

Conceptual Synchronisation: From *Progress* to *Crisis*

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Millennium: Journal of
International Studies
2018, Vol. 46(3) 421–439
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0305829818774781
journals.sagepub.com/home/mil



Abstract

International order is also temporal order, based on the alignment, more precisely, the synchronisation of the multiple times at work on a global scale. Synchronicity between cultures, languages, and polities does not emerge by itself. To create temporal orderings on a global scale requires work: political, social, and linguistic. Some work of synchronisation is performed by technological innovations such as clocks, trains, telegraph lines, phones, satellites etc. Another set of tools, however, is linguistic, made up by concepts used to make historical and political time understandable and workable. Concepts are used to order events, objects and polities temporally, thus making both them and their temporality aspects of international order. By drawing together experiences, events, and meanings from different knowledge fields or cultures, they synchronise them, aligning their speeds, rhythms, and durations. One of the most central concepts that have been used in synchronisation over the past two centuries is *progress*. In this article we map out how it has synchronised temporalities on a global scale, and ask whether *progress* is in the process of being replaced by the concept of *crisis* as the main tool for synchronising temporalities in international society – using examples from political and administrative rhetoric as well as anthropological studies.

Keywords

time, international order, crisis

Synchronisation conceptuelle : du progrès à la crise

Résumé

L'ordre international est aussi un ordre temporel qui se base sur l'alignement ou, pour être plus précis, sur la synchronisation de la multiplicité des temps utilisés à l'échelle mondiale. Le

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synchronisme entre cultures, langages et politiques n'émerge pas de lui-même. La création d'un ordre temporel à l'échelle mondiale exige un effort politique, social et linguistique. Cette synchronisation est réalisée en partie grâce aux innovations technologiques telles que les horloges, trains, lignes télégraphiques, téléphones, satellites, etc. Néanmoins d'autres outils tout aussi importants sont d'ordres linguistiques. Ces derniers sont constitués de concepts qui permettent de comprendre, organiser et gérer politiquement le temps historique et politique. Ces concepts permettent d'ordonner dans le temps les événements, les objets et les politiques, pour faire de ceux-ci et de leurs temporalités respectives des aspects de l'ordre international commun. Le regroupement des expériences, des événements et des significations de différents domaines de savoir et de différentes cultures permet de les synchroniser, d'aligner leurs vitesses, leurs rythmes et leurs durées. Un des concepts les plus fondamentaux utilisés pour la synchronisation aux cours des deux derniers siècles et celui de *progrès*. Dans cet article, nous retraçons la manière dont ce concept a synchronisé les temporalités à l'échelle mondiale. Ensuite, nous nous posons la question de savoir si l'idée de *progrès* est en voie d'être remplacée dans sa fonction de synchronisation des temporalités à l'échelle globale par le concept de *crise*. Pour ce faire, nous nous appuyons sur des exemples tirés de la rhétorique politique et administrative ainsi que d'études anthropologiques.

Mots clés

temps, ordre international, crise

Sincronización conceptual: del progreso a la crisis

Resumen

El orden internacional es también un orden temporal basado en el alineamiento, más precisamente, en la sincronización de los tiempos múltiples que funcionan a escala mundial. La sincronización entre culturas, lenguas y formas de gobierno no surge de la nada: la creación de órdenes temporales a escala mundial requiere de trabajo político, social y lingüístico. Parte de la sincronización la realizan innovaciones tecnológicas como los relojes, los trenes, las líneas de telégrafo, los teléfonos, los satélites, etc.; no obstante, existe otro conjunto de herramientas de carácter lingüístico que se compone de conceptos utilizados para hacer que el tiempo histórico y político sea comprensible y factible. Se utilizan conceptos para organizar los acontecimientos, los objetos y los sistemas de gobierno de manera temporal, lo cual hace que tanto estos como su temporalidad se conviertan en aspectos del orden internacional. Mediante la agrupación de experiencias, acontecimientos y significados de diferentes culturas o campos del conocimiento los mismos son sincronizados, alineando su velocidad, ritmo y duración. Uno de los conceptos más importantes que se ha utilizado en la sincronización a lo largo de los últimos dos siglos es el de *progreso*. En este artículo analizamos los modos en que dicho concepto ha sincronizado las temporalidades a escala mundial y cuestionamos si el *progreso* se encuentra actualmente en proceso de ser reemplazado por el concepto de *crisis* como la herramienta principal de sincronización de temporalidades en la sociedad internacional, recurriendo para ello a ejemplos de retórica política y administrativa, así como a estudios antropológicos.

Palabras clave

tiempo, orden internacional, crisis

Introduction

On 20 September 2016, President Barack Obama gave his two final speeches at the United Nations: one was an address to the General Assembly, in which he summed up the

major achievements during his tenure as President of the United States and identified the challenges for the future; the other was a set of ‘remarks’ to the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, in which he urged world leaders to take collective action to help the 65 million people driven away from their homes. Delivered on the same day, these two speeches communicated very different messages, organised around two different concepts.

