Russian-Soviet Modernity: None, Shared, Alternative, or Entangled?
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Since the 1990s a debate has raged in the field of Russian and Soviet historical studies around the concept of modernity. Can late imperial Russia and the USSR be considered modern, and if so in what sense? Particularly subject to controversy in this regard has been the place of the Stalin period, which many observers are reluctant to label modern—either because they argue that Stalinism resurrected archaic features of the past or diverged sharply from much of the world, especially in the realms of economics and ideology. Others object to calling the Soviet Union modern on a variety of methodological or political grounds, given a range of thorny dilemmas surrounding modernity theory or, for example, the use of “modernization” to justify the human costs of Stalinism. If one can recognize such a thing as Soviet modernity, what does this signify—both as a theoretical problem and a research agenda?

I proceed from the premise that the debate that has gone on in the post-Soviet years about modernity in the Russian and Soviet context is important and revealing. First of all, it revolves around a concept, modernity, that has long been fundamental in all the human

*Статья подготовлена в результате проведения работы за счет субсидии на государственную поддержку ведущих университетов Российской Федерации в целях повышения их конкурентоспособности среди ведущих мировых научно-образовательных центров, выделенной Национальному исследовательскому университету «Высшая школа экономики.»
sciences and that remains an important locus of social theory. Second, it provides a new twist on one of the oldest and most important binary oppositions running like a red thread through the entire history of Russian studies: between particularism and universalism, uniqueness and comparability. For all those involved in historical studies, this question of particularism and universalism applies not only to history but to historiography. It applies not just to the part of the world we study but to the very conceptual tools and methodologies we employ. In other words, it requires standing back from narrow research problems and relating specific historical knowledge—which historians of Russia derive from the material and research intrinsically derived from their own field—to a tangled field of theory that, by its nature, has international and global sweep. Those tools, as always, were initially developed by those immersed in other areas—the proverbial West—and can only with modifications or a posteriori be applied to “us.” To state the obvious, we must evaluate a key concept, modernity [модернити] that in the Russian language was never used as such by the historical actors who experienced it and by definition, in recent times, could not have emerged organically from Russian intellectual milieux.\(^1\) Finally, as will become abundantly clear below, the debate over modernity, at least among historians, reveals deep methodological splits that are often covered over because they are not addressed explicitly or systematically. By the same token, the stances that scholars take on modernity are highly, if sometimes obliquely, politicized. The English-language proverb, “Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are,” can in Russian studies justly be rephrased: “Tell me what you think about modernity and I will tell you who you are.”

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In the discussion that follows, I delineate and distill from the debates over the last 15 years, primarily in the English-language literature written mostly by historians, four major positions on Russian-Soviet modernity. The first, “no modernity,” is perhaps the most widespread among practicing historians and especially those working on the key period 1850-1950. It either rejects the concept of modernity itself as flawed, ignores it, or claims, in one way or another, that Russia and the Soviet Union were never modern. The second position, “shared modernity,” was assumed by what I call the first generation of modernity scholars, those who initially applied the concept of modernity to the Russian and Soviet context from roughly 1995-2005, although others have adopted it since. It sees modernity as more or less a unified phenomenon, and therefore concentrates on what Russia or the Soviet Union shared with other modern countries. The third position, alternative modernity, proceeds from the premise that paths to and forms of modernity are multiple and not by definition “western.” It builds on the work of the late sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt and his colleagues on “multiple modernities,” arguing that Soviet communism explicitly positioned itself as an alternative modern form. A subset of this third position, what I will term “failed modernity,” emphasizes the fact that this Soviet alternative modernity failed in 1991, and therefore revolves around the ways it did not succeed or compete. Finally, the notion of “entangled modernities” also assumes that modernities are multiple, but argues that those modernities are not single, unified, or systemic. Rather, it pictures various forms of modernity around the globe as built out of many institutional spheres that interact across national borders. If the many elements comprising

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multiple modernities circulate and interact internationally, then the Soviet Union, for example, could be seen as participating in certain of them very differently than in others.

As I elaborate these four major positions, I attempt to discuss at the same time both the practitioners in the Russian field who have supported or criticized these positions and the theoretical interventions in other areas that are relevant to consider. My attempt is to pinpoint the most pressing problems and conceptual dilemmas facing each of the four positions. In so doing, I do not pretend to be comprehensive, but to pick prominent and illustrative examples from my own perspective as a historian. It is my hope that by clarifying some of the major the issues at stake in the long-running if often fragmented and implicit debate about Russian-Soviet modernity among historians and sociologists, my discussion will become relevant across disciplinary boundaries. Finally, while I strive for objectivity in laying out the positions and the conceptual dilemmas facing all of them, I also make no attempt to conceal my own views. I find the first two positions—rejecting the existence or the concept of modernity or conceiving it as an essentially unified and universalistic phenomenon—simplistic and untenable. In my view, the way forward for productive advances lies in researching, testing, and refining in the Russian-Soviet context a synthesis of the last two areas, multiple and entangled modernities.

Any consideration of the plurality of positions on modernity in recent debates must begin by understanding the turn from “modernization” to “modernity” that has occurred in the last half-century—outside but also within the Russian field. In the heyday of modernization theory beginning in the 1950s–1960s in the United States, historians of Russia as well as political scientists looked to global and more or less measurable processes such as industrialization, urbanization, increasing literacy, and secularization as a means of putting
Russia into comparative perspective. Although the modernization school in Russian studies became more sophisticated over time, modernization theory was widely criticized as teleological. ⁴ Starting in the 1980s, debates over “postmodernism” provoked new considerations of the modern era that came before. Understandings shifted from quantitative to qualitative, from processes to attitudes, and from concrete to abstract: “modernity” was linked to a range of abstract, ontological, cosmological shifts. These have included, in particular, rebellion against tradition (the original spirit of aesthetic modernism) and, perhaps most importantly, profound reorientations in attitudes toward time, in which the possibility of this-worldly change is viewed as increasingly feasible and fast-paced. Other key processes include a new recognition of society and the social sphere as objects to change, the attendant crystallization of the human sciences, and a new reflexivity and awareness of agency to “rationally” engineer state and society. In sum, modernity has meant an accompanying panoply of ambitious projects and discourses aiming to shape and even remake culture, society, and man.

Both modernization and modernity have been and remain deeply politicized concepts. It is important to recognize that in this realm the connection between theoretical stances and politics remain profoundly intertwined. Within the field of political science, an original impetus behind modernization theory was to find the path toward a liberal-democratic end point for the developing world. The scholarly paradigm was launched during the Cold War when, some historians have recently argued, modernization became an overarching, flexible ideology

justifying the U.S. superpower’s foreign policy. Even as the language of contemporary scholarship has shifted from modernization to modernity, in some quarters there remains a lingering notion, in Russia and elsewhere, that the status of “modern” is a positive approbation, to be accorded or denied according to one’s views.

