, and Javier Fernández-Sebastián (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 63–95.

[48] In more detail: Margrit Pernau, "Einführung: Neue Wege der Begriffsgeschichte" [Introduction: New Paths in Conceptual History], ed. Margrit Pernau, Special Issue, Geschichte Und Gesellschaft 44, no. 1 (2018): 5–28. https://doi.org/10.2307/26534518.

the Doab (1770s) and the Panjab (1840s), the end of the Mughal Empire with the failed revolt of 1857/58 and the exile of Bahadur Shah, and the independence and partition of the Subcontinent in 1947. If we look at structural transformations at the political level, this picture changes slightly. In the first decades after the military conquest, most territories were governed through a system of alliances, which kept the traditional structures of administration intact. This not only lowered the cost of administration, both economic and political, but also avoided the resistance that changes might have triggered otherwise. This process basically ended in the 1830s. By then, the political weight had shifted from the royal Palace to the British Residency, and the British began to rely increasingly on midlevel administrators and no longer on noble commanders of battalions. British information gathering mechanisms had improved to such an extent that they were no longer dependent on their noble allies but could claim the right to confirm successions and pensions or distribute them anew. The Muslims experienced the revolt of 1857 as a trauma. However, in the end it did little but confirm the changes that had already been underway earlier. Change picked up again in the 1870s and 1880s with the beginning of the national movement, which managed to mobilize an increasing number of people from World War I onward. Again, Partition came as a trauma, but at least in India, independence brought no radical change of the structures that had been developing since the 1930s. If, therefore, we are looking for periods of crisis and turbulence with reference to political events and socioeconomic structures, we have two: the first from the 1770s to the 1830s and the second from the 1880s to the 1930s. In both cases, the colonial power and the reactions toward it were the central driving forces for political developments.[49]

Things look a little, but not radically, different if we do not foreground politics, but language—Koselleck points out that politics and concepts may advance at different paces and be "out of sync," with experience sometimes preceding the creation of a concept, and a concept at other times anticipating future experiences. In his reflections on the *Sattelzeit*, however, this seems to get lost. Once again, I will be using one strand of Koselleck's thinking to get beyond what I find problematic in another strand. North India has been a multilingual region for many centuries. Traditionally, the division between the languages was functional: Arabic was the language of theology and of science, Persian was used at the court and in administration, and the different variants of Urdu, Rekhta, and Khari Boli, written in the Persian script or in Devanagri, dominated in daily communication. However, the

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[49] For more details, see Margrit Pernau, "India in the Victorian Age: Victorian India?" in The Victorian World, ed. M. Hewitt (London: Routledge 2012), 639–655; and with special reference to the region of Delhi: Pernau, Ashraf into Middle Classes.

boundaries between the languages were not fixed. Moreover, since the beginning of the Mughal Empire, translations between Sanskrit and Persian abounded.[50] The religious movement initiated by Shah Wali Ullah (1703–62) aimed at reforming faith and society through a return to the sources, that is, the Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet. To facilitate access to these sources for a larger number of people, he not only wrote a large number of his theological treatises in Persian but also translated the Quran into Persian (1738).[51] A generation later, his sons took up the same program with translations into Urdu.[52] From the eighteenth century on, Urdu also took over from Persian as the most important language of poetry, though familiarity with classical Persian poetry remained a mark of distinction far into the twentieth century.[53] While the East India Company replaced Persian with English and Urdu in 1835/37 as the official language and language of the courts, it remained the official language at the Mughal court until 1858 and in Hyderabad, the largest of the princely states, until the end of the century. A first period linguistic crisis or turbulence thus stretched roughly from the 1730s to the 1830s and was marked by a switch toward Persian and, a little later, toward Urdu.

The second linguistic movement, the movement toward English as language of education, government, and administration, started already in the 1830s (earlier in Bengal). But still in the 1880s, it was possible for a man like Saiyid Ahmad Khan to function perfectly without English in his everyday life, even though he was the founder of a college aiming to familiarize Muslims with the language and culture of the colonizers. For people even slightly younger than him, this was no longer possible—English and Urdu had become the languages of communication.[54] At the same time, Persian became associated with a past from which many wanted to distance themselves. Instead of the glories of the Mughal Empire and of high culture, it now began

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[50] Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Supriya Gandhi, *The Emperor Who Never Was: Dara Shukoh in Mughal India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020).