In his address to the General Assembly, President Obama set forth the rhetorical strategy that had become his trademark, and that placed him safely in the tradition of post-war global leaders:

And so I believe that at this moment we all face a choice. We can choose to press forward with a better model of cooperation and integration. Or we can retreat into a world sharply divided, and ultimately in conflict, along age-old lines of nation and tribe and race and religion. I want to suggest to you today that we must go forward, and not backward. I believe that as imperfect as they are, the principles of open markets and accountable governance, of democracy and human rights and international law that we have forged remain the firmest foundation for human progress in this century. I say all this not to whitewash the challenges we face, or to suggest complacency. Rather, I believe that we need to acknowledge these achievements in order to summon the confidence to carry this progress forward and to make sure that we do not abandon those very things that have delivered this progress.¹

Obama’s speech places us, his audience, in a decisive, fateful or potentially dangerous situation, in which we have a choice: either to ‘press forward’ or to ‘retreat’. Had he been a Sophist, Obama would have identified this situation as an instance of *kairos*, ‘a decisive moment that must be caught in passing’, as ‘the opening of a discontinuity in a continuum’.² Then again, for the outgoing American president there is really no choice: only one avenue is open to us, ‘forward, not backward’, into the future. And the key concept that invests his speech with movement and direction, as it has done in Western, and increasingly, in global political discourse since the late 18th century, is *progress*. In one of his essays on time and history, the German historian Reinhart Koselleck, points out how *progress* in the modern age changes into what he calls a ‘collective singular’: it is no longer the progress of anything specific, but the progress of everything – another name for the movement of history itself.³ Far from presenting us with a choice, Obama’s message is that we need to ‘acknowledge [our] achievements, in order [...] to carry this progress forward’.

Shifting our attention to the second address, at the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, we encounter a very different mode of speech, and not least a different key concept, around which the speech is organised:

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1. Katie Reilly, ‘Read Barack Obama’s Final Speech to the United Nations as President’, *Time*, 20 September 2016. Available at: <http://time.com/4501910/president-obama-united-nations-speech-transcript>. Last accessed February 28, 2018.
 2. Françoise Balibar, Philippe Büttgen, and Barbara Cassin, ‘Moment, Instant, Occasion’. In *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Paris: Le Robert/Seuil, 2004), 815.
 3. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik historischer Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 50–8.

Mr. Secretary General; heads of state and heads of government; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen: As you saw in the video, we are facing a crisis of epic proportions. More than 65 million people have been driven from their homes – which is more than any time since the Second World War. Among them are more than 21 million refugees who have fled their countries – everything and everyone they’ve ever known, fleeing with a suitcase or the clothes on their back. And I’m here today – I called this summit – because this crisis is one of the most urgent tests of our time – our capacity for collective action.⁴

Again, Obama evokes the fateful situation, *kairos*, in the strongest possible way: ‘I’m here today – I called this summit’. At this occasion, however, there is no mention of *progress*, of a historical movement that can be carried forward, in continuity with prior achievements. On the contrary, the radical discontinuity in the moment is evoked again and again; instead of being alleviated by *progress*, the *kairos*-element is intensified by a very different key concept: *crisis*. Only in the quoted passage, Obama evokes ‘a crisis of epic proportions’ and ‘this crisis’ as ‘one of the most urgent tests of our time’. Later in the address, Obama describes the refugees fleeing their countries as a ‘crisis of our shared security’ and a ‘crisis’ that ‘is a test of our common humanity’. What the international society is currently doing is not sufficient for a ‘crisis of this magnitude’. The contrast with the address to the General Assembly could not have been stronger. *Crisis* appears in the first speech as well, but only at the very beginning and only as something to be overcome: ‘From the depths of the greatest financial crisis of our time, we coordinated our response to avoid further catastrophe and return the global economy to growth’ – in other words to progress. In this case *crisis* emerges as part of the historical logic of capitalism, in terms of an event or even a stage in a steady onward movement.

Of course, Obama is referring not to one *crisis*, but a series of different *crises*: the financial crisis, the climate crisis, the refugee crisis, as well as the crisis of security. Similarly *progress* in the first address brings together several forms of progress – what used to be called several ‘progresses’: the progress of economy, the progress of democracy, the progress of international law. But this is exactly the point: Both *progress* and *crisis* draw together different meanings from different fields of knowledge and practice, aggregating them in the same conceptual form. This, Koselleck argues, is what separates a concept from a word. Although both might appear ambiguous, a word might be rendered disambiguous by *deixis*, direct contextual reference, or by definition, whereas a concept will always have multiple meanings, which are then aggregated and organised in the concept, and only there.⁵

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4. ‘Remarks by President Obama at Leaders’ Summit on Refugees’, The White House Office of the Press Secretary. 20 September, 2016. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/09/20/remarks-president-obama-leaders-summit-refugees>. Last accessed February 28, 2018.
 5. Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur Politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland, Vol. 1*, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972), xxii. For the English translation by Michaela Richter, see ‘Introduction to the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 19.