By contrast, a negative association of the modernity concept, representing a very different kind of politicization, derives from the direct line drawn in much cultural criticism and postmodern writing between Enlightenment rationality in the eighteenth century and the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth. The association of the Enlightenment with the Soviet project, in fact, became widespread among those historians and scholars of Russia and the USSR inclined to see the USSR as modern. A prominent example of this was Stephen Kotkin’s identification of the Enlightenment and its utopian mentality as crucial for the understanding of Stalinism in the introduction to his celebrated Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization. Like modernity itself, this critique tended to see the Enlightenment as a single, unified phenomenon rather than referring, as does much eighteenth-century scholarship today, to multiple Enlightenments and different strands within them. In direct contrast to this strong tendency to “blame” the Enlightenment, the political theorist Richard Shorten has argued that the main ideological roots of totalitarianism—in his work, these are the “anthropological revolution” aimed at the creation of a “new man,” scientism, and revolutionary violence—all derived from currents in modern thought that “in the philosophical sense are antagonistic

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towards Enlightenment ideas, and which in the historical sense were formed either in opposition to the Enlightenment, or else after disillusionment with it had set in. Modernism...is both a ‘counter-’ and ‘post-’ Enlightenment phenomenon, and it is the corresponding period of intellectual innovation—principally in the nineteenth century—that the intellectual sources of totalitarianism must be located.”

To continue to discuss the contours of politicization: the discussion of modernity has also become linked with charges about “Eurocentrism,” namely the tight association between modernity and the West, rather than the rest of the world, in the early sociological literature. The conceptual antidote to a tight identification of a single modernity with the West, the notion of multiple modernities, can by the same token be caught up with politicized notions of special paths or Sonderwege. These easily acquire positive or negative valences depending on political outlook, as when, just to give one example, valorization of a specifically French version of modernity is associated with a critique of Americanization. This has obvious relevance today, when popularized notions of an osobyi put’ have weighty associations with conservative intellectual traditions, on the one hand, and the notion of a “modernizing Stalin” is used to justify the cost of “excesses,” on the other.

Let us now turn to an analysis of the four positions I have delineated.

No Modernity

Perhaps the most prevalent stance among historians of Russia and the Soviet period before 1953 (as opposed to many scholars working in the social sciences, or those studying the post-

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7 Richard Shorten, **Modernism and Totalitarianism: Rethinking the Intellectual Sources of Nazism and Stalinism, 1945 to the Present** (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 3.

8 The Russian edition of Oleg Khlevniuk’s recent biography contains a section, “Mif Stalina,” not in the English translation, that directly addresses myths about the positive, modernizing nature of Stalin’s rule in post-Soviet Russia. Oleg Khlevniuk, **Stalin: Zhizn’ odnogo vozhdia** (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AST, 2015): 443-52.
Stalin period) is actually not openly to dispute that Russia and the Soviet Union became in some sense modern, but rather to avoid the concept of modernity and sidestep explicit engagement with it. One major reason for this response is the sheer amorphousness and definitional fluidity of the concept. Perhaps the most prominent scholar in the Russian/Soviet field to emphasize the definitional problems has been the political scientist and historian Ronald Grigor Suny. In 2007, for example, he wrote that modernity is an “extraordinarily capacious term, which appears to explain everything from human rights to the Holocaust.” The concept has been so expansive, he warned, that unless particular elements are specified and the causal links demonstrated it may “obscure more than it illuminates.” Another reason for Suny’s wariness about the literature on Soviet modernity was the emphasis on the dark side of the Enlightenment in the initial post-Soviet scholarship on modernity starting in the 1990s, which seemed to him to have politically conservative implications. In this sense, Suny’s position has remained constant even as the link between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries, between Enlightenment rationality and totalitarian politics, has distinctly faded in recent years as the broader discussion has moved toward multiple, non-western forms of modernity. In the quotation above, however, Suny is making what appears to be a very valid methodological objection, contesting the manner in which scholars in trying to explain historical development have relied on modernity as a crutch. He shrewdly noted that an attempt to use modernity as an “explanation for action,” or a causal factor in historical development, was a problematic feature of those using the modernity concept in historical scholarship in Soviet studies. Rather than relying on modernity itself to explain the course of events or the nature of the entire

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Soviet system, Suny offers, modernity is better seen as “a context, an environment in which certain ideas, aspirations, and practices are more likely to find support than others.”

Thus Suny does so much repudiate the concept of modernity entirely as to issue valid warnings about making modernity itself into a causal factor in Soviet history.

When Suny and others object to investigating modernity in the Russian and Soviet context because of the vexed slipperiness of the term, however, they are on less firm ground. Our scholarly toolkit includes dozens of key concepts—“traditional” and tradition, for one, not to mention empire, class, nation, nationalism, socialism, fascism, totalitarianism, intelligentsia—that also have intricate debates and literatures standing behind them. In fact, what key concept does not? If it modernity is not a condition defined by “objective” markers (as in much of the older modernization literature), but rather a Grundbegriff in all the human sciences and, therefore, a heuristic prism for historical interpretation, then one must indeed clarify how one approaches it—as with any such key concept.

Yet the problem goes deeper than Suny’s capaciousness. It has to do with a fact that Russian/Soviet studies confronts in other contexts as well: the very theoretical tools in the human sciences that we must use are developed in, for lack of a better word, “western” contexts. The social theorists or theoretical sociologists who launched modernity theory started with the locus classicus of modernity, western Europe. Anthony Giddens’s seminal lectures on modernity that deeply shaped subsequent thinking on the topic, for example, treated the rise of capitalism and the nation-state as fundamental to his understanding. Indeed, Giddens

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unambiguously stated that not only the origins but the very nature of modernity were Western. At the same time, the globalization of the modern ensured that it would be—he did not specify when—approached by strategies and conceptions developed in non-Western settings. Without discussing how Stalinism could be modern without capitalism or the nation-state, Giddens also suggested that the Soviet case suggested how “totalitarian possibilities are contained within the institutional parameters of modernity rather than being foreclosed by them.”

In the Russian or Soviet version of modernity (or, as some would have it, non-modernity) we are dealing with continental empires, not nation-states; liberalism that was either not dominant or repressed, rather than “really existing”; and, *inter alia*, a “planned” economy of shortages where distribution and consumption differed radically from modern market economies.

