

# Chapter 1

## Transition and simultaneity

### A Periodisation: Modern, Premodern

The historical studies on time have an overbearing presence of historical periodisation which uses the idea of transition. That this periodisation is itself a function of the emergence of modern disciplines or modernity, which has allowed us to look back at the past and connect with the future in a certain way and through certain categories (chiefly the stage-based idea of progress), should not go amiss.<sup>25</sup> In Reinhart Koselleck's words, 'The uncovering or discovery of such subjective historical time is itself a product of modernity.'<sup>26</sup> Kathleen Davis has powerfully argued for the role of politics and ideas of sovereignty as regulating principles that emerged in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Europe, which were co-terminus with the colonial slave trade of the time, that necessitated retroactively creating a temporal divide to cast the European past of slavery and subjugation in terms of feudal order/feudalism/medievalism. Simultaneously, this divide was extended to temporally equate the European past with the then colonial present while effacing Europe's own involvement in the ongoing enslavement and economic oppression. The natural-ness of historical periodisation based upon historical consciousness and economic models of periodisation between medieval and modern was therefore a function of the underlying political order based upon sovereignty and claims to secularisation.<sup>27</sup> Periodisation is not just a mere back-description that divides history into segments, she argues, but a fundamental political technique to moderate, divide, and regulate that serves its purposes to now, that is, to the present moment in which periodisation is scripted.<sup>28</sup>

In History, time has also been understood as a function of the rupturous design of the 'modern time regime' that redefined our relationship with the past

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25 See François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, New York, 2015 (English translation, Saskia Brown); Margrit Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, Cambridge, 2021; Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time: Negotiating the Borders Between Present, Past and Future*, Göttingen, 2013; Allegra Fryxell, Anna Gutgarts, and Oded Y. Steinberg, 'Lost in Time: Periodization and Temporality in Abnormal Times', *Global Intellectual History*, 8, 5, 2023, pp. 549–83.

26 Quoted in, Lebovic, 'The Sovereignty of Modern Times', p. 282.

27 Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*, Philadelphia, 2008. Also see Constantin Fasolt, 'Scholarship and Periodization', *History and Theory*, 50, 3, 2011, pp. 414–24.

28 Ibid., p. 5.

and the future.<sup>29</sup> Usually the cut-off period is traced to the eighteenth century although the word modern, as *moderne*, meaning ‘just now’ and ‘at the present’, was first used in the fourteenth century and began to be popularly used in the seventeenth century in opposition to the term ancient.<sup>30</sup> This was also the period when the term medieval, in contrast to modern, was invented as the container of all negative attributes that from the sixteenth century onwards accompanied the temporal and cultural colonisation of the past as well as of non-European territories.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, generally in any such study on modern time (through devices, patterns of global convergence or movement of techniques, or as a marker of historical periodisation), the meaning ascribed to time is closely aligned with the function of historical periodisation. The categorisation of the past is either through the primacy given to the modes of production (feudalism, commercialism, capitalism) or to the modes of (alleged forms of) governance (barbaric, despotic, revolutionary, democratic) or even through major political breakpoints (formal colonialism under the Crown, the French revolution, the Meiji reforms, the early twentieth century reforms in Turkey, the transfer of power in the Indian subcontinent leading to a ‘tryst with destiny’). This categorisation then plays a crucial role in understanding the social and political transitions in temporal values, which are encapsulated in terms such as feudal and revolutionary, glorious and decadent, antiquity and futuristic, colonial and national, and, ancient, medieval, and modern. If temporality is understood as a function of categorising the past, the present, and the future, which are based upon experiences and conceptions of time,<sup>32</sup> then time and temporality are often presented as intertwined entities. We will return to the problems of their interchangeable use but let us continue with our mapping of the prevalence of this aspect of periodisation and categorisation that uses the ideas of transition and simultaneity in the existing scholarship.

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29 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York, 2004 (English translation with an Introduction, Keith Tribe); Aleida Assmann, ‘Transformations of the Modern Time Regime’ in Lorenz and Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time*; Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History*, Budapest, 2008; Aleida Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime*, Ithaca and London, 2020 (English translation, Sarah Clift).

30 Hunt, *Measuring Time*, pp. 48–9.

31 Meena Bhargava and Pratyay Nath, ‘Introduction’, in Bhargava and Nath, eds., *The early Modern in South Asia: Querying Modernity, Periodization, and History*, New Delhi, 2022, pp. 4–5.

32 Allegra Fryxell defines it like that in, ‘Time and the Modern: Current Trends in the History of Modern Temporalities’, *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, p. 286. Margrit Pernau defines temporality ‘as the experience and interpretation of relations between the past, the present, and the future’. Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, p. 4.

This feature is most prominent in two sets of studies: the first in western writings on the philosophy of history and (historical) time, which have become prominent since the 1970s; and second in the postcolonialism-inflected studies that gained prominence from the 1980s on. In the former, time becomes evident only through its rendition under a rupturous regime of modernity that segregates human conceptualisation of time into rigid boundaries of the past, present, and future.<sup>33</sup> Time is approached as segments of classification – past, present, and future – acquiring new meanings about historicity and historical consciousness due to changing political or social contexts.<sup>34</sup> In the latter, that is, in the set of postcolonial studies, time is used to deconstruct imperial claims, which either relegated non-European societies to ‘the waiting room of history’ or enabled nation’s elites to discover their own ‘primitives’ and ‘foreign bodies’. Time was used as a marker of the hierarchical spatialisation of history.

Time, in this sense, appears to emphasise the logic of colonial ‘deferral’, to expose the colonialist’s construct of the colony, to deconstruct the discourse of the ‘timelessness’ of colonized societies and to highlight the semantic upsurge of the native elite that undergirded the temporal dimension of the making of the nation-state.<sup>35</sup> In multiple strands of this scholarship, the temporalisation of the past through history is used to reflect back on time itself, and to label it as modern, premodern, abstract, plural, linear and so on. The temporalisation of the past (in terms of categories such as modern or premodern) and the characteristics ascribed to time (plural or abstract) thus fuse together, often pairing up in binaries. Although postcolonial scholarship can be accredited for rupturing this binary construction through the framework of relativism, as Stefan Helgesson has insightfully shown, it suffers from a fundamental contradiction that disallows it to completely break through this binary. On the one hand, this scholarship has denounced the way in which the others of the west are placed in another time and

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33 For the leading studies of this variant, see Koselleck, *Futures Past*; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; Assmann, *Is Time Out of Joint?* A very accessible exposition of this framework is in Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*; Helge Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’, *History and Theory*, 53, 4, 2014, pp. 498–518; Hunt, *Measuring Time*.

34 Marcus Colla, ‘The Politics of Time and State Identity in the German Democratic Republic’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 29, 2019, pp. 223–51.