Our point in quoting at length the former US President is not to highlight his rhetorical skills and situational understanding, or to criticise his lack of consistency, but rather to emphasise how these two speeches delivered on the same day, and partly to the same audience, contained two opposite and competing strategies for framing mankind's role in history, in other words, our *historicity*. Since the late 18th century the key concept for structuring the relationship between past, present, and future in Western culture has been *progress*. The idea of a homogenous, linear, global movement towards a common, unspecified, ever-receding goal, has withstood both historical and philosophical attacks and set-backs, from the collapse into barbarism theorised by the Frankfurt School to Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history'.⁶ At present, however, the myth of a uniform time of progress seems to be losing its grip and another concept emerges to take its place as the concept by which world leaders and populations historicise themselves, by which they locate themselves in history, in the nexus past-present-future. In Obama's two final addresses to the UN, these two concepts mirror and challenge each other: *progress* and *crisis*. Our claim in this paper is that the concept of *crisis* is about to replace the concept of *progress* as the main tool of historicisation in the Western world and beyond. What we will be primarily interested in are what these two concepts do with time. Both *progress* and *crisis*, we argue, perform their conceptual work by synchronising multiple times – speeds, rhythms, and durations – into one homogenous global time: the time of progress, or the time of crisis. Which one is allowed to dominate world politics is highly decisive for what we are able to experience, to plan and to do. If we are correct, what we see emerging is a new temporal regime or arrangement, in which the relationship between past, present and future is organised in a completely different way.⁷ Turning John Ikenberry's claim that international order is in crisis inside out, we argue that the concept of *crisis* is increasingly being used to order the international.⁸

In addition to the literature on time and temporality in international politics,⁹ we want to contribute theoretically to the discussion about what the study of concepts in history, in the German, but also in the British and the French traditions, can tell us about international order – or maybe rather of international ordering.¹⁰ There is also some affinity here

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6. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Toronto and New York: Free Press, 1992).
 7. We draw here upon Nicholas Onuf's concept of *arrangements*, insisting that they are not as totalising as François Hartog's *regimes*, and that there is no 'great arranger'. Nicholas G. Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). See also François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité* (Paris: Seuil, 2003).
 8. See John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
 9. See for e.g. Andrew R. Hom, 'Timing is Everything: Toward a Better Understanding of Time and Politics', *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2018): 69–79; Andrew R. Hom, Christopher McIntosh, Alasdair McKay et al., eds. *Time, Temporality and Global Politics* (Bristol: E-international Relations, 2016); Kimberly Hutchings, *Time and World Politics: Thinking the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).
 10. Felix Berenskoetter, ed., *Concepts in World Politics* (London: SAGE Publications, 2016); Helge Jordheim and Iver B. Neumann, 'Empire, Imperialism and Conceptual History', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 14, no. 2 (2011): 153–85; Evgeny Roshchin,

with the Copenhagen School, which deals with the concept of *security* as speech act, and we will return to those towards the end of the article.¹¹ Our point of departure is Koselleck's claim that conceptual history – or even history in general – cannot do without a theory of historical times.¹² Drawing on Koselleck's insights, but also on work in sociology and anthropology, we take the world to be inherently multi-temporal. Making these multiple temporalities appear to be synchronised, or even uniform and universal, takes a lot of work – what we refer to as 'work of synchronisation'.¹³ Synchronisation is a social phenomenon, and the work that achieves it employs shared meanings and shared concepts. For most of the past two centuries, the key concept used to synchronise multiple temporalities between different polities has been *progress*, bringing with it ideas about temporalisation, future-orientation, acceleration, synchronicity and non-synchronicity. If our claim that *crisis* is about to replace *progress* as the main tool for temporal ordering, for synchronisation, as the main 'synchroniser', if you like, holds true, the West and large parts of global society are using a new and very different temporal framework, linked to experiences of standstill, presentism, and of a world that is fundamentally 'out of sync'.

Synchronising Modernity: the Concept of Progress

Modernity as a hegemonic temporal arrangement largely coincided with an increasing inter-connection of polities on a global scale. An expectation of global synchronicity emerged, not only in terms of the adoption of the Greenwich zero meridian and the universal day in 1884, but also in terms of a large set of social and political temporal rhythms linked to modern Western ideals of civility and civilisation.¹⁴ In this way human history could be conceptualised and narrativised as a unitary whole – *universal history*.¹⁵ Both Hedley Bull's 'international society' and John Meyer's 'world society' are closely connected with modernity.¹⁶ The 'expansion of international society' can also be thought of

Friendship among Nations: History of a Concept (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Einar Wigen, 'Two-level Language Games: International Relations as Inter-lingual Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 2 (2015): 427–50.

11. Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Ole Wæver, 'Securitisation and Desecuritisation'. In: *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 46–86.
12. Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten. Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 302. For a discussion of this claim see Helge Jordheim, 'Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities', *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2002): 151–71.
13. For a further discussion of this 'work of synchronization', see Helge Jordheim, 'Multiple Temporalities and the Work of Synchronization', *History & Theory* 53, no. 4 (2014): 498–518; and Jordheim, 'Synchronizing the World: Synchronism as Historiographical Practice, Then And Now', *History of the Present* 7, no. 1 (2017): 59–95.
14. See Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).
15. A topic to which Francis Fukuyama devotes a full chapter in *The End of History*, 56–70.
16. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984); Georg Krücken and Gili S. Drori, eds., *World Society: The Writings of*

as a process of synchronising the world by translation and use of a particular conceptual vocabulary, that has also been used to create and uphold modernity as a temporal arrangement.¹⁷