Starting in the 1990s, a group of historians writing about the interwar Soviet Union advanced the concept of “neo-traditionalism” as a direct rebuttal of the modernity thesis. In a 1999 edited volume on the new developments in the study of Stalinism, Sheila Fitzpatrick placed disagreements between a modernity group and its critics at the center of the new historiography. In the work of the “current generation,” Fitzpatrick wrote, “two distinct approaches can be discerned. . . . The ‘modernity’ group . . . suggests that the stereotype of modernity based exclusively on Western experience (parliamentary democracy, market economy) is inadequate and points to the Soviet example as an important alternative form.”

She described this group’s case for an alternative Soviet modernity as resting on the presence of statist phenomena such as planning, early social welfare measures, scientism, surveillance, and the disciplines of self and collective. The critics, adherents of the concept of neo-

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traditionalism, did not necessarily deny that the Soviet Union in its way was modern, but “their interest, however, is drawn more particularly to the ‘archaizing’ phenomena that were also a part of Stalinism: petitioning, patron-client networks, the ubiquity of other kinds of personalistic ties like blat, ascribed status categories, ‘court’ politics in the Kremlin, the mystification of power and its projection through display, and so on.”

As Fitzpatrick noted in 2000, a number of works by on “traditional” aspects of the Soviet order lay behind the neo-traditionalist case, notably Fitzpatrick’s own emphasis on patronage and blat in Everyday Stalinism and her seminal article on the emergence of Soviet-like sosloviia, “Ascribing Class.” Two of Fitzpatrick’s students, Matthew Lenoe and Terry Martin, were most deeply involved in advancing the concept of neo-traditionalism in the field of Soviet history.

Tellingly, Lenoe’s rejection of the modernity concept on the grounds that it “obscures more than it explains” centered on highlighting differences between the Soviet order and Western liberal democracies, implicitly yet unselfconsciously denying the possibility of non-Western modernities. As Lenoe put it: “Postmodern claims for the dominance of discourse and micro-practices of power over the self and the world have contributed to recent arguments that the Soviet Union, Imperial Russia, and the liberal democracies of the ‘West’ share or shared something called ‘modernity’ with many nefarious consequences.” Those who used the label of modernity across the boundary between liberal and illiberal regimes, he continued, in essence “argue that differences between Leninist and liberal democratic regimes in forms of

14 Matthew Lenoe, Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 5–7, 247. This Introduction to this book contains the most extensive elaboration of the “neo-traditionalist” position among historians of the USSR.
property, level of coercion, and political organization were less important than they appear.”

Lenoe’s rejection of the modernity concept in the Russian and Soviet context was thus a reaction to implied comparisons between liberalism and communism.

The line of skeptical questioning of Russian-Soviet modernity that focuses on the persistence of “tradition” and persistence and extent of personalistic ties is now represented in a significant body of literature that began with the “neo-traditionalist” school and continues to multiply today. In this context, I want to point out one key development. At the outset of the neo-traditional critique of modernity scholarship, as we saw above, Sheila Fitzpatrick referred to “‘archaizing’ phenomena” that were also a part of Stalinism. The term archaizing means both to make archaic and to evoke archaic phenomena. Fitzpatrick chose that term with care. It fits in with particular conceptions of “neo-traditionalism” that understand that the resurrection or persistence of elements of tradition could be or were combined with modern methods and phenomena.

It could also fit in with David Brandenberger’s argument that the late 1930s “rehabilitation” of the past originated as a utilitarian party strategy, or the presence of what Eric Hobsbawm first called “invented traditions.” It also does not contradict the comparative observation that many interwar states made appeals to tradition using modern methods.

However, by the time of J. Arch Getty’s 2014 *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition*, archaizing had become “archaic.” In Getty’s work, what he repeatedly identifies as “ancient and archaic” practices of patrimonial politics persisted at least

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15 Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 4–5.
from the time of Muscovy, although there are also references to the “millennium” since the founding of Rus’. Having entered into the deep structures of Russian “political culture,” they carried over after 1917. In other words, Getty depicts a thousand-year-old political culture that drove the practices of boyars and commissars alike. According to this view, Russian and Soviet history form part of a single stream, and events from Russia’s distant past are pictured as directly analogous to those both of the Soviet period and the post-Soviet present. In its introduction, Getty’s work appears to align itself with the notion of neo-traditionalism, which is discussed approvingly. But in its more fundamental thrust, this work advances a qualitatively more direct continuity thesis between what is consistently called “old Russia” (everything before 1917, with an almost exclusive emphasis on the Muscovite period) and Soviet/post-Soviet practices. Thus the Bolsheviks, whatever their agenda or ideology, fell back willy-nilly on the “ancient” and “archaic” practices of patrimonialism that were built into old Russian political culture.  

While the neo-traditionalists in the early 2000s gave short shrift to actually examining tradition, Getty picks up where they left off and devotes his attention to filling in the gap—reading all of Russian history backwards and forwards from the Stalin period.

Getty’s work frequently cites one of the most celebrated continuity theses in the Russian field, Edward Keenan’s famous article, “Muscovite Political Folkways.”19 It is from Keenan that he adopts the notion of political culture—a notion that originated in the 1960s political science literature concerned with finding the traits of “civic culture” in democratic political systems, and was thus closely related to modernization theory. Political culture was

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18 J. Arch Getty, Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); these two terms appear esp. on 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 18, 33, 44, 68, 69, 70, 72, 75, 79, 86, 279.  
later, beginning in the 1980s, transformed by historians of the French Revolution, in particular, and cultural historians, more generally, to describe the symbolic and ritualized dimensions of politics as it was intertwined with cultural production, including festivals, ceremonies and revolutionary art. But Getty, deriving his notion of political culture from Keenan’s older approach, has in mind tacit, underlying, and most often concealed approaches to politics rather than cultural phenomena that can actually be traced concretely over great historical breaks. In this way, political culture, specifically Russian political culture, has been essentialized.20

Keenan and other continuity theories have often been critiqued for their inability to point to concrete, causal mechanisms by which features of Muscovy were recapitulated in the Soviet period. Getty perpetuates this problem, largely glossing over the changes of the imperial period from Peter the Great to 1917, during which, he maintains, “little changed.”21 Both 1917 and 1937 also changed little: “There had never been any other way to govern Russia, and upon reflection it would have been surprising indeed if Stalin could have replaced a thousand years of governing practice just by killing the current incumbents. . . . That was how Russia had always been governed.”22

Getty seems exemplary among those who see “no modernity” in Russia in that he conceives simple, binary dichotomy between the modern and the traditional. Either a country is modern, or it is not. This black-and-white division is based on a reading of Weber’s ideal types,

20 But the dangers of reductionism in “cultural” analysis is clearly articulated in Laura Engelstein, “Culture, Culture, Everywhere: Interpretations of Modern Russia, Across the 1991 Divide,” *Kritika* 2, 2 (Spring 2001): 363-93.
astonishing in its literal-mindedness, as if everything modern in governance could be seen as “rational-bureaucratic” and as if everything before that was personalistic, traditional, and patrimonial. In the case of Getty’s continuity theory, archaic deep structures have turned into the most important causal explanation—precisely what Suny was warning against in the historical scholarship on Russian modernity. To ascribe stasis to archaic deep structures, to appropriate Suny’s phrase, may obscure more than it reveals. There is a big difference between archaizing and archaic.