35 See Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labour Servitude in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 1990; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ, 2008; Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, New York, 1999; Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From the Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago, 2004; Prathama Banerjee, *Politics of Time: ‘Primitives’ and History-writing in a Colonial Society*, New York, 2006; On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, Berkeley, 2013 (e-book version used).

yet this distinction, though criticised, is also upheld through the logic of the discreteness of homogenised units of western and non-western habitations or temporalities.<sup>36</sup> Strictly in relation to time, postcolonial scholarship also uses time metaphorically and as a substitute for history rather than as a social component of historical processes.

Under this impulse, in varying guises, it has been remarked that time in the premodern era was elastic, fluid, and non-linear in contrast to what it became in the modern period: abstract, linear, and fixed. This is one prime example of how scholarship fuses, invents, and combines the characteristics of temporal (premodern) with time (fluid). Peter Burke summarises a set of important studies in the following words: time in traditional societies is qualitative, concrete, local, and imprecise in contrast to modern societies in which it becomes quantitative, abstract, uniform, and exact.<sup>37</sup> At the risk of some generalisation, this can be said to be the feature of a variety of studies, ranging from E. P. Thompson's to that of David Landes'.<sup>38</sup> One crucial element in this postulation is the society's temporal relationship with nature. Arguably, the role of seasonality in premodern societies was of a higher intensity and significance. Nigel Thrift, who otherwise criticised Thompson's overdetermination of a new time-discipline through the use of the mechanical clock, did argue that, broadly, before 1550 in England, a sea of timelessness existed in which the basic idea of time was rhythmic rather than measured.<sup>39</sup> In the case of eighteenth century north India, it has been recently argued that the making of the colonial state was premised upon abstracting time out of the social and ecological conditions in which agrarian production took place. In other words, the monsoon was tamed by the exigencies of the emerging fiscal

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36 Stefan Helgesson, 'Radicalizing Temporal Difference: Anthropology, Postcolonial Theory, and Literary Time', *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, pp. 545–62.

37 Peter Burke, 'Reflections on the Cultural History of Time', 2004, pp. 617–26. Also see, Roger Neustader, 'Beat the Clock: The mid-20th Century Protest against the Reification of Time', *Time and Society*, 1, 3, 1992, pp. 379–98.

38 E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', *Past & Present*, 38, 1967, pp. 56–97; L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, New York 1934; Davis S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, Cambridge, Mass, 1983; S. Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan*, Princeton, NJ, 2004. For a sustained critique of this approach, see Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, *Shaping the Day: A History of Timekeeping in England and Wales, 1300–1800*, Oxford, 2009.

39 Nigel Thrift, 'The Making of a Capitalism Time Consciousness', in John Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, New York, 1990, pp. 107–09.

state.<sup>40</sup> This meant two things: one, practices of time-notation in those allegedly traditional societies were flexible. The counting of the passage of time was dependent upon seasons and other constituents of nature (sunrise and sunset being the most important markers in various cultures, but also the phases of the moon which, in fact, created a temporal chaos in colonial Natal), which made time itself a variable entity.<sup>41</sup> Two, the passage of time was socially understood as not abstract but marked by a set of lived practices. Time was not an independent variable; it arguably became so in the modern period.

Reiterating a popular and widespread view, Stefan Tanaka claims that ‘Prior to the modern period, and in places not dominated by abstract time, time is episodic, local, uneven, and irregular.’<sup>42</sup> In order to prove this, he gives the example that some days are more favourable than others. Reading this as a remnant of ‘non modern times’, Tanaka, who otherwise is keen to rescue time from the flattening force of modernity’s abstraction, seems to be upholding the binary of modern and nonmodern times. In many modern societies operating fully under the abstract sense of time and timing, some days are still more favourable than others (depending on the nature of political, religious, or social action). Furthermore, in his own account various ancient and medieval societies were keenly invested in designing sophisticated calendars. However, this does not deter Tanaka

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40 Hayden Bellenoit, ‘Taming the Monsoon Economy: Taxes and Mastering Time in India, 1760–1860’, in Burghart Schmidt, Mathew John Kokkatand, Anu Pande, eds., *Time and Temporality in the Asian and European Modernity*, Drebber, 2023, pp. 103–14.

41 On seasonality, see G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views on Time from Prehistory to the Present Day*, Oxford, 2004; G. Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders*, Chicago, 1996; for Tokugawa Japan, Y. Frumer, ‘Translating Time: Habits of Western-Style Timekeeping in Late Edo Japan’, *Technology and Culture*, 55, 4, 2014, pp. 785–820; Y. Frumer, *Making Time: Astronomical Time Measurement in Tokugawa Japan*, Chicago, 2018; for labour conflicts in Natal over time-use, K. E. Atkins, ‘Kafir Time’: Preindustrial Temporal Concepts and Labour Discipline in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Natal’, *The Journal of African History*, 29, 2, 1988, pp. 229–244; K. E. Atkins, *The Moon is Dead! Give us our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900*, Portsmouth, 1993. The recent studies on England have further established the mixed ways in which people used both nature and the clock to tell time. They question the Thompsonian watershed of industrial time-discipline by showing two developments: one, clock-consciousness and regular work rhythms were not the inventions of the factory; two, accurate time keeping was still a preserve of a few until the late nineteenth century, meaning that Thompson engaged in ‘retrospective thinking’. Mark Hailwood, ‘Time and Work in Rural England, 1500–1700’, *Past and Present*, 248, 2020, pp. 87–121; Hannah Gay, ‘Clock Synchrony, Time Distribution and Electrical Time Keeping in Britain, 1880–1925’, *Past and Present*, 181, 2003, pp. 107–140. Also see Michael Sauter, ‘Clockwatchers and Stargazers: Time Discipline in Early Modern Berlin’, *The American Historical Review*, 112, 3, 2007, pp. 685–709.

42 Tanaka, *History Without Chronology*, 2019 (open access, Lever Press), p. 24.

from arguing that time in nonmodern societies was uneven and irregular, that it lacked abstraction.<sup>43</sup> Is it just because the definition of abstraction has changed under our modern times that premodern time, in spite of using techniques to regularise and categorise time, appears non-abstract to us? If abstract is meant as a form of articulation in which an entity acquires an independent status bereft of its inner qualities or intrinsic properties, then writings on ancient India show not only the interlaced presence of cyclical and linear time but also the presence of abstract time, abstracted through the use of a cosmological uneven cycle of ages, mathematics, time's agency in cosmology's creation and destruction, time stretching itself to the limit of timelessness, time manifesting itself as a process of repeated creation and dissolution, time as *chakra*, a turning wheel whose spokes constantly revolve downward and upward symbolising it as a permanent and eternal entity without any intervening destruction, and *dharma*.<sup>44</sup>

The binary that has been sketched between modern and premodern times invokes many other forms of transition: from predominantly agrarian modes of production to industrial ones; from the precapitalist organisation of work and labour to a value-oriented capitalist system of production and exchange; from larger time-units to minute classification of time with greater precision, in hours and minutes; and not least, from the unequal divisions of the day and night to the equally divided and fixed units of durations.<sup>45</sup> Arguably, all these shifts freed time from being located in social practices and events and allowed it to become an entity of its own. In simpler words, if in the premodern period, tasks, rituals, events, and episodic moments were the ways of marking and understanding time and through which time itself was mapped, then in the modern period, all these things happened in time which acquired a continuous, linear dimension. Particularly, with the dominance of the mechanical clock-time in association with the capitalist mode of production, time is said to have become an independent entity external to human activities.<sup>46</sup> It flowed in a continuous manner with activities happening within it rather than defining it. Building upon Moishe Postone, Andrew Liu summarises, 'Concrete time was a 'function of events' and referred to

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 27–8.