[51] Marcia Hermansen, "Translator's Introduction," in *The Conclusive Argument from God,* xv–xl; Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Wali Ullah and His Times* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1980).

[52] Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah Abd al Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Ma'rifat Publishing House, 1982).

[53] Ralph Russell, "Khurshidul Islam," in *Three Mughal Poets: Mir, Sauda, Mir Hasan* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[54] David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978); David Lelyveld, "Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Public Sphere: Urdu Print and Oratory in Nineteenth Century India," in Islamicate Traditions in *South Asia: Themes from Culture and History*, ed. Agnieszka Kuczkiewicz-Fras (New Delhi: Manohar, 2013).

to stand for aristocratic decadence. The poems of the classical tradition were seen as artificial, if not downright immoral, and, in any case, a waste of time that no longer had a place in the modern world. If the Muslims were to reform themselves and their community, they had to look to the pure Arabic of the early Islamic tradition and let go of Persian.[55] This also influenced the development of Urdu. While at an earlier stage, Urdu and Persian allowed for an easy transfer of vocabulary, to the extent that they could often only be distinguished by some grammatical features, the translations from English into Urdu in the twentieth century drew increasingly on Arabic for the creation of neologisms.[56] The second linguistic period of turbulence, marked by the transfer to English and Urdu for all practical matters, and the shift from Persian to Arabic as the ideal classical language, can be seen in the decades between the 1870s and 1920s.

It is more difficult to identify periods of rapid change in theology and reformist thinking, not least for the fact that for a long time, the authors themselves strove to emphasize continuity rather than innovation in their interpretations. The Orientalist interpretation tended to see the colonial conquest as the central event that pushed an "eternal" and motionless Orient onto the path of history, inducing self-reflection on the alleged pitiful state of society and awakening a desire to change things. However, the reformist movements in North India predated this conquest and the engagement with colonial knowledge by more than half a century—and it still makes more sense to read the radical Naqshbandi reformers of the 1830s as a response from within the tradition than as the result of an engagement with colonial knowledge or missionary activities.[57]

The lull between two periods of turbulence that we could observe both for political and socioeconomic developments, as well as for the languages used to make sense of the changes, does not find correspondence in the reformist discourse. The Delhi College, aiming at a fusion of Oriental and Western knowledge in the 1840s and 1850s, had a strong intellectual and personal connection to the network of intellectuals of the Shah Wali Ullahi tradition.[58] After the Revolt of 1857, a part of that lineage moved on to found the theological seminary in Deoband (1866),[59] while others scholars, who had identified

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[55] Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and Its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[56] Kavita Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2013).

[57] Marc Gaborieau, *Le Mahdi incompris: Sayyid Ahmad Barelvi (1786–1831) et le millénarisme en Inde* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010).

[58] Margrit Pernau, ed., *The Delhi College: Traditional Elites, the Colonial State, and Education Before 1857* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[59] Barbara Metcalf, Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900 (Princeton,

with Delhi College, became central in Aligarh. Th e history of the semantics of reform used by these groups remains to be written and shall not be attempted here. If, however, we focus on periods of conceptual turbulence, preceded and followed by more stable years, the turbulence would probably have to be extended from at least the beginning of the eighteenth century into the 1960s, following neither the political nor the linguistic transformations.[60]

These reflections could be expanded for other concepts and fields—the transformation of the visual language or of musical interpretations might be a case in point.[61] Instead of striving for integrating all of these changes into the concept of the *Sattelzeit*, moreover one which would also need to take place roughly contemporaneously in different regions, I would suggest extending plural histories to a pluralization of what has been called the *Sattelzeit*, divesting it of the task of having to explain "modernity." This would, of course, be so far away from Koselleck's concept, that it might be better to choose a new name for the phenomenon altogether. Crisis, as suggested by Jan Ifversen, is one option; an alternative would be to focus on the investigation of periods of conceptual turbulences in a translocal contemporaneity, which in turn would allow us to emphasize communication and the creation of commonality, while also remaining alert to persistent differences.

Conclusion

So, all things considered, how well does Koselleck and Koselleckian theory travel outside of Germany and Europe (or at least its northern and western regions)? As this article has shown, the answer needs to be differentiated according to the topics Koselleck addressed in his various writings.