Indeed, this black-and-white, either-or approach to modernity can be called the major weakness of the “no modernity” literature. First, it assumes that modernity as a whole was either present and achieved, or it was not. However, every country in the world has retained some elements of “tradition” and invoked it even as the most modern breaks with the past have occurred. In his classic 1981 work, Arno Mayer wrote about the “persistence of the old regime” in pre-1914 Europe.23 “Tradition” itself is flexible and reinvented, as many have pointed out, and is intertwined in complex ways with modern projects. Yet these objections only scratch the surface of the problem. One major issue never confronted by the “no modernity” school is that many of the most quintessentially modern projects are directed against the ills of the modern condition or, in the words of Marshall Berman, hope “to heal the wounds of modernity through a fuller or deeper modernity.” To be fully modern, in the words of Berman’s aphorism, is to be antimodern.24 In his essay, “Modernity on Endless Trial,” Leszek Kołakowski pointed to the frequency with which historical phenomena express both modernity

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and “the antimodern resistance.” Marxism, he wrote in a comment with relevance for the Soviet case, combined enthusiasm for rationalism and technology with “yearning after the archaic community” in which “both sets of values would be implemented and make a harmonious alloy: modern factory and the Athenian agora would somehow merge into one.”

A much different approach to the “either-or” position is to conceive of modernity as incomplete, proceeding in stages, punctuated by crises, in certain ways always fused with elements from the past, and proceeding at different paces in different areas.

Those rejecting modernity because of the persistence of traditional forms in the twentieth century Russian-Soviet context thus come very close to recapitulating the hoary stress on backwardness in explaining Russian history. They also engage a concept—tradition—that is no less amorphous than modernity. The notion of traditional society as a single, catch-all category encompassing non-modern formations is analogous to conceptualizing a single modernity that Russia lacks, and it ignores the way anthropologists commonly stress how tradition has been made and remade over the cataclysmic changes of the twentieth century.

Another major avenue by which scholars have rejected modernity—in particular in the context of Stalinism—has been to point to specific features of the Soviet system that appear on the face of it to be distinctly non-modern. And when it comes to features of Stalinism that have not infrequently appeared as a prima facie argument about the atavism of the Soviet system, the sheer extent of Soviet political violence and the nature of the GULAG have loomed large.

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27 For example, Bruce Grant, In the Soviet House of Culture: A Century of Perestroikas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)
After all, under Stalin a significant sector of the economy consisted of millions of people forced to wield shovels and other primitive tools in a form of slave labor. Thus Viktor Berdinskikh, the historian of the Gulag, began a paper with an analogy to the Egyptian pyramids.\footnote{Viktor Berdinskikh, “ГУЛАГ: экономика и идеология подневольного труда в 20-м веке,” paper delivered at the conference “The Soviet Gulag: New Research and New Interpretations,” Georgetown University, 25-27 April 2013.} To be clear, the history of slavery is a relevant comparative framework when discussing forced labor. But there is such a thing as modern slavery, and levels of technology are not primarily what is at stake in describing the modernity of political violence. For example, Golfo Alexopoulos’s forthcoming work on GULAG physicians underscores systematized role of medical criteria in facilitating the extent and exploitation of human bodies, something that differentiated Soviet politico-economic incarceration from the tsarist penal system.\footnote{Here see Golfo Alexopoulos, Human Raw Material: Health and Inhumanity in Stalin’s Gulag (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming), and Alexopoulos, “Destructive-Labor Camps: Rethinking Solzhenitsyn’s Play on Words,” forthcoming in Kritika.} Second, to give just one other example, Mark Levene’s work on comparative genocide in the European “rimlands” from 1939 to 1953 notes how the NKVD’s efficiency and organization in rounding up entire populations for deportation was the envy of its SS rivals. Invoking James C. Scott’s notion of “high modernism” denoting a hyperinterventionist social engineering and state interventionism that peaked in the mid-twentieth century, Levene refers to the NKVD as the “cutting edge of Soviet high modernism.”\footnote{Mark Leven, The Crisis of Genocide, vol. II: Annihilation: The European Rimlands 1939-1953 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 316; James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).} Here Michael Mann’s critique of Zygmant Bauman in the context of explaining the modernity of the Holocaust is particularly relevant for students of Stalinism. Mann forcefully argues that the modern element in Nazism and the Holocaust lay not in “industrial
“killing” or technology but in the modern mass movement, with its “discipline, comradeship, and careerism” reinforced by a shared ideology.31

Aleksandr Etkind, in a hard-hitting 2005 critique of works on subjectivity in Soviet studies for “reproducing the rhetoric of power in a moment of unprecedented monologicity,” objected in particular to the notion of perekovka and the creation of “new people” in the “corrective-labor camps” of the Gulag. “Is it not important that New Men were never built there,” he asked, “perhaps not even a single one?” It is not at all clear, Etkind continued, that “the Soviet regime was modern. Its results were decidedly anti-modern. Some of its means, such as tanks, were modern; others, such as drills, were not. Were the spiritual aspirations of the regime—its ideological goals, educational plans, ideas about right and good—modern? Perhaps the answer should be mixed and complex but I believe that the ideological ends of the regime demonstrated its most archaic, backward-looking features.” It is important to observe that in this revealing discussion Etkind definitively and, seemingly without exception, identified modernity with liberalism and the West. He referred, most strikingly, to the “modern (Western) world,” adding that “Soviet subjectivity” was a failed project, whereas “modern or ‘liberal’ subjectivity” is an everyday reality.32

**Shared Modernity**

The “first generation” of modernity scholarship in the 1990s and early 2000s was concerned above all in countering a longstanding stress in the field on relative backwardness and what Russia lacked, what the Germans call Mangelgeschichte. As a number of historians of Russia

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took up the challenge of developing conceptions of Russian and Soviet modernity, they were preoccupied less with exploring the origins and features of one specific, particular incarnation of modernity than with making a convincing case that Russia/USSR could be considered modern in the first place. Given this imperative, it was logical and compelling that the centralized, interventionist state—something, unlike developed capitalism or the nation-state, that Russia and the Soviet Union did not lack but, to the contrary, possessed in spades—dominated scholarly attention. A major example is Peter Holquist’s celebrated examination of surveillance practices across the boundaries of 1914 and 1917, where modern state practices are shown as fundamentally similar both as they exploded in Russia during the era of total war as well as in their international context. While state practices were the same, in his treatment, they were directed to different ends depending on the ideologies behind them.33

Inspired by the domestication of Foucault in the historical scholarship of the 1990s, another wave of scholarship on power and knowledge focused on experts and specialists, a key area in which Russia also appeared close to the forefront rather than representing backwardness. As Yanni Kotsonis put it, “rather than measure what was not achieved and conclude that Russia was less than modern, the important fact is that historical actors debated within the terms of modernity, and for this reason can be considered within the rubric of modernity.”34 Discussions of Russian and Soviet modernity thus focused first and foremost on elements of comparability rather than on the distinguishing contours of a late imperial Russian

and especially Soviet system that diverged quite radically from other modern states. Making Russian and Soviet particularity central smacked of the old, noncomparative stress on what Russia lacked.