<sup>44</sup> Romila Thapar, 'Cyclical and Linear Time in Early India', *Museum International*, 57, 3, 2005, pp. 19–31; Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*, New Delhi, 1996. On the limitations of any binary conceptualisation of time between cyclical and linear, see Anindita Niyogi Balslev, 'Time and the Hindu Experience', in Balslev and J. N. Mohanty, eds., *Religion and Time*, Leiden, 1993, pp. 163–81; Ludo Rocher, 'Concepts of Time in Classical India', in Ralph M. Rosen, *Time and Temporality in the Ancient World*, Philadelphia, 2004, pp. 91–110.

<sup>45</sup> One of the most comprehensive accounts can be found in Rossum, *History of the Hour*.

<sup>46</sup> See Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation: A Socio-Historical Inquiry into the Making of Modern Time*, Leiden and Boston, 2015.

‘particular tasks or processes’. Abstract time, by contrast, was ‘independent of events’.<sup>47</sup> In the words of Barbara Adam, ‘Clock-time, which was developed in Europe during the 14th century, no longer tracks and synthesizes time of the natural and the social environment but produces instead a time that is independent of those processes: clock-time is applicable anywhere, any time.’<sup>48</sup> Jacques Le Goff in his highly insightful study quipped, ‘[h]enceforth the clock was to be the measure of all things’.<sup>49</sup> A long history of the rationalisation of time, through the middle ages culminating into the ethics of capitalism in the nineteenth century, is thus argued for in a set of studies, which for a long became the defining criteria of distinguishing between time in premodern societies and that of in the modern societies. This in a way symbolises the coming of a full circle. If, following Davis, we learn that historical periodisation was the product of a changing political order, then the now naturalised temporal units of classification – modern and premodern – became the ground for drawing distinctions between societies, and creating another hierarchical order of social and political formation.

## B First Empty, Now Plural: Modern Time(s)

There are three analytical entry points which historians and social scientists have broadly used to argue for the making of modern time as empty, homogenous, and linear. Although scholars are aware that the processes were protracted and contradictory, these frameworks uphold the view of a transitional movement from the premodern to the modern time.

One, the capitalist order which is based upon the alienation and reification of social relations into things; two, the ‘temporal revolution’ of the nineteenth century which was based upon technologically-driven attempts at synchronicity and standardisation of everyday practices for which the railways, steamships, the telegraph, and mechanical clocks are the most accounted; and three, the nexus of imperialism and consequent ‘national/imperial’ reforms in various world regions through which time itself was colonised but also, quite simultaneously, equipped to spread out globally.<sup>50</sup> Not so ironically, imperialism, nationalism, and globalisa-

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Liu, ‘Incense and Industry: Labour and Capital in the Tea Districts of Huizhou China’, *Past and Present*, 230, 2016, p. 186.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Adam, ‘Time’, *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 23, 2–3, 2006, p. 123.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Chicago, 1980, p. 52 (English translation, Arthur Goldhammer).

<sup>50</sup> Besides works mentioned above, some of the prominent works covering these areas are of Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*; Vanessa Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*:



tion came together to make time modern. From the late nineteenth century, in a gradual but progressive manner, the mechanical clock-based notation of time slowly became the defining method of a global system of measuring and maintaining time, whose accuracy was further perfected by the new technology of the quartz clock.<sup>51</sup>

Unlike works mentioned above, a newer variant of studies has emerged in the last decade or so which insists on the fluidity of modern time as well.<sup>52</sup> For instance, Sebastian Conrad notes that the temporal revolution of the nineteenth century did not go uncontested; the hegemony of the modern time regime was never absolute.<sup>53</sup> Margrit Pernau talks about the embroiled state of the past, the present, and the future in which they are no longer distinguishable.<sup>54</sup> ‘Multiple times’ and ‘pluritemporality’ are the cornerstone of the plethora of recent writings on time.<sup>55</sup>

This fluidity has been argued for not only historical time, but also when time is seen as a social entity, that is, more in its material form than as a product of historical temporalisation. This appears to follow the perceptive dictum of Ernst Bloch and Mark Ritter which signifies the existence of the non-simultaneous with the simultaneous (paralleling Reinhart Koselleck’s idea of ‘sediments of time’, which expounds the view that the location of a social process in time is often

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1870–1950, Cambridge/London, 2015; G. Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire*, Manchester, 2012; Sebastian Conrad, ‘Nothing is the way it should be: Global Transformations of the Time Regime in the Nineteenth Century’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 15, 3, 2018, pp. 821–848; Ritika Prasad, ‘“Time-Sense”: Railways and Temporality in Colonial India’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, 4, 2012, pp. 1252–1282; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1986; Barak, *On Time*; Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Chicago and London, 2015.

51 Shaul Katzir, ‘Time Standards for the Twentieth Century’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 89, 1, 2017, pp. 119–50; Gay, ‘Clock Synchrony, Time Distribution and Electrical Time Keeping’. The atomic clock has replaced the quartz clock ‘which, after about an hour, become inaccurate by a billionth of a second’. Sarit Kattan Gribetz and Lynn Kaye, *Time: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, Oldenburg, 2023, p. 35.

52 For a useful summary of these works, see Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern’. Also see Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’.

53 Conrad, ‘Nothing is the way it should be’.

54 Pernu, *Emotions and Temporalities*.

55 Helgesson, ‘Radicalizing Temporal Difference’; Marek Tamm and Laurent Olivier, eds., *Re-thinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*, London, 2019 (e-book version used).



marked by the co-existence of seemingly disparate and contradictory practices, beliefs, etc. rather than moments of absolute transition).<sup>56</sup> In a perceptive introduction to the First World War genealogy of this thought, Tamm and Olivier have traced this to the writings of Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin.<sup>57</sup> However, Koselleck's main contribution is in explaining how modern time, or a new temporalisation of *Neuzeit*, emerged in the late eighteenth century. His expression, which has become the most famous by now, was of the separation between a horizon of experience and the space of expectation. In the pre-revolutionary period, expectation was not outside the realm of social or eschatological experience. The future was conceived from within the precincts of past experience. Thus, for him, there was a clear break in the emergence of time-sensibility in the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

This reading has been challenged by Helge Jordheim who interprets in Koselleck's *Zeitschichten* an avowal of the existence of 'multiple temporalities'. Koselleck did speak of not one historical time 'but rather of many forms of time superimposed one upon the other'.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, my understanding of Koselleck concurs with that of Pernau's. She argues that to depict the contemporaneity of the past, Koselleck borrowed the imagery of the rock from the discipline of geology, meaning, 'the past may be there but it will remain hidden'. She therefore summarises that in Koselleck's theory of historical times, 'the past, the present, and the future remain clearly distinguishable from each other and follow in a given, unsubvertible order'.<sup>60</sup>

However, revisiting Koselleck, it has been argued that modern time, marked by the primacy of the mechanical clock whose precision is defined by minute calculation, is still beset with plurality.<sup>61</sup> Here, plurality itself has acquired a new

<sup>56</sup> Ernst Bloch and M. Ritter, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics', *New German Critique*, 11, 1977, pp. 22–38; Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, California, 2018 (translated and edited, Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman).