First, the anthropological constants that Koselleck suggest hover uncomfortably between theoretical truth claims, which cannot be falsified by empirical history, and deductions from this very history, or rather its mod-

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NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); Brannon Ingram, *Revival from Below: The Deoband Movement and Global Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

[60] See the slightly earlier, but no less extensive periodization in Alp Eren Topal, "From Decline to Progress: Ottoman Concepts of Reform 1600–1876," PhD diss. (Bilkent University, 2017); Zemmin, "Th e Janus Face," also argues for an extended *Sattelzeit*, which starts in the early seventeenth century. However, there might be a danger that these investigations would no longer focus on a *Sattelzeit* as the mountain pass that allows to look into both directions, but on the mountain range as a whole. In the end, the fact that there seems to be a need to extend the one *Sattelzeit* over and again might also suggest that the changes in the *Sattelzeit* are not unique but preceded and followed by other changes, which are just as important.

[61] And, of course, they are not unique to India, but can be taken up and adapted to other regions.

ern European part. They probably can be found in most societies if we look hard enough, but this does not mean that other categories could not be found just as easily. Nor does it show that interpreting the world according to abstract oppositions is the best way to understand cultures that were not based on these assumptions. Nevertheless, asking for the anthropological pre-assumptions that underlie our own work (whether we want it or not) is a good move, especially if we are navigating a field marked by questions of universality, commensurability, and difference. My suggestion would be to reduce these assumptions as far as possible. For the history of concepts and of temporalities, I do not think that we need to claim more than the human ability to experience the world through the body and the senses and to make sense of these experiences through language and other semiotic modes in order to act meaningfully and purposefully. As long as we can agree on these assumptions for the concrete work we want to do together, we can postpone worrying about their abstract truth claims.[62]

Second, we would do well to take Koselleck's program for histories in the plural seriously, even where he contradicts his own claims by arguing for well-defined stages of development, which presuppose knowledge of the characteristics by which the Stone Age or the Medieval can be recognized no matter when and where they took place. At the first instance, histories in the plural might sound similar to the more familiar defense of the fragment, for which Gyanendra Pandey and others have argued.[63] However, where fragments are only rarely connected to each other and generate insights that point beyond the single instance, histories in the plural are a counterpoint, but not a contradiction, to larger narratives. If we are aiming at a form of global history that integrates the legacy of regional studies, notably their contextual and linguistic competencies, histories in the plural can give us the rationale why it matters to look at transformation processes in the Indian or the Islamic world within a common framework, which, nevertheless, does not negate differences where we find them.

Third, global history puts a premium on processes of entanglement and communication (which, of course, do not take place outside of power relations). These processes do not always need to share a common present, but in most of the cases, they do, and it is this contemporaneity and the interactions for which it provides that push toward universalization.[64] For projects

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[62] In more detail: Margrit Pernau and Imke Rajamani, "Emotional Translations: Conceptual History beyond Language," *History and Theory* 55, no. 1 (2016): 46–65.

[63] Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[64] Christopher L. Hill, "Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century," *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 134–159.

involving a multiplicity of regions, therefore, it makes sense to identify the common present under consideration chronologically. At the same time, this needs to be complemented by an investigation of the temporal imagination and the periodization of the historical actors. In the long run, I argue, this will be one of the promising strategies that will allow us both to question and overcome the way European concepts, as well as European periodization and European temporalities, are at the same time provincial and perceived as the only locality from where universal insights can be produced.[65]

In sum, Koselleck travels well, and his Germanness should not debar him from entry into the Indian world or other regions. He will be welcome, however, not as a development expert in the history of concepts or temporalities but as an interlocutor who from his specific space of experience asks some pertinent questions and helps to establish a dialogue between different regions and traditions. Many of his assumptions will remain contentious, and it is not certain whether a consensus will arise quickly—or ever. In the meantime, however, this discussion will remain fruitful; one from which historians could learn, but also contribute a lot to the ongoing building of a theoretical framework, irrespective of their geographical specialization.

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[65] For more details on this argument with reference to concepts, see Margrit Pernau, "Provincializing Concepts: The Language of Transnational History," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 36, no. 3 (2016): 483–499.