In this vein, important contributions were made not just to modern ideas and fields of knowledge but in works devoted to political violence, revolutionary mass politics, and socio-ideological engineering. References to the theorist of links between modernity and the Holocaust, Zygmunt Bauman, and the theorist of high modern states, James C. Scott, came to populate footnotes on Soviet history. In his famous Kritika article, Stephen Kotkin went one step further and claimed that an excess of modernist implementation—the sheer extent of Soviet industrial Fordism and by extension other aspects of the Stalin-era attempt to leap beyond liberal modernity—were made possible by the party-state suppression of private property and the market. Examining the interwar conjuncture internationally, Soviet modernity was placed into the context of the triad of mass production, mass culture, and mass politics. Kotkin argued that in some respects, such as the adoption of industrial Fordism or the political mobilization of mass culture, the Soviet Union’s communist-statist version of modernity, facilitated by the elimination of private property, was able to go further than its rivals. In Kotkin’s depiction, then, the interwar Soviet Union was therefore in key ways more modern than its capitalist competitors. But the concern nonetheless was with a single kind of modernity—the one marked by the international conjuncture of the 1920s and 1930s—as opposed to exploring particularities of differing historical trajectories to differing modernities

(in the plural). The result was an implicit conceptualization of a single or shared modernity. This was a move from “none” to “one,” rather than to “many.”

A new, updated kind of shared modernity thesis is contained in Stephen Kotkin’s recent biography of Stalin, which is not only a biography of Stalin up until the late 1920s but a lengthy history of revolutionary Russia and its place in the world. Now concentrating now in particular on economic competitiveness and political legitimacy in the context of late imperial Russia, Kotkin finds the early twentieth-century autocracy especially lacking above all in modern political mass mobilization (as opposed to economic and military affairs, where he thinks the country did relatively well). Tilting against the social theorists who have dominated the discussion of modernity, Kotkin maintains that becoming modern was not a mere “sociological” transition from traditional society. Modernity was rather “a geopolitical process, a matter of acquiring what it took to join the great powers, or fall victim to them.” Modernity, in this reading, was nothing more and nothing less than acquiring those “difficult-to-obtain attributes” that the greatest powers mastered in an international contest.37

One strength of Kotkin’s geopolitical definition is its insistence that modernity evolves in an international system in distinct phases. In other words, what was “modern” before 1914 was obviously not the same as in the interwar period and the postwar periods. However, when Kotkin insists that this evolution proceeded along the lines of a kind of Darwinian geopolitical competition, my response is: was it really just as simple as do or die? How do states actually modernize within the framework of international competition? Borrowing always involves intricate processes of adaptation and domestication of what is borrowed. In the twentieth

century these were processes increasingly carried out not just by politicians but armies of experts, scientists, and even cultural image-makers. How should we factor into this complex process of circulatory geopolitical surveillance those ideologies that in other contexts Kotkin insists were decisive? In many countries experts could convert from one political ideology to another in part because those ideologies sometimes shared the intersecting lineages. Grappling with this dimension of international competition, I would argue, engages not geopolitical but transnational history.

Anna Krylova’s recent discussion of Kotkin directly takes aim at his thesis in “Modern Times” that the Soviet version of modernity was left behind internationally when Stalin reconstructed the postwar economy along interwar lines. Krylova contends that with this conclusion Kotkin constructed a full-fledged “stagnation narrative,” although his treatment of the postwar period was focused on economics and offered more in the nature of a short, suggestive conclusion. More important, however, is that Krylova contests the notion of a failed, alternative Soviet modernity by sketching out her own two-stage model of Soviet modernity—what she calls the Bolshevik and the Soviet—with the 1930s as the hinge period in a long, uneven transition from the one to the other. The post-Bolshevik Soviet version emerged as an “urban and middle-class inflected socialist modernity,” marked by a discourse on individualization that diverged from earlier Bolshevik collectivism. Soviet society and its discourses (as opposed to Soviet economics) evolved rather than fell back on patterns from the 1930s. For Krylova, the postwar decades were the time when “the modern alienated and self-focused individual,” as elsewhere, became a “mass social phenomenon.” In this fashion, Krylova argues that the notion of a revolutionary, Bolshevik alternative modernity is misguided,
because the postwar, “urban and middle-class inflected” Soviet modernity resembled its capitalist competitors far more than often thought.\textsuperscript{38} Krylova’s new, two-stage model thus ends up with a kind of convergence theory and thus can be considered a variation on the broader stance of positing a “shared” modernity.

**Alternative Modernity**

“One of the most important implications of the term ‘multiple modernities,’” wrote the sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt in 2000, “is that modernity and Westernization are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only, ‘authentic’ modernities, though they enjoy historical precedence.”\textsuperscript{39} Eisenstadt talked of a “cultural program of modernity” that flowed from the advent of the awareness of the autonomy of man and hence led to a novel cognizance of contestation in the core ontological concepts prevalent in many societies and civilizations—including non-Western ones.

Eisenstadt’s concept of multiple, non-Western modernities, along with the related notion of an “alternative” modernities that has resonance especially in the Soviet field, has met resistance among scholars. It has provoked a number of noteworthy objections. In particular, Frederick Cooper’s well-known critique in the postcolonial and non-European contexts argues that “if alternative modernities all represent alternatives to a European modernity, then one package of cultural traits is being awarded a European pedigree while other packages are being linked across time to a people, however defined, as in Chinese or Islamic modernity.”\textsuperscript{40}

However, the danger of dividing up modernities into European and non-European is not, in fact, 


\textsuperscript{39} Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” 2–3.

\textsuperscript{40} Frederick Cooper, “Modernity,” *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 114.
fatal to the concept of multiple modernities. Here the Russian-Soviet case is especially instructive, because Russia can plausibly be seen as at once European and non-European. The logical response to the danger Cooper points out in making a dichotomy between European modernity and all alternatives is to agree that, indeed, it makes no sense to fuse all European historical trajectories into a single Europe separate from the Rest.