<sup>57</sup> Tamm and Olivier, 'Introduction', in Tamm and Oliver, eds., *Rethinking Historical Time*.

<sup>58</sup> Recently, Zoltán Boldizsár Simon has distinguished between the future newly envisioned in the eighteenth century in the context of the Enlightenment and one that is formed in the postwar period of 'unprecedented change' marked by nuclear warfare, anthropogenic climate change, and artificial intelligence. However, his point is not of the erasure of the future due to the regime of presentism but it getting reconceived along technological and ecological factors. *History in Times of Unprecedented Change: A Theory for the 21st Century*, London, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 2. Helge Jordheim, 'Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities', *History and Theory*, 51, 2, 2012, pp. 151–71.

<sup>60</sup> Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*, p. 6. Also see Stephen Hanß, 'The Fetish of Accuracy: Perspectives on Early Modern Time(s)', *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, pp. 267–84.

<sup>61</sup> For other criticisms, including eurocentrism in Koselleck's works, see Vanessa Ogle, 'Time, Temporality and the History of Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 243, 2019, pp. 312–27.

meaning over the course of fifty years or so. Amongst historians, Fernand Braudel might have been the first one to divide time according to its pace of flow, thus rendering it plural, into three types: fast event-centred, intermediate structure-centred, and an extremely slow-moving time based upon environment and geography.<sup>62</sup> In his own words, 'Each "current reality" is the conjoining of movements with different origins and rhythms. The time of today is composed simultaneously of the time of yesterday, of the day before yesterday, and of bygone days.'<sup>63</sup> He treated history not as a simple descent down the slopes of time but as a 'series of descents, following the multiple and innumerable rivers of time'.<sup>64</sup> This has led scholars to argue that Braudel tried to develop a theory of multiple times.<sup>65</sup>

However, Braudel's conceptualisation of multiple time was not based upon fractured time; time remained a continuous entity – 'imperious because irreversible' – for him.<sup>66</sup> His idea of historical time was deeply opposed to sociological 'social-time'.<sup>67</sup> He found Sociology's emphasis on event or short-term time on the one hand, and its penchant for discovering timeless structures on the other, deeply problematic.<sup>68</sup> For him, history was a way of explaining the social in all its reality, and the unity between the past and the present. He found the idea of 'an instantaneous moment of time, in which all temporalities are suspended' a 'virtual absurdity'.<sup>69</sup> For him, to think through the plurality of time and temporality was a methodological option – 'the creation of our mind' – to resist the use of a single and uniform explanatory model rather than an index of postulating time's own unique attribute of being innately plural.<sup>70</sup> He did not characterise time itself as plural but argued that in order to understand the course of human civilisation – whose all possible past, present, and future is studied by history – one needs to look at the almost immobile changes happening at the geographical levels and the suddenness of a change, say, through a political event, and at every

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62 Olivia Harris, 'Braudel: Historical Time and the Horror of Discontinuity', *History Workshop Journal*, 57, 2004, pp. 161–174.

63 Fernand Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 32, 2, 2009, p. 181 (translation, Immanuel Wallerstein).

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 187–88.

65 Helge Jordheim, 'Stratigraphies of Time and History: Beyond the Outrages upon Humanity's Self-Love', in Anders Ekström and Staffan Bergwik, eds., *Times of History, Times of Nature: Temporalization and the Limits of Modern Knowledge*, New York, 2022, esp. pp. 31–35.

66 Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', p. 198.

67 Jordheim, 'Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization', pp. 502–03.

68 Braudel, 'History and the Social Sciences', pp. 183–85.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 187.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

other pace of duration in-between these two simultaneously. By emphasising the value of *longue durée*, he was questioning ‘traditional historiographical temporality’ (as he said, in his times there was an obsession with an event-centric focus) rather than conceptually pluralising time.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, Georges Gurvitch, the sociologist, emphasised the difference between social-time as studied by Sociology and that of studying History in terms of the dialectical ambiguity of historical time, in which, broadly speaking, the discipline’s necessity of History for finding passages and transitions creates a picture of continuous time in spite of the recognition of the discontinuous time in which past societies lived. History privileged continuous time; Sociology gave preference to the discontinuity of time.<sup>72</sup> Jordheim reaffirms that, for Braudel, the three temporal rhythms of the event, the structure, and the landscape belonged to the same time, to the same temporal standard; ‘they all are measurements on the same scale’.<sup>73</sup> To Gurvitch, on the other, multiple times led to a complete disintegration of any unity and continuity.<sup>74</sup> We will return to discussing the features of social-time as received through the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology in the second chapter, but it can be remarked that the plurality of time in our current historical writing is closer to the erstwhile sociological understanding of time than it is to the Braudelian framework. Running against this, this book is more amenable to Braudelian framework of treating plurality as a historiographical and methodological choice, if necessary, rather than as the intrinsic quality of time itself.

The new plurality of historical time does not share the Braudelian time-unity. Now, time is not only not empty and homogenous;<sup>75</sup> it is also non-unidirectional.<sup>76</sup> This view has resulted from a weakened faith in the teleologically-driven idea of progress and futurity on the one hand, and a growing lament about the extended presence of the ‘monstrous present’ on the other.<sup>77</sup> In the modern regime of things beginning the eighteenth century, as argued by Koselleck, history ceased to be the guide to the future. The future instead was supposed to enlighten the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 176, 183–87.

<sup>72</sup> Georges Gurvitch, ‘Varieties of Social-Time’, in Hassard, ed., *The Sociology of Time*, pp. 72–76.

<sup>73</sup> Braudel, ‘History and the Social Sciences’, p. 198.

<sup>74</sup> Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’, p. 503.

<sup>75</sup> Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern’; Ogle, ‘Time, Temporality and the History of Capitalism’.

<sup>76</sup> Pernau, *Emotions and Temporalities*.