While populations within nation-states were supposed to lock step and live their lives according to a single temporal standard,¹⁸ polities, ideally nation-states, were supposed to take part in a race between nations along the universalising temporality of progress.¹⁹ European or Western polities were purportedly ahead in this race, and various other polities distributed along a time axis.²⁰ Like the closely linked ‘standard of civilisation’, *progress* has been used to order relations between polities – to produce an international order that is also a temporal order.²¹ Tied in with this concept is the international ordering that Johannes Fabian called the ‘temporalisation of cultural difference’, which served to categorise human polities into *primitive*, *savage*, and *civilised*, distributed along a time axis of human *progress*.²² The extent to which a polity could claim to be *civilised* held significant advantages in terms of legal status in relation to European powers.²³ While the standard of civilisation is less used to structure relations between states, *progress* is still ubiquitous in such expressions as the ‘first’, the ‘second’ and the ‘third’ world, in the sense of ‘China catching up’, or in the ‘advancement ‘towards the UN’s Millennium Goals. As Robert A. Nisbet and others have pointed out, progress is one of the most enduring narratives of the Western world and has withstood both historical as well as philosophical attacks and set-backs.²⁴ Since the 18th century, probably no other cultural condition has had a more pervasive influence on, or been a more decisive prerequisite of, societal development than the concept of *progress*, to which advances in sciences, technology, economy and politics owe their legitimacy and to a certain extent their existence.

John W. Meyer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Pertti Alasuutari, *The Synchronization of National Policies: Ethnography of the Global Tribe of Moderns* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

17. Einar Wigen, *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2018).
18. Avner Wishnitzer and ON Barak have amply shown how ‘modern’ European clock time came to challenge the quotidian and everyday temporal practices in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt respectively. ON Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013); Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2015). See also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Press, 2006).
19. Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim et al., *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
20. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
21. Gerrit W.G. Gong, ‘The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Turan Kayaoğlu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
22. *Ibid.*
23. Bowden, *Empire of Civilization*,.
24. Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995).

In historiographical literature the emergence of the concept of *progress* is routinely dated back to the 18th century. According to Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, Reinhart Koselleck and others, Western modernity is characterised by a new and different experience of time and history.²⁵ Due to a process of temporalisation (*Verzeitlichung*), history changes from a closed homogeneous space of experience to an open and accelerating process of movement.²⁶ Time is moving forwards, into an open and endless future, and humanity moves and changes with it, reaching ever new stages of civilisation, learning and freedom – what Rousseau famously referred to as *perfectibilité* and Kant called ‘den Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit’ (‘man’s exit from his self-incurred immaturity’).²⁷

Temporalisation means that all parts of human life develop their own temporal index, their own historicity. Through this process, Koselleck argues, concepts such as *democracy*, *progress*, and *history* cease to be labels for concrete empirical or theoretical phenomena and become concepts of movement, pointing towards or even anticipating an open and endless future, as a field of political battle and planning. Furthermore, that all parts of history, all parts of human life, are seen as being in perpetual change and having their own inherent temporal dynamic also means that there is no guarantee that they are in synchrony with each other, that they follow the same speed or rhythm, that they change and evolve equally fast, or that they begin, reach maturity and end at the same time. Among the most famous diagnoses of the non-synchronicity of modernity is the first *discours* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the arts and the sciences from 1750, where he argues that the development of the sciences and the arts is indeed out of sync with the development of morality. Another example is Friedrich Schlegel’s review of Condorcet’s *Esquisse*, one of the most famous treatises on progress from the end of the 18th century: ‘The real problem of history’, Schlegel writes, ‘is the inequalities between the different strands of human development’.²⁸

After the late 18th century, globalisation, what Manfred Steger calls ‘the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space’,²⁹ has brought with it more complex and heterogeneous temporal relations, in which the global time of commerce, technology and media comes in conflict with the different rhythms and dynamics in diverse religions, cultures and communities. Increasing interconnectedness and transnational mobility of people, cultures, commodities and

25. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949); Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966); Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*.

26. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 300–48.

27. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2008); Immanuel Kant: ‘An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”’, in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 54.

28. Friedrich Schlegel, *Condorcets Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (1795), in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, Vol. 7*, eds. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1966), 7.

29. Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15.

ideas, has necessitated the accompanying vocabulary of multi-culturalism, cultural pluralism, and integration, in public, private and academic discourse.

In the temporal arrangement called modernity the key tool for synchronising different rhythms and processes in different regions of the world but also different regions of the same culture, has been the concept of *progress*. As Koselleck has pointed out, in early modern Europe progress used to be a concept that often appeared in the plural, or at least in reference to different fields of knowledge or socio-cultural development. There could be progress of medicine, of agriculture, or of art. And in a culture there could equally be ‘progresses’ in many fields, meaning cumulative change in field-specific advances.³⁰ By applying this concept to a number of different and distinct contexts – social changes, political changes, legal changes, medical changes, technological changes, and economic changes – *progress* came to be used as a tool to understand these phenomena as inter-linked and semantically linking them. This made *progress* what Koselleck calls a ‘collective singular’, *Kollektivsingular* – a concept which can only appear in the singular, but with a collective, indeed a universal subject. From the late 18th century onwards, progress, in singular, meant progress of mankind, of civilisation, or simply of history – thus synchronising and indeed integrating different types of progress into a singular historical movement. However, calling changes *advances* or *progresses* presupposes a goal. This might be inter-subjectively agreed-upon in epistemic communities such as the medical profession, but when one moves from medicine to society or even history, the teleology inherent in the concept of *progress* is far more political, and potentially contested.