However, Cooper’s warning does suggest a danger in attributing all the particularities of all non-Western modernities to cultural or “civilizational” traits, rather than treating them as part of the specificities of a broader historical trajectory that would include political, social, and economic systems. For example, Nazi modernity, to cite a case that has been extensively discussed among Germanists since the 1980s, and more recently referenced by many Soviet specialists, is hardly separate from German historical particularities yet hardly identical to an undifferentiated European modernity.

In an important discussion of Nazi Germany that preceded Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities, Peter Fritzsche used the term “modernism” rather than modernity, a common practice in a significant wing of scholarship that is favored by those who wish to combine both political and cultural phenomena in the same concept.41 Fritzsche argued that Nazism reflected an “extreme” response “to the economic and political crises of post-World War I Germany.” Calling National Socialism “modernist” is “compelling not because National Socialism bears resemblance to modern liberal states of the period after World War II, or because it adopted and celebrated automobiles, airplanes, and other futuristic technology, but because it conceived of Germany as both the object of the social and economic forces of

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41 See, for example, the journal Modernism/Modernity at: https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/modernism_modernity/.
industrialization and, thanks to those same forces, as a potential subject that possessed the capacity to reorganize political life...The Nazis were modernists because they made the acknowledgment of the radical instability of twentieth-century life the premise of relentless experimentation."⁴² A number of prominent scholars in the Soviet field, reacting to the discussion in the German field in particular, have embraced the concept of “illiberal modernity,” linking the totalitarian interwar regimes.⁴³

This concept of illiberal modernity, however, differs in important ways from multiple modernities in that it is based not on plurality but on dualism, this time between liberal and illiberal modernity. If one does not reject the possibility that there have been many differing forms of modernity—many rather than none, one, or two—then it follows that there has been a specific historical path in the Russian and Soviet case that is at once particular and connected to other modern forms. In other words, the choice between particularism and universalism that seemed so stark among the initial debates about modernity in the Russian field can be seen as a false dichotomy.

This position, rejecting a binary opposition between uniqueness and comparability, opens up a number of perspectives in terms of the Russian longue durée. In both the Russian pre-1917 and Soviet contexts, one needs to theorize a modernity that arose out of the confluence and interactions of a not merely modern but vociferously antiliberal, antibourgeois, anticapitalist revolutionary transformation and a society that had not fully experienced liberalism, capitalism, or the bourgeoisie. Just as Russian Europeanization preceded that of

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most of the non-Western world, this anticipatory antibourgeois sentiment might be compared to similar phenomena in numerous non-European settings. This, in turn, allows the literature working in a modernity framework to build on rather than sidestep the legacy of a sophisticated historiographical tradition delineating the particular features of imperial Russia’s trajectory within a broader European context.

For example, in a classic discussion rejecting the notion of a unilinear transition from traditional to modern in the imperial Russian context, Alfred J. Rieber turned attention to the “contradictions, anomalies, archaisms, and irregularities” present in the late imperial period. The term he invented to describe them was “the sedimentary society,” in which “a successive series of social forms accumulated, each constituting a layer that covered all or most of society without altering the older forms lying underneath the surface.” Crucially, he projected this model forward: “In Soviet as in autocratic Russia the problem was how to instill the values of the dominant culture—these deeper layers of society that rested underneath the accumulation of superficial social and institutional forms erected from above.”

Several other important, classic conceptualizations of imperial Russian historical development center are not incompatible with the later notion of multiple modernities, for they also center around this late and rapid old regime modernization, its paradoxes and contradictions, and the time lag (what in German is referred to as Ungleichzeitlichkeit) embedded in Russian Europeanization. For Marc Raeff, the gap between domesticated European practices and ideas and the distinctively Russian “socioinstitutional matrix” for

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modernization was at the heart of his landmark work on the well-ordered police state. Martin Malia, in turn, wrote about an East-West “cultural gradient” in which, for example, Russia experienced the equivalent of 1848 only in 1905. Malia’s time-lag analogies, though, hid a more complex understanding: “The political formula produced by Russian backwardness, then, is the chronic compression or telescoping—and thus the chronic radicalization—of the stages of the modern movement toward democracy.” In a notable formulation, Malia referred to the “special path of each nation along the East-West cultural gradient, in a series of Sonderwege from the Atlantic to the Urals.” Using the German term Sonderweg, or in Russian особый путь, in the plural—Sonderwege, or особые пути—in fact anticipated the concept of multiple modernities.

A blistering critique of Eisenstadt’s notion of multiple modernities was advanced in 2013 by the German historian Stefan Plaggenborg. After finding it highly significant that sociological modernity theory is largely “silent” on Eastern Europe and especially Soviet communism, Plaggenborg nonetheless dismisses Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities as “trivial” and somehow “extra-scientific” (although, in fact, that was a sociological theory that explicitly labeled communism as a modern form). For Plaggenborg, the theory of multiple modernities has no core, and so collapses under the weigh of definitional problems. Thus, at one point, he raises the rather powerful objection that the theory of multiple modernities demands recognition of many “trees,” but together they form no identifiable “forest.” This comment addresses the balancing act between the global and the national, the comparative and the

particular, that any theory of alternative modernities must undertake. It is entirely right that the notion of multiple modernities is indeed incompatible with a single, concrete definition of the modern—that is, with a single “forest.” It is also true that plurality in and of itself provides no theoretical explanation of what modernity signifies. Plaggenborg offers no solution to the problem he raises. Instead, he resorts to what is for historians a rather ritualistic response: a demand to historicize the discussion of modernity.47

Still, Plaggenborg identifies a real dilemma. If all particularities are simply held to be part of an alternative form of modernity, we are simply reasoning by tautology; to have any significance for an “alternative modernity,” those particularities must also be part of something discernably modern, in which case there is, at a given historical conjuncture, some core or commonality to what is held to be modern. In my opinion, the answer to this objection cannot be found in the concept of multiple modernities, in just positing many variations of the modern. A set of potential answers can be found, however, in the notion of “entangled modernities,” discussed below, in which various strands of the modern are understood to be interacting across national borders, both Western and non-Western.