<sup>77</sup> Jordheim, ‘Introduction: Multiple Times and the Work of Synchronization’; Lorenz and Bevernage, eds., *Breaking up Time*. On the extended presence of the present, see Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*; on the demise of the future and the simultaneous resurrection of the past in the twentieth century as the new form of ‘modern time regime’, see Assman, *Is Time Out of Joint?*

present.<sup>78</sup> This new future ‘did not simply contain the possibility of progress, but [it] was synonymous with it’.<sup>79</sup> With the widening of the gap between experience and expectation, the crisis of the present deepened. As Hartog explains, with the demise of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the present has become ‘its own self-enclosed horizon’ subsuming both the past and the future.<sup>80</sup> These are definitely very useful ways in thinking about how western society or societies have intellectually explained their relationship with time and its perception (in terms of how the relationship between past, present, and future have come to be organised and reorganised in the last two hundred years), the questioning of the modernisation framework, postcolonialism’s relativism, and global history’s sensitisation to move beyond Eurocentrism has made modern time – once thought abstract and singular – plural. The singularity of historical time derived through the trajectory of European history, imbued with enforceable ideas of the future and progress, and mindful of effacing the violence underlying its own claims, was, so to say, called out. It had to be replaced by a more accommodative framework of plurality. The narratives of transition made room for investiture of synchronicity.

The more pronounced the claim for plurality of the modern time becomes, the more vociferous the tone of scholarly jest to make room for the non-western pre-modern ‘many faces and functions of time’ also becomes. Ironically, the latter is based upon hammering down the point that in western understanding, time is unquestionably linear and uniform.<sup>81</sup> Time is thus not only the site for scripting a Eurocentric vision of progress and modernisation, and now generating its critique, but also a site for resurrecting alternative non-European narratives. Inadvertently, these approaches have created more binaries than have dissolved them.

As in the previous set of scholarship there existed multiple avenues through which time’s emptiness was argued for, now, in the new approaches also, the plurality of time is underscored in various ways. First, it is usually read through people’s activities and embeddedness in conceptions or imaginations of different times and lives. Fryxell argues, ‘In modern life [a plurality of social times] may include the time of seasons, governments, school timetables, churches, clocks, in-

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<sup>78</sup> See Christophe Bouton for raising the question of if ever the model of *historia magistra* dissolved in the modern times. Bouton, ‘Hartog’s Account of Historical Times and the Rise of Presentism’, *History*, 2019, pp. 309–30.

<sup>79</sup> Terence Holden, ‘Hartog, Koselleck, and Ricoeur: Historical Anthropology and the Crisis of the Present’, *History and Theory*, 58, 3, 2019, p. 386.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>81</sup> Shonaleeka Kaul, ‘Temporality and its Discontents or *Why Time needs to be Retold*’, in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time: Alternative Temporalities from Premodern South Asia*, London and New York, 2022.

stant messaging, pop concerts, political referendums, holidays, veterinary visits, reproduction and birthdays.<sup>82</sup> Further, she elaborates, the person acting out their life according to the hours and minutes of their wristwatch might also be believing ‘in reincarnation and attend seances to communicate with departed loved ones’.<sup>83</sup> So, one argument for plurality is made on the basis of multiple social activities and the possibility that even a modern person can simultaneously inhabit different temporalities. Based upon personal and social forms of engagement, time is divided into different units: there is biological time, psychological time, generational time, living time, historical time, ‘arrested time’ in myths and rituals and so on. According to Barbara Adam, ‘time is not just conceived as a linear linking of past to future but a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that involves *biographical time*, which covers that lifespan from birth to death, *generational time*, which provides links and attachments across generations of kinship relations, and *historical time*, which locates individual and family lives in the wider frames of external events, environments and political landscapes.’<sup>84</sup> She uses the category of timescapes to capture the multiplicity of temporalities or multiple social times.<sup>85</sup> She sets out also to explain the variety of times in her writings.<sup>86</sup> Not so dissimilar is May and Thrift’s emphasis on ‘multiplicity of times’ moving at different speeds and in different directions, which are interrelated at various levels constituted through the use of technologies such as of transport and communication but also of light and energy, and knowledge systems based upon physics, biology, and geology.<sup>87</sup>

## C The Encounter Narratives: Colonial and Global

The second way to map the plurality of modern time is by showing the messy journey of the late nineteenth and twentieth century history of the globalisation

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<sup>82</sup> Fryxell, ‘Time and the Modern’, p. 290.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>84</sup> Barbara Adam, ‘Researching Lives Through Time: Time, Generation and Life Stories’, Timescapes Working Paper Series no. 1, <https://timescapes-archive.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2020/07/WP1-Researching-Lives-Through-Time-June-2008.pdf> (last accessed, 5 December 2023).

<sup>85</sup> See Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*, pp. 43–46 for an extensive discussion of her works, in which he argues that Adam’s emphasis on multiplicity of times overshadows the logic of power and struggle within a given timescape.

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, Cambridge, 1990.

<sup>87</sup> Jon May and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, London and New York, 2001, pp. 11–12.

of time. This process of transformation was uneven and conflictual, which in various instances led to diverse sorts of arrangements, even to showing multiple local times on a single clock tower. There were pluralities emerging from within the time-notation system of the mechanical clock-time itself; in India, for instance, it was debated whether the astronomically determined master clock-time observed in Madras or the local time determined by the sunrise would be followed in the province of Bombay.<sup>88</sup> The adoption of Greenwich Mean Time added a new layer to these debates.<sup>89</sup> For the most part of the period between the fourteenth and the mid-nineteenth century, the mechanical clock-time was dependent on solar time, which meant that the mechanical clock-time was also local until the railways exposed the problems of temporal synchronisation.<sup>90</sup> Gradually, Greenwich Mean Time, which is the mean solar time observed in Greenwich, was adopted as the world standard time by the early twentieth century.<sup>91</sup> If time were plural, it would not only be on account of the binary between the fixity of the mechanical clock-time and the cultural/intellectual cognition of the passage of time which arguably collapsed or fused the neat differences between the past, the present, and the future. The history of the unification of time is not only a product of the tussle between natural time and the clock time but of multiple clock times as well, both in Europe and in the colonies. One has to remember here that clock times were also diverse, and their history of unification and standardisation has been recently accounted for under the framework of 'global history' or broadly through histories of connection, diffusion, and adaptation.<sup>92</sup>

Global times, used in plural, do help in countering the Eurocentric bias of the 'convergence-model' of time in which the default time-keeping practice is taken to be European, with which other regions and practices accordingly 'converge'.<sup>93</sup> The new global accounts of time argue that global uniformity produced more of a variety of local times. For Ogle, the point of emergence of local contestations was

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<sup>88</sup> For a 'time battle' in Bombay, see Shekhar Krishnan, 'Empire's Metropolis. Money Time & Space in Colonial Bombay, 1870–1930', Ph.D. thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013; Jim Masselos, 'Bombay Time', in M. Kosambi, ed., *Intersections: Socio-Cultural Trends in Maharashtra*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 161–183.