This concept has not only been the backbone of the genre known as *universal*, later *world history*, it also carried over into international studies, as this field appropriated the historical narrative that emerged in universal history. From the *Journal of Race Development* to Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History*, and Thomas Risse et al.’s spiral (upwards, mind you) model of human rights, liberal IR has been structured using the concept of *progress*.³¹ Martha Nussbaum’s conceptualisation of human rights as having a ‘first generation’, a ‘second generation’ and a ‘third generation’ is also premised on the concept of *progress*.³² The premise is that as time passes, things get better. Although liberal IR at some point became thin constructivism, the sub-field retained its underlying assumption of progress, with liberal norms spreading across the world and ever-more actors becoming socialised into them.³³

Between the late 18th century and today, the concept of progress was the main tool used by Western politicians and academics to give the movement of history a direction and a goal, to homogenise it, linearise it and give it a common stable and regular rhythm

30. Christian Meier and Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Fortschritt’, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1975), 385–90.

31. Fukuyama, *The End of History*; Thomas Risse, Kathryn Sikkink, and Stephen C. Ropp, *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

32. Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

33. The special issue edited by Jeffrey Checkel in *International Organization* is a case in point; *International Organization* 59, no. 4 (2005).

– in other words to synchronise history. Furthermore, this concept had a key role in imbricating non-Western locales and collectives in European-emergent universal temporalities. The emergence of *progress* as a key concept of Western political vocabulary happened in tandem with Europe's increased capacity for involvement outside its own frontiers. As shown by Timothy Mitchell, it was the representation of the pre-existing social arrangement not only as *old* in temporal terms, but also as *disorderly* and thus destined for the scrap-heap of history, that made the newly imposed European order legible as *new* and indeed as *ordered*.³⁴ *Progress* was thus constituted as a 'passage' from locally anchored practices to practices legitimated by discourses formulated by use of European-emergent, but supposedly universally valid, concepts.³⁵

Crisis: New Tool of Synchronisation?

Much IR literature is still premised on a narrative structured by *progress*; however, just like concepts of *crisis* have become ubiquitous in the subject-matter that this literature studies, they are also prominently used in academic meetings and publications. In the long-established sense within the discipline, *crises*, often military crises and humanitarian crises are important objects of study or explanatory tools. *Crisis* in this sense features centrally in IR classics such as E.H. Carr's *The Twenty Years' Crisis* and foreign policy analysis classics such as Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*.³⁶ Carr's work was published when crises were all-pervasive, yet these works typically use the concept of *crisis* in a narrower sense than has become prevalent over the past decade or so. In the past, when the discipline of International Relations organised conferences featuring *crisis* as part of their topics, the crisis in question would typically be specific – e.g. *Millennium* organised its 1983 conference on the Falklands Crisis.³⁷ By contrast, in 2017 the *European International Studies Association* organised its annual conference under the theme 'The Politics of International Studies in an Age of Crises'.³⁸ There are simply too many crises to treat individually – or rather, the concept of *crisis* is applied to so many different phenomena and chains of events in the contemporary world that the shift from specific events to an 'age' seemed justified.³⁹ John

34. Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).

35. For an example of this literature, see Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glenco: Free Press, 1958).

36. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Longman, 2010); Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

37. See <https://millenniumjournal.org/conference-archive/>. Last accessed March 26, 2018.

38. For e.g. the 11th Pan-European Conference on International Relations (2017) had the theme 'The Politics of International Studies in an Age of Crises'. <http://www.paneuropeanconference.org/2017>. Last accessed October 4, 2017.

39. While not latching on to the idea that we are living in an 'age of crises', a previous EISA conference considered the theme 'One International Relations or Many? Multiple Worlds, Multiple Crises'. See, http://pts.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/warsaw_2013_-_call_for_section_chairs.pdf. Last accessed October 4, 2017.

Ikenberry's book *Liberal Leviathan* is part of this, where the argument is that the international order is in crisis.⁴⁰ The rest of this article represents an attempt to understand how *crisis* in this comprehensive, even universal sense has taken hold of discussions of international order and what the effects of this conceptual shift are.

Between 1750 and 1850, the modern concept of *crisis* emerged, by aggregating meanings originating within very different discourses, like medicine, law, and theology, and adding to them a strong temporal dimension.⁴¹ In the works of French philosophers like Diderot and Rousseau the concept of *crisis* evokes the possibility, even the necessity of radical change, reform or even revolution in the not so distant future. In this sense the concepts of *crisis* belongs to what Koselleck calls 'the structural signature of modernity'.⁴² On the one hand, *crisis* belongs to the logic of progress, indicating one of the ways in which history moves forward, by gradual changes or by sudden jumps, or in more traditionally political terms, by reform or by revolution. But on the other hand, *crisis* also introduces a very different logic into the historical structure of modernity, by pointing not to the future but to the present, to the now, as a site for great transformations, a now of drama, fate, and with uncertain consequences, opening up towards an unknown future.⁴³

In the current situation, and as illustrated by the two Obama speeches, another set of discourses are brought to convergence by *crisis* – not medicine, law, and theology, but climate sciences, economy, and identity politics. The crisis of economy, the crisis of the climate, and the crisis of cultural identity and politics are drawn together, assimilated and unified into one singular concept: crisis, with a capital C, if you like. To the extent that *crisis* had already become a collective singular in the late 18th century, at the same time as *history* and *progress*, we are now witnessing a process of reassemblage, resingularisation, a reaffirmation of *crisis*, which is not happening in the same way with 'progress'. Rather, this other signature concept of modernity seems to be losing traction. Indeed, the survival of the concept of *progress* as a temporal ordering principle for future history depends fully on its ability to overcome and even transcend the element of crisis. Moreover, the collective – even global – reference of this particular singular, *crisis*, is no longer just a philosophical, Hegelian, universalist invocation, but an empirical and in worst case catastrophic reality.