Similarly, another criticism of alternative modernities voiced by Cooper has to do with the distinction between modernity as a “condition” and modernity as “representation.” Cooper argues that scholars “should not try for a slightly better definition so that they can talk about modernity more clearly.” Instead, he writes: “They should instead listen to what is being said in the world. If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why; otherwise, shoehorning a political discourse into modern, antimodern, or postmodern

discourses, or into ‘their’ modernity or ‘ours,’ is more distorting than revealing.” ⁴⁸ It is hard to object to the importance of tracing key concepts historically. In the Russian-Soviet case, of course, there was really no exact term for “modern” or “modernity” for us to hear. In the Soviet context, “socialism” was the next historical stage and what was meant by it has hardly escaped attention. Sovremennost’ and sovremennyi convey some related connotations of modern, and the concepts of backward and advanced were prevalent as well. There is no lack of historical perceptions to trace. But even if the history of key concepts and the perceptions of historical actors are crucial endeavors, can historians ever be limited to the specific vocabulary of their historical subjects?

The notion of an “alternative” Soviet modernity, which is often raised in discussions by Soviet specialists, is quite compatible with Eisenstadt’s theory of multiple modernities. It holds several conceptual advantages. First, it opens the door to seeing both elements shared with other countries and the particularities of a distinctive historical trajectory. Second, it allows us to look at elements that persisted across boundaries like 1917 without the reductionism of single-stream continuity theories. Third, to state the obvious, in its own and others’ perceptions Soviet communism was nothing if not an alternative challenge to its constituting other, capitalism, and that the Soviet model was widely perceived as a short-cut to modernization that would leap over the advanced capitalist countries.

The notion of a Soviet “failed modernity” is closely connected to conceiving the Soviet system as an alternative modern form. The fact that the Soviet Union died in 1991 may not have loomed over postwar Soviet history quite as much as 1917 long loomed over the late

imperial period, yet similar questions—what held the system together for so long versus how far and how long can we read state collapse backwards—are beginning to be asked in a number of scholarly works.\textsuperscript{49} In the Anglophone literature, however, the issue of Soviet modernity as a conceptual problem has not been nearly as important in studies of the post-Stalin period as it has been for the period before 1953. A number of important works in the post-Stalin period do not engage the debate over Soviet modernity or simply take it for granted that the Soviet Union was modern—perhaps because in this period the USSR was an industrialized, much more urbanized, nuclear superpower that was a model for parts of the developing world.\textsuperscript{50} Yet if the rapidly expanding field of postwar Soviet history is to grapple in a serious way with 1991, these scholars, too, will have to confront this question.

The failure of Soviet modernity was raised explicitly by Kotkin in his “Modern Times,” which at the end looked past the “interwar conjuncture” that was the article’s main focus. Kotkin argued that postwar reconstruction along interwar lines under Stalin set the USSR back dramatically, since postwar modernity was entering a fundamentally new phase. In other words, as mentioned above, Kotkin argued explicitly that in the international context modernity has differing features in different eras, and Soviet economic reconstruction after 1945 in particular locked the country into an interwar model. In another work on consumerism, György Péteri, explicitly refers to the failure of an alternative communist or state-socialist modernity in both the Soviet and East-Central European context.


\textsuperscript{50} For example, see the work by anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, \textit{Everything Was Forever, until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). Yurchak simply states: “Like Western democracy, Soviet socialism was part of modernity” (10).
The notion that consumer goods would underpin a collectivist, cultured, and socialist lifestyle, and not simply in aping the West, was at its height in the 1950s and early 1960s in both the USSR and in communist East-Central Europe. Péteri focuses on Khrushchev’s attempt to make automobiles part of socialist consumerism by promoting collectivist carpools over private ownership. His painstaking archival documentation establishes that this became an impossible project: individual communist party functionaries in Hungary quickly subverted the carpools and in practice privateered cars for their own use, thus undermining the collectivist plan long before it was officially repudiated during the Hungarian new economic course. Péteri argues more broadly that in the key area of consumerism, the nomenklatura elite’s long-established addiction to Western goods and luxuries had widespread social and symbolic significance. It undermined the very notion of an alternative socialist modernity, thus directly setting up the failures of 1989 and 1991.

In this case, the notion of failed modernity is clearly linked to communist ideology and its claim to have created a better alternative to capitalism. More broadly, however, the notion of failed modernity suggests the failure of an entire system, not just ideology. Thus the question of “failed” Soviet modernity must directly face the question: does regime change mean that an entire system, an alternative modernity, failed? Or could it be that other strands of a broader Russian-Soviet modernity that straddled 1917 also survived 1991? In this regard, a very relevant question to ask (and this brings us back to the debate about “none” versus “shared” Soviet modernity): is modernity ever fully achieved?

The political scientist and historian of the human sciences, Björn Wittrock, argues that the reach and promise of modernity are never fully realized. He thus deployed the concept of “promissory notes” to suggest how modern orders need to revise and legitimate themselves as they extend their institutional reach.\(^{52}\) Does 1991 not then mean that Soviet modernity was not capable of revising itself sufficiently or quickly enough, rather than “failing” as a whole and in every way? One answer to this question can be found in the notion of “entangled modernities.”

**Entangled Modernities**

The concept of entangled modernities first emerged in postcolonial studies along with the desideratum that imperial metropoles and their colonies must be understood together. But it also has much in common with the historical scholarship on French-German interactions known as *histoire croisée*.\(^{53}\) When the sociologist Göran Therborn made a well-known intervention in 2003 to endorse and develop the notion of “entangled modernities,” he expressed dissatisfaction with Anthony Giddens “almost disarmingly candid” the “Eurocentrism” in defining modernity as the social and institutional forms that emerged in Europe after the seventeenth century. “The least arbitrary way” to approach modernity, he argued, “seems to be to consider modernity as a culture, and epoch, a society, a social sphere having a particular *time orientation*. That is, a time conception looking forward to [a] this-worldly future, open, novel,

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reachable or constructable...” Modernity, it follows, does not mark any one specific time period, but can be incarnated in different ways in different places and in different times. In a remark with particular relevance to Russia and the Soviet Union, he notes that it is entirely possible for there to be “different periods of modernity, followed by de-modernization or re-traditionalization.” Thus, modernity can be “entangled” with elements of tradition, since every modern rupture with the past is complex and incomplete, and most traditions evolve. In turn, this implies that there are no straight roads to modernity and modernity never emerges suddenly, full-blown; instead, modernities (in the plural) emerge as they evolve and interact across geographical borders. “Entanglements,” he writes in a noteworthy passage, “are produced by complexities or partialities of interaction, by selective reception, by feedback or side-effects.” Attempting to provide a kind of global map of the programs and conflicts that generated various modernities, Therborn distinguishes between the European route of internal conflict or civil war; the colonial world, where modernity arrived at the “barrel of a gun”; and the trajectory of several pre-modern empires, including China and Russia, which embarked on what he calls “Reactive Modernization” when they were challenged and threatened by colonial domination. Imperial Russia, in his view, combined the element of European internal “civil war” with this Reactive Modernization.54 In this picture, several types of modernizing trajectories can be “entangled.”