<sup>89</sup> Prasad, 'Time-Sense'.

<sup>90</sup> Leofranch Holford-Strevens, *The History of Time: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, 2005, pp. 11–12.

<sup>91</sup> Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*; Martineau, *Time, Capitalism and Alienation*; Ritika Prasad, *Tracks of Change: Railways and Everyday Life in Colonial India*, Cambridge, 2015; Rossum, *History of the Hour*.

<sup>92</sup> Ogle, *The global Transformation of Time*; Barak, *On Time*.

<sup>93</sup> See Wilhem van Schendel and H. Schulte Nordholt, eds., *Time Matters: Global and Local Time in Asian Societies*, Amsterdam, 2000.

located in the attempt to establish global uniformity.<sup>94</sup> For Barak, the speed of standardisation that was based upon the notion of western punctuality created the more frequent breakdowns or ‘countertempos’ leading to Egyptian slowness. This slowness was at odds with the value of mechanical clock-time and created disdain for European standards of efficiency, linearity, and punctuality.<sup>95</sup> Using technology to study time, Barak emphasises a central role of western encounter in the making of Egyptian ‘substandard’ temporal culture. The centrality of encounter is best reflected in these words: ‘the development of Egyptian time overlapped an initial, optimistic embrace of the instrumentalist language of reform, followed by a growing disillusionment with technoscientific enlightenment and disenchantment with technology’s alienating temporal regimes’.<sup>96</sup> Western and Egyptian times co-emerged, as antithesis, in which the former appeared masterly but was unstable and the latter appeared derivative but was creative. Not dissimilar is Ogle’s take, only that in her case, this co-production happened at the global-local axis: ‘The circulation of ideas and globalization of time *produced* a “nationally” interpreted, civilizational Arab and Islamic time’.<sup>97</sup> For Ranajit Guha, due to British colonialism, Calcutta got slotted into official and indigenous time, the former symbolising the time of the office and the latter the time of the festivity.<sup>98</sup> In each of these, the metropolitan or the global appears to be the source of both standardisation and diversification: a sort of two scripts but one history. The history is premised upon the centrality of encounter.

## D Problems with Above Frameworks

The argument for the plurality of time, based upon the multiplicity of daily activities, appears weak when we think of the possibility of time itself as the plural entity. For ages, human societies have indulged in performing multiple activities. A psycho-subjective critique of standardised time-regimes takes us into a journey of personal, emotional, and inner registers of time or ‘felt time’.<sup>99</sup> In doing so, they reveal the individual agency at work, but their subjectivist orientation oblit-

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<sup>94</sup> Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*.

<sup>95</sup> Barak, *On Time*, p. 32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>97</sup> Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time*, pp. 121–22 (emphasis added).

<sup>98</sup> Ranajit Guha, ‘A Colonial City and its Time(s)’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45, 3, 2008, pp. 329–51.

<sup>99</sup> See Neustadter, ‘Beat the Clock’; Michael G. Flaherty, *The Textures of Time: Agency and Temporal Experience*, Philadelphia, 2010.



erates any structural explanation. It fails to relate various kinds of temporal orientations to one another as a way of explaining social structural phenomena. It therefore does not become clear why time is the object of study at all as any and every dimension of human life can be fragmented into plural forms. The use of time in explaining social structural change was essential in Thompson's writing in which he used examples from anthropological works to set a contrast between task-orientation and time-discipline.<sup>100</sup> The performance of activities and the concomitant conceptualisation of time in the precapitalist world were task-based, which in the capitalist system, ushered through by industrialisation, changed to a mechanical clock-time based disciplining. It is difficult for me to postulate how, for instance, Fryxell's example of multiple activities in modern times relates to this shift from task-orientation to time-discipline or what other shifts would they relate to, or indicate to, which would analytically denote a change in the characteristic of time itself. In other words, scholars like Thompson embedded the logic of transition in the political-economic formation of the period; their explanatory model was structural in nature. In contrast, the 'multiplicity of tasks' approach, it appears, privileges subjectivity to argue for the existence of a pluritemporal condition without providing any structural anchorage to that subjectivity. Based upon either multiplicity of tasks or varied subjective forms of relating to its passage, can we say that time was less plural in previous centuries (and in which centuries if so) or, alternatively, did it become more plural in association with modernity or postmodernity? In other words, how do we understand the relationship of multiplicity of tasks with the changing nature of time? Is it under the new structure of modernity that, while it created a relatively singular dimension of time, the everyday and social times kept on multiplying? But then the question arises if time is ever plural as a static formation, does it even need historicisation?

The temporal experiences in carrying out each of the everyday activities as mentioned above will surely vary but the plural framework still leaves open the question of if differential time-orientations do not presuppose a singularity of time. Each of the tasks, say, bringing the child to the school, the pet to the veterinary, and finding the best flights and hotels for an impending holiday, is required to be finished on time. Eviatar Zerubavel reminds us of the point that modern numerous daily activities and commitments require a lot of regulation and coordination. Schedules, which temporally organise our daily life, are part of a rigid structure maintaining a temporal regularity.<sup>101</sup> The pressure of an empty clock-

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<sup>100</sup> Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism'.

<sup>101</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*, Berkeley, 1981, p. 52; also, in general, see Ch. 2.

time ticking its time away and exerting a force to finish tasks on time undergirds many of the activities of our everyday life. The co-inhabited worlds of different time-flows (for instance, life and after-life), life and life-forms (for instance, body and soul), experience and memory, reality and desire, and the organisation of life according to different calendars is still more relevant to think about how people engage with time in plural ways. And yet, it should not be forgotten that ageing and death do reveal the basic irreversible characteristic of time. Thapar brings out the complexity in the Hindu beliefs around rebirth very well.<sup>102</sup> Implicit in the idea of rebirth is 'the inevitability of death with which time comes to an end' but rebirth is also tied to the concepts of *karma* and *samskara*, meaning present action could determine the future. This thought therefore conveys the idea that past, present, and future are linked from the viewpoint of human action and conduct. But there is an inevitable and irreversible destruction of certain entities – primarily the body – which is caused by time. There is a deep fundamental ethos of linearity embedded in what appears to be cyclic. Further, the concept of *moksha*, that is, freeing the soul from the cycle of rebirth, and a strong philosophical as well as moral emphasis which is put on achieving it through good conduct, can once again be read as a preference to the end of cyclicity of birth and death. Moksha is the termination of that cycle, which is the highest desired form of life-value. We will return to this point of linearity and reversibility when we reflect on the question of whether multiple forms of engagements *with* and *in* time make time itself plural, or if can we draw a line between time as a universal entity on the one hand, and forms of engagement with it as a web of social time relationships on the other.