Making Crisis into a Collective Singular: Two Examples

In both Obama's addresses quoted at the beginning of this article, global health emerges as an indicator of *progress* and *crisis* respectively. 'A person born today', he states in his address to the General Assembly, 'is more likely to be healthy, to live longer [...] than at any time in human history'. In the same year political scientist Ilona Kickbusch, former leader of the World Health Organisation Global Health Promotion Program, who went on to co-chair a

40. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*.

41. Koselleck, 'Krise', *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, Vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1982), 610–50.

42. Koselleck, 'Krise', 629.

43. For a discussion of this duality, see for e.g. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 97–116.

health crisis simulation at the G20 Health Ministers meeting in Berlin,⁴⁴ gave her analysis of global health challenges. She started by offering an overview of the state of the world:

While concern about the ecological crisis has been with us for some time, at the beginning of 2015 the financial crisis was still very much in focus, during the year the humanitarian emergency moved to the centre. In view of mass migration and the growing refugee crisis the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Samantha Power stated that “*this year has shown with painful clarity that our existing systems, approaches and funding are inadequate*”.⁴⁵

Like Obama in his address to the Leaders’ Summit on Refugees, to which Kickbusch also refers, she frames her diagnosis of the present in the language of *crisis*. Even more striking, however, is the way she deploys the concept of *crisis* to draw together three sets of events: ‘ecological crisis’, ‘financial crisis’, and ‘refugee crisis’. Furthermore, the specificity of the present historical moment emerges from the convergence of these three different forms of crisis. Kickbusch continues, emphasising the novelty of the inherent discontinuity of the situation:

[T]he new context of global health is defined first and foremost by the global diffusion of power, the new awareness requires an understanding of the interface between the ecological crisis, the financial crisis, the health security crisis and the crisis of social dislocation.⁴⁶

What the concept of *crisis* does, even more explicitly in Kickbusch’s article than in Obama’s address, is to draw together four different fields of knowledge and practice, prominent in global political order: climate change (‘ecological crisis’), economy (‘financial crisis’), health (‘health security crisis’), and migration (‘crisis of social dislocation’). Kickbusch is interested in the ‘interface’ between the four of them. Indeed, in our terms, these fields and historical processes are *synchronised by* and *in* the concept of *crisis*, that is, they are adjusted and adapted to the same temporal standard or structure. Furthermore, they are synchronised not by the evocation of continuity and development, in terms of stages or cause-effects links, as in the case of ‘progress’, but by the insistence on discontinuity and break.

In a similar conceptual move like the one made by Kickbusch, the Norwegian social anthropologist, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, illustrates how a ‘collective singular’ forms in academic discourse. According to Eriksen, the intensification and acceleration of globalisation has resulted in what he refers to as ‘three crises’: a crisis of the environment, a crisis of the economy, and a crisis of cultural identity.⁴⁷ Elsewhere and for short, he calls them

44. ‘Berlin Declaration of the G20 Health Ministers: Together Today for a Healthy Tomorrow’, 20 May 2017. Available at: <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2017/170520-health-en.html>. Last accessed February 27, 2018.

45. Ilona Kickbusch, ‘Global Health Governance Challenges 2016 – Are We Ready?’ *International Journal of Health Policy Management* 5, no. 6 (2016): 349. Emphasis in original.

46. Kickbusch, ‘Global Health Governance Challenges 2016’, 351.

47. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Overheating: An Anthropology of Accelerated Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016a); Thomas Hylland Eriksen (guest ed.) ‘Special Issue: Overheating: Towards an Anthropological History of the Early 21st Century’, *History and Anthropology* 27, no. 5 (2016b). For the project pages, see <http://www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/research/projects/overheating/>. Last accessed October 4, 2017.

by their more usual names: ‘the climate crisis’, ‘the financial crisis’, and ‘the cultural crisis’.⁴⁸ Eriksen goes on to argue that even though a plethora of books has been written on each of these three ‘crises of globalization’, as he calls them, there has until now ‘been no sustained attempt to view them as a whole, empirically interrelated and structurally similar’.⁴⁹ For him, however, ‘the assumption is that the three global – recurrent or chronic – crises of the economy, the environment and cultural identity are being experienced, and dealt with, almost everywhere in the world’.⁵⁰ But since social reality is created through the interaction of individuals, networks and communities with their wider environments, the crises as such are bound to differ from place to place. And he goes on to list examples in Queensland, upland Sierra Leone, the Andes and in Greenland.⁵¹