The sociologist Johann Arnason, one of the original proponents of the concept of “multiple modernities,” continued this line of investigation in the communist period, writing

54 Therborn, “Entangled Modernities,” 294, 295, 299, 301. In Russian and Soviet studies, the idea of “conservative modernization” is well known. See, for example, А. Г. Вишневский, Серп и рубль. Консервативная модернизация в СССР (Москва: ОГИ, 1998).
about “entangled communisms” in the Soviet and Chinese cases. In both countries, imperial legacies and imperial traditions interacted with modernization projects, and the two revolutionary projects were also linked directly to one another after 1949 in intricate if asymmetrical ways. But forced modernization under Stalinism linked up with earlier tsarist traditions of top-down modernization, whereas “no comparable legacy was available in China, where modernizing efforts of the imperial centre had been on a much more modest scale; hence the Chinese adaptation of the Soviet model, but hence also the efforts to redefine it...”

As this suggests, many of the discussions of “entanglements” look beyond the interactions between separate countries and national groups—which can be conceived in the differing realms of practices, discourses, technologies and material culture, and the circulation of knowledge. They also conceive them in terms of the traffic between historical legacies and global or international processes.

The most important feature of the concept of entangled modernities—as opposed to the previous three conceptions I have elaborated of none, shared, and alternative—is that modernity itself is not taken as a single, systemic whole. Rather, as entanglements are identified, modernity is broken up into its component elements and conceived in terms of the interactions of those elements across space and time. This has particular relevance for Russia and the Soviet Union, where we need to analyze two state breakdowns in the twentieth century—1917 and 1991. The notion of failed modernity—which tends to picture those breakdowns in terms of failure of the whole—can be compared to a more differentiated picture

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of differing paces of change and cross-border entanglements in, for example, the political, social, economic, and cultural realms.

An example of this kind of disaggregation inherent in the notion of “entangled modernities” can be found in the new work by the historian Adeeb Khalid on Turkestan and Central Asia in the decades on both sides of 1917. Khalid argues against the common conception of “the history of the region as a straightforward encounter between two clearly defined, distinct, and homogenous entities, ‘Central Asia’ and the ‘Soviet regime.’” Rather, he writes the history of Uzbekistan as the story of “two visions of modernity” that overlapped yet remained distinct: that of the Bolshevik new regime, and that of those members of the indigenous intelligentsia known as Jadids, who in Turkestan before 1917 articulated a vision of progress and civilization through an “aggressively modernist interpretation of Islam.” The Jadids embraced the revolution and especially the notion of cultural revolution after 1917, as they were radicalized, but they conceptualized it entirely through the lens of nation, not class. In particular, while the Jadids shared an intense stress on enlightening the masses with the Russian intelligentsia, their point of reference was not St. Petersburg or Tehran, but Istanbul. This was a “fateful” entanglement, in Khalid’s discussion, for a fascination with Turkism came to the fore in Jadidism as a result. In addition, the Jadid version of modernity did not only interact with the European communist leadership in the region and the Soviet center, but was repeatedly shaped by clashes with the Jadids’ conservative opponents within Central Asian and Uzbek society. Two generations of the Uzbek intelligentsia, first the pre-revolutionary cohort and then the first Soviet generation, perished in the 1930s. But this came only after Uzbekistan had been “made” by a complicated interaction between two different visions of modernity that
joined forces for a time, but contained distinguishably different “logics.” It is interesting to note that Khalid himself never once uses the term “entangled modernities.” Yet Khalid, in essence, suggests that a single, unified Soviet modernity did not exist within the Soviet multinational state; rather, in the case he elaborates, distinct yet intertwined versions of modernity co-existed within the Soviet project. Khalid also insists in the case of the divided and internally conflicted Central Asian society that there was no single “tradition” that interacted with a single Bolshevik center; instead, tradition and “authenticity” were contingent and constantly contested. In the end, I would argue, Khalid’s implicit endorsement of “entangled modernities” without the term itself suggests that history and theory can come to the same position by way of different paths.

One new study that does explicitly engage the theory of entangled modernities is Alexey Golubev’s study of late Soviet material history, which focuses on a social history of Soviet material objects and spaces. Golubev argues that “many phenomena in late socialism were inspired, triggered, or caused by the transnational circulation of objects, ideas, and people.” To him this implies not that the Soviet Union was a quintessentially modern state, nor that it represented a separate, socialist variation of modernity, nor that it was never modern at all. Instead, he argues that “the concept of entangled modernities popularized by Göran Therborn is, indeed, helpful for the understanding of late socialist society, yet were should add an important aspect to it: the divisions between modernities followed no only national and cultural, but also social borders...different social groups had their own understanding of what it meant to be modern.” In this sense, Golubev argues, to speak of an alternative or unique form

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of modernity in the Soviet context would mean to “discard an immense diversity of social and cultural life in the USSR” in favor of a focus on the political system and the state.\textsuperscript{57}

As Golubev’s position suggests, the theory of entangled modernities, even as it usefully breaks down the unified and holistic understandings of modernity that have dominated conceptions in the past, tends when applied to the Soviet context to normalize the Soviet system. His work does this by showing how certain aspects of Soviet life, including social and cultural developments, were part of an international circulation or diffusion of modern phenomena that were not necessarily or even at all connected directly to the failures of the state or the ideology. The notion of entangled modernities thus avoids one drawback of the “failed modernity” position, which implicitly pictures modernity as a systemic whole that either succeeds or fails as a whole. However, in so doing it opens itself to another line of critique. How can the theory of entangled modernities confront the issue that communism was established both at home and abroad as an alternative formation distinct from capitalism and the West? It was understood as such an alternative by hundreds of millions of people around the globe, and its decline and fall cannot be understood without this fact. Furthermore, were not the various dimensions of the Soviet system—its ideology, political system, economic order, culture, and society—deeply and profoundly intertwined? The theory of entangled modernities threatens to disaggregate and separate those various dimensions to the point where the fundamental interconnections are lost.

It seems to me, therefore, that the way forward in applying the theory of modernity to the Soviet context lies in the simultaneous development and investigation of both the third and

fourth positions outlined in this article—the notions of alternative and entangled modernities.

The two positions can be construed as incompatible, but they are not necessarily so. The transnational, international, and global dimensions of modernity can be investigated even as it is acknowledged that Soviet communism was a deeply systemic phenomenon that was understood and constituted as a path of development that would leap over, oppose, and “bury” the modern West. Once again the binary opposition between particularism and universalism, uniqueness and comparability, proves to be false. If in the Soviet case modernity can be conceived as at once alternative and entangled, it is also plausible that other modern societies can also be conceived as such as well.

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