Similarly, while insightful in decoding the power of western discourses on time and historicizing the creative reconstitution of modernity in non-western world regions, the global or colonial encounter-based studies on time exhibit two limitations: one, the history of standardisation emerges from the very temporal point in which the standardisation of time was attempted and gradually achieved. A west-centric colonial-global order formulated the project of time standardisation via railways, clocks, and calendar. As a result, these accounts are heavily concentrated on the period of the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>103</sup> The pre-history of 'non-standardised' time appears only instrumentally to explain the history of standardisation and its limitations. We do not need to study non-western or premodern practices of slowness, delay, and waiting only in the mirror of

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<sup>102</sup> Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History*, p. 24.

<sup>103</sup> Stephen Kern exhibits the same problem, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983.

their opposite: the western and modern sense of speed, punctuality, and acceleration. But the encounter framework may unwittingly force us to adopt such an approach. For example, the prefixes ‘counter’ and ‘alternative’ which work as more than mere descriptions of empirical accounts, as used by Barak and Kaul in two different contexts, reveal the limitations of such an approach.<sup>104</sup>

Second, because of the primacy given to standardisation, these accounts prioritise ‘temporal encounter’ over temporal orders, regimes, and cultures as the main framework of studying time. For studying colonised societies in particular, within this framework, time appears only in moments of encounter between the coloniser and the colonised, mostly as an agent of colonisation for the former and as an adaptive tool of resistance for the latter.<sup>105</sup> The framework of global transformation questions the Eurocentrism embedded in narrating this encounter but ‘encounter’, as the moment of transformation (in spite of its unevenness), itself is left relatively unquestioned. The encounter is used to explain the ensuing changes in society (in terms of imposition, adaptation, or reform) but the moment of encounter is not adequately situated and contextualised by what existed prior to it. As a result, the subsequent temporal practices become derivative of this encounter rather than being seen as part of the larger dynamic formation of temporal regimes and cultures in which certain elements could have carried on from earlier practices. By privileging the moment of encounter, either through colonial or global modes of analysis, the long history of temporal regimes and cultures escapes scholarly analysis. The moment of encounter opens only a small window into the world of the social. Therefore, the suggestion here is not to discard or dismiss the impact of encounter, particularly in studies on colonial societies, but to not let it become the only optic to approach the social conditions in which time functions and temporalities get formed.

Further, synchronisation and standardisation should not be confused with linearity. If, say, time was local in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, what this means is that every place had its own local (solar) time. Consequently, it indicates two things: one, the measurement of time across spaces was non-uniform; and two, time was dependent on natural conditions and therefore was non-fixed even in one location (the duration of measurement of day and night would have varied according to seasons even in one place). But independently of both these conditions, people might still have felt the linearity of time – its fixed passage from morning to evening at the quotidian level; its linear move-

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<sup>104</sup> Barak, *On Time*; Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time*.

<sup>105</sup> Nanni, *The Colonisation of Time*; M. M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South*, Chapel Hill, 1997; Barak, *On Time*.

ment from birth to death at the biological, social, and cultural levels; and, its feature as a finite resource not to be wasted away at the ontological and philosophical levels.<sup>106</sup> Further, as clocks emerged as an important measuring device in Europe in medieval and early modern periods, other societies also had different precision devices for measuring time.<sup>107</sup> In the fourteenth century, a water clock adorned the top of the royal palace in Delhi, and, according to the contemporary observers, served various purposes: it enhanced the prestige of the sultan, gave correct hours for prayers, and oriented residents to the beginning and end of the fasts during night time or when the skies were overcast because the water clock was considered to be a more reliable and precise instrument than the sundial.<sup>108</sup> This again means that premodern time was not necessarily infused with concrete or lived senses of time alone. It also had a time-sense based upon calculative repetitive mechanism, not only at the level of memory, belief-systems, and epochs but also through quotidian devices and instruments. The water-clock was a popular device in India until the beginning of the early twentieth century.<sup>109</sup> The terms of measurement such as *prahar* and *ghadi* associated with this device still pervade time-sensibilities in large parts of South Asia.

The encounter-centric narratives of history of time reinforce certain binaries while at the same time, in their global capacity, partly undo the excessive focus on Europe in time studies. They make spaces dynamic but freeze temporal divisions. They resuscitate the chasm between premodern and modern, between western and non-western. Thematically, they remain close to exploring histories

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**106** Some of the essays in Kaul, ed., *Retelling Time* trace these features existing across various religious and intellectual traditions in South Asia.

**107** On Europe, Glennie and Thrift, *Shaping the Day*; Le Goff, *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*; Hanss, 'The Fetish of Accuracy'; on the prevalence of the water-clock in South Asia, A. J. Qaiser, *The Indian Response to European Technology and Culture (A.D. 1498–1707)*, Delhi, 1982; S. Sarma, *The Archaic and the Exotic: Studies in the History of Indian Astronomical Instruments*, Delhi, 2008; S. R. Sarma and Ishrat Alam, 'Announcing Time: The Unique Method at Hayatnagar, 1676', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 52, 1991, pp. 426–431; Takao Hayashi, 'The Units of Time in Ancient and Medieval India', *History of Science in South Asia*, 5, 1, 2017, pp. 1–116; Samuel Wright, 'The Moment of Marriage: Toward a History of Temporality in South Asia, 1650–1820' (forthcoming, *Modern Asian Studies*).

**108** Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, 'Science and Scientific Instruments in the Sultanate of Delhi', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 54, 1993, pp. 143–44.

**109** For its presence registered around this period, see 'The History of Time', *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, Saturday, June 25 1892; 'Timepieces', *The Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, Saturday, November 15 1902. On the presence of *Yamas* and *Ghatikas*, the time-units based on ancient system of measurement, Kalidasu Sankaraiah, 'A Hindu Astronomical Clock', *Current Science*, 16, 6, 1947, p. 190.

related to standardisation, synchronisation, techniques and technologies, and devices and instruments.

Finally, in many of these works, particularly those that are concerned with the making of modern time, there is an anomalous circularity in the way the research question has been framed. The straightening of time, that is, the arrival of the modern, is a function as well as a result of the marking of the fundamental historical changes based upon key transformational moments. The rise of the Enlightenment thinking, the global spread of the mechanical clock, the massive pace of industrialisation fuelling commodity production from the mid-eighteenth century, the new labour discipline based upon management and internalisation of a new time discipline which had industrial roots but also a deep slavery-based plantation antecedents, and not least, the technology-driven imposition of standard methods of time-reckoning are some of the widely studied moments.

In this postulation, time has changed its characteristic together with the shift in the gear of historical periodisation. This is a classic case of a generalised understanding of time – and the anomaly in the approach towards studying the making of modern time mentioned above – that is based upon privileging the factor of temporalisation. The making of modern time is often traced through the histories of those institutions and technologies, and at those sites and locations, which in their genesis are already marked by the ascriptive values of modernity. Mechanical clock, factory, industry, railway, tramways, telegraph, telephone, school, office, and army are some of the usual suspects.<sup>110</sup> These sites and locations then yield the results that historians expect of them: either to confirm their overwhelming contribution to the making of the modern time, or to discover the mix of conflictual processes of the co-existence of various tempos (reflecting the worlds of modern and premodern times, for instance).