These examples from the global health discourse and anthropology as well as from traditional IR serve to illustrate two points: on the one hand, how the conceptual work performed by the concept of *crisis* consists not only in emphasising the rupture with the past and the specificity of the situation, but also draws together events and processes from completely different fields of global politics; on the other hand, how these events and processes come with different times inherent in them, as pointed out by Eriksen’s fleeting reference to the temporality of these crises, ‘recurrent or chronic’. However, none of these disciplines, anthropology, global health and IR, are concerned with how the concept or even the word *crisis*, in different translations, spreads across the globe, and how it is used to give meaning to all these different phenomena. Instead they focus on what they perceive as tangible and often highly dangerous effects, of economic collapse, global warning and different forms of identity politics and cultural friction. Still, there is absolutely no doubt that among these very effects we find the concept of *crisis* itself, not just an ‘indicator’, but also a ‘factor’ – to use Koselleck’s terms – of dramatic and even catastrophic change.⁵²

The Times of Crisis

In Eriksen’s project ‘the three crises of globalisation’ are brought to convergence in the same ‘ethnographic present’, thus giving rise to *crisis* as a ‘collective singular’ – a universal, global crisis, a crisis of mankind. However, the fields in which these three crises take place – climate, economy, and identity politics – come with their own times and temporalities, their own durations, speeds and rhythms, which seem to disappear into the collective singular, but which re-emerge as soon as we give the concept a closer look. In *crisis*, like in all other collective singulars, there is a tension between the on-going work of synchronisation performed by the concept and the non-synchronicities inherent in the meanings and experiences assembled in the concept.

48. Eriksen, *Overheating*.

49. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, ‘An Overheated World: A Short Introduction to Overheating by Thomas Hylland Eriksen’. Available at: <https://www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/research/projects/overheating/publications/overheated-world.pdf>. Last accessed March 26, 2018, 4.

50. Eriksen, ‘An Overheated World’, 6.

51. *Ibid.*, 8.

52. Koselleck, ‘Einleitung’, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, Vol 1* (Stuttgart: Klett–Cotta, 1972), xiv.

Easiest to grasp is probably the specific temporality inherent in the ‘crisis of economy’, or ‘the financial crisis’. Today the financial crisis refers to a set of events which culminated between 2007 and 2009, which by many economists is seen as the worst crisis since the Great Depression and which is still sending ripples through economies worldwide. In this formulation *crisis* seems to equal what Koselleck refers to as an ‘iterative periodic concept’, or with another term that becomes increasingly important to him in the latter parts of his work, a ‘structure of repetition’, *eine Wiederholungsstruktur*.⁵³ Thus, *crisis* indicates what happens when conflicts and tensions rise to a level where the system finally breaks down. One epoch comes to an end, another begins. The crisis represents a break, or using one of Koselleck’s favourite terms, a ‘threshold’.⁵⁴ This process can repeat itself again and again, as in the case of political revolution, and indeed in crises of the world economy, made explicit by the recurring comparisons of the latest financial crisis with other prior crises. What connects them, making the one an iteration of the other, is for instance the disturbance of the balance between production and consumption, or between the circulation of money and the circulation of goods. The typical way out of a crisis like this is to increase production, thus pointing at another characteristic of crisis as a concept of ‘periodic iteration’: it is entirely enmeshed with a concept of *progress*. Any crisis is subjected to the idea of an on-going and never-ending movement forward; the crisis itself becomes an integral part and even a generator of progress and thus upholds rather than breaks with the conceptual logic of modernity.

To the extent that the concept of *crisis* involves an attempt to synchronise events and processes in the economy with events and processes resulting from other aspects of globalisation, a striking non-synchronicity comes into view between the crisis of economy and ‘the crisis of cultural identity’, to use Eriksen’s terms, not only in events and actors, but in how these two crises are structured temporally. As opposed to the periodic iteration inherent in the concept of the financial crisis, the ‘cultural crisis’, referring to the tensions and frictions with strong elements of identity politics owing to increased interaction and resource competition, seems to have become more of a permanent condition, or an on-going process – *Krise als Dauerzustand*, to use Koselleck’s term. Koselleck’s favourite illustration of this particular concept of ‘crisis’ is the famous line from Schiller’s poem ‘Resignation’, published in 1784: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*, or in English: ‘World History is World Judgement’.⁵⁵

By ‘world history’, Schiller means everything that man experiences and that influences his or her actions. The truth or falseness, the good and evil of these actions is not to be found outside of history, as divine will, but in history itself, in all our choices and decisions, in other words everything that makes up our identity, not just individually, but as part of different collectives and communities. To Schiller, as later to Hegel, justice can be found not only in individual biographies and in singular events and processes, but in history as such, as a synchronised, homogenous, progressive movement. On the contrary, for a present-day anthropologist like Eriksen, there is no history as such; and questions of crisis,

53 Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten: Studien zur Semantik und Pragmatik der politischen und sozialen Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag GmbH, 2006), 210.

54. Ibid.

55. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten*, 208–9.

cultural identity, and justice can only be understood on the level of individuals, communities and cultures – which today find themselves in a permanent condition of crisis.

Another crisis that seems to be turning into a permanent condition, with no ending or solution in sight, is the climate crisis. However, also between the crisis of climate and the crisis of identity there are major differences in how they are structured temporally. The climate crisis designates neither a permanent condition nor a form of periodic iteration – on the contrary, the climate crisis, recently reconceptualised in geological terms as the Anthropocene, indicates a definitive discontinuity, break or ending, what Koselleck refers to as a *Letztentscheidung*, a ‘final decision’ or ‘decisive moment’.⁵⁶ Again, we can hear the echoes of the theological prehistory of the concept of *crisis*. In this case, however, it is world history itself, the aggregate of all historical events and actions, which advances toward its own end: *crisis* as the end of history. However, in the case of the climate crisis, world history does not only include human history, but also the history of nature, or ‘natural history’, to return to the 18th-century genre. As opposed to crisis as periodic iteration, which can easily be brought in agreement with the idea of history as linear and progressive, this concept of crisis rejects all forms of continuity. Drawing on Koselleck we could think of it as a ‘pure concept of futurity’, imagining a future which has no connection whatsoever with the past and the present, but represents an absolute discontinuity.⁵⁷ Koselleck writes in 1985 that until recently, ‘this concept of crisis appeared as completely utopian, but if we consider all the current means of self-destruction, it has every possibility of being realized’.⁵⁸ But on the other hand, he adds, being himself far from an apocalyptic, ‘it is a part of every human being’s finitude to consider his or her own condition as more important and more serious than all prior conditions’.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly, the concept of the Anthropocene, in terms of a new geological epoch, in which mankind has become a geological agent, intervening in time scales which encompass hundreds of millions of years, while at the same time facing imminent destruction, represent a recent attempt to deal with the paradoxes of crisis as *Letztentscheidung*.

To replace a multitude of crisis concepts, from different parts of human and natural life, with one concept, one collective singular *crisis*, means adjusting and aligning a whole range of temporal experiences and structures, such as crisis as periodic iteration, crisis as permanent condition, and crisis as the end of the world as we know it. This kind of conceptual alignment of temporal experiences and meanings – synchronisation – represents a way of orienting ourselves in a world which is becoming progressively desynchronised. However, for this work of synchronisation to succeed, there needs to be a model or a standard, to which the other temporal configurations can be aligned and synchronised. Among the times that are synchronised with each other, one has to be chosen, or if no choice is made, one will emerge, as the right time, the one according to which all the others are synchronised. At present, however, a third option is presenting itself, at least in certain parts of historiographic and social science literature: that the time of crisis is also a crisis of time.

56. Ibid., 212.

57. Ibid., 208.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., 213.

The Crisis of Time

In her book *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*, 'Is time out of joint?', the German historian of collective memory Aleida Assmann analyses what she considers to be the end of the *modern temporal regime*, characterised by a set of ideas including the discontinuity between the past and the future, the fiction of beginnings, processes of destruction and preservation, and discourses of acceleration.⁶⁰ From the 1980s onwards, Assmann claims, this temporal structure, in which the future emerged as the all-dominating temporal dimension, is falling apart, and is about to be replaced by something else.⁶¹ Similarly, in his path-breaking work, *Régimes d'historicité* from 2003, the French historian François Hartog introduces the idea of a 'crisis of time', in terms of a moment in history when a certain set of ways to understand and deal with time – what he calls a 'regime of historicity' – is about to lose its uncontested and quasi-natural position and character.⁶²

What is currently collapsing, according to Hartog and Assmann, is the regime of historicity that we have become used to calling *modern*, characterised by an openness to and an orientation towards the future, and a similar disinterest in, or rather willingness to ignore, the past. The shorthand for this regime of historicity is, of course, progress, in terms of a homogenous, linear, global movement towards a common, unspecified, ever-receding goal. At present, the myth of the uniform time of progress seems to be losing its grip: On the one hand, globalisation has brought with it more complex and heterogeneous temporal relations, in which the global time of commerce, technology and media comes in conflict with the different rhythms in the variety of cultures and communities;⁶³ on the other hand, the 'deep times' of climate change, giving rise to the geochronological term *the Anthropocene*, challenges the limited temporal horizons of social relations and political decisions and forces us to renegotiate our views of past and future.⁶⁴

In his discussion of what succeeds and replaces the modern temporal regime and the idea of progress, Hartog, in the tenor of Pierre Nora and others, mourns the loss of our relationship to the past as well as to the future and the growing dominance of the present, giving rise to the ubiquitous 'presentism', which is about to replace all other temporal experiences and horizons. After 1989, Hartog argues, history has been reduced to an eternal present enabled and reinforced by new communication technologies.⁶⁵ To him the new regime of historicity replacing the regime of modernity is *un présent monstre*, a 'monstrous present':⁶⁶

60. Aleida Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen? Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2013), 131–208.

61. *Ibid.*, 323.

62. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicités*, 27.

63. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Globalization: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2007). For post-colonialist approaches to multiple temporalities, see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

64. Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Alan Haywood, et al., 'The Anthropocene: a New Epoch of Geological Time?', in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 369 (2011): 835–41.

65. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicités*, 119.

66. *Ibid.*, 217.

In this way the present has *expanded* as much in direction of the future as in direction of the past. Toward the future: by the *dispositifs* of precaution and responsibility, by taking into account what cannot be undone and what cannot be revoked, by going back to the notions of patrimony and of debt, which are combined and give meaning to the whole. Toward the past: by mobilization of similar *dispositifs*. The responsibility and the duty to remember, the making of everything into patrimony, the imprescriptible, and again the debt.⁶