I wish to call this feature of our research an illustration of the linear mode of methodological thinking. While modern time may now be readily regarded as plural, the organisation of research behind it is quite linear in its thinking. We can, with some certainty, predict which sites and locations will be chosen for investigating the making of the modern time. The so-called premodern fluid temporality is often investigated at the site of nature (seasons and monsoons); modern plurality is usually explored around the themes of uneven technological (railways, calendrical, and mechanical clocks) standardisation, the emergence of new social or disciplinarian institutions (army, school, office), the ‘incomplete’ transition to a capitalist mode of production (factory), and not least, through memory

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<sup>110</sup> Two very insightful studies, adopting diverge methodological entry points, do nevertheless limit themselves to the select sites of modernity: Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks*; Barak, *On Time*.

and regimes of historicity which encompasses themes as varied as the significance of political movements to those of the presence of ghosts. In our research, we go to places where we already expect what we will find.

While it is required of historians to seriously take into account the categories with which people explained their experiences (and most of the times it was with regard to places such as the factory, the school, and the office, and around new networks of communication that time-related enchantment, anxiety, and other sensibilities were usually expressed, or around rupturous political, social, or epidemiological events creating a distinct register of explaining the engagement with time),<sup>111</sup> it is equally true that seldom are histories of the modern time traced to the site of the agrarian field and farm, through devices of irrigation, for instance.<sup>112</sup> Or very rarely are the histories of the standardisation of work traced through the functionality of law, regulation, and punishment (and not the mechanical clock) in which the site is not the factory but a riverine tract which belonged to the realm of ecological temporality upon which the legal temporality functioned in the domain of labour management. Very little by way of a thick description study exists which conceptually elevates the home to the same level as the factory to investigate whether modern time produced a sense of alienation or affect in the performance of household chores. A narrow focus on a few select areas in our research is one concern which directly emanates from the ways in which the lived-abstract or the plural-homogenous dichotomous nature of the debate on the history of time has so far been conducted.

## E Recap

Broadly speaking, there are two levels at which the history of time has usually been explored: one at the level of temporality and periodisation in which the prime urgency is to unravel the ways through which society created the meta-distinctions of time into the past, the present, and the future, and when and why it happened; and two, at the level of socio-economic and political changes which are based upon a historically inflecting set of ideas and practices that included industrialisation, political revolution, imperialism, mechanisation, acceleration,

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<sup>111</sup> On crisis and their experiences leading to changed modes of peoples' engagement with past, present, and future, see Alexandra Paulin-Booth and Matthew Kerry, 'Introduction – 'Activist Times: Temporality and Political Action in Twentieth-Century Europe', *European Review of History*, 28, 4, 2021, pp. 475–83.

<sup>112</sup> An exception in Indian case is Shahid Amin, *Sugarcane and Sugar in Gorakhpur: An Inquiry into Peasant Production for Capitalist Enterprise in Colonial India*, Delhi, 1984.

commodification, law, and technological synchronisation and standardisation. Perhaps, the former has arisen due to the qualitative shifts brought about by the latter, which has led to time itself being perceived in newer ways. The period from the mid-eighteenth century is taken to be the breakpoint for thinking about the rise of modern time. Primarily due to one dominant view about the rise of the capitalist mode of production from this period in which time is said to have become abstract and empty, a glance back at the previous eras usually presents time as concrete and lived. However, what was regarded as empty and homogeneous, is also now increasingly seen as plural and multiple.

In terms of transition and simultaneity, there is no denying that in the last hundred years or so the dominance of one mode of time-notation (the mechanical clock-based 24-hour system of the division of time) has globally superseded other forms of time measurement existing in different regions of the world even if those other forms do continue to influence and organise certain areas of life in different cultures. As a result, there indeed is simultaneity in the use of multiple ways of organising time. Particularly, the role of the calendar is worth mentioning as in many world regions people do inhabit and organise their everyday time according to more than one calendar. However, transitions or changes are also part of this journey; another instance of time-related change through the late nineteenth century is people paying attention to ever smaller fractions of time.<sup>113</sup>

Wading through this matrix of transition and simultaneity, one possible way of doing a social history of time could follow this pattern of mixing the ascriptive values of time arising out of temporalities in which societies classified themselves (and were classified by others) with the forces of socio-economic and political changes which will mainly be structural in scope. Temporalities here mean the relationship established between the past, the present, and the future together with modes of classifying that relationship. However, this approach will potentially have a problem with being circular in nature: the narrative will move forward only when it holds its own tail. The making of modern social time will require us to select, in a pre-given manner, the sites and processes which are often already imbued with the notion of being modern or are popularly seen as contributing to the making of the modern. It may also make use of the encounter framework as modern time regimes emerged being coterminous to processes of colonisation, modernisation, and globalisation.

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<sup>113</sup> May and Thrift, eds., *Timespace*, p. 8.



Sumit Sarkar's classic essay on clock and *chakri* both reproduces this problem but also presents a possibility to break through it.<sup>114</sup> By prioritising the presence of the mechanical clock in the lives of nineteenth century Calcutta clerks, and how it instigated a renewed social discussion on the age of the epochal, apocalyptic notion of *Kaliyug*, he interlaced the materiality of the nineteenth century (generated through the use of the mechanical clock and its impact on reconstituting clerical work as servile) with the discursive formation of the same period, which manifested itself in the fear and anxiety of the return of the cyclically-conceptualised decadent age from the Hindu system of the division of time (the *Kaliyug*).<sup>115</sup> In other words, he intertwined the mechanical and the epochal, the linear and the cyclical in order to provide a history of the new felt crisis and sensibility towards time in nineteenth century Bengal.<sup>116</sup> His is a classic exposition of social history which prioritised time itself as one of the most important vectors through which colonial power-knowledge influenced the idea of history.<sup>117</sup> The limitation is that Sarkar's foray into the social meaning of modern time is heavily dependent upon two modern entities: the mechanical clock and the office. We do know what the nexus of the clock and the office produced; we don't know what this nexus replaced.

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114 Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyug, 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramkrishna and his Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27, 29, 1992, pp. 1543–1559, 1561–1566.

115 On classical Hindu system, see Thapar, 'Cyclic and Linear Time in Early India'; *ibid.*, *Time as a Metaphor of History*.

116 Analytically, this can also be seen as an example of 'time-border' which Fryxell and others have elaborated upon as a framework in which multiple temporalities, or cyclical and linear times, are 'intrinsically interconnected and interdependent in understandings of historicity and temporality'. Fryxell et al., 'Lost in Time', p. 570.

117 With qualification, but he emphatically argues that 'British rule brought with it clocks and a notion of time as linear, abstract, measurable in entirely non-qualitative units, an independent framework within which events happened.' Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, p. 8, also see pp. 6–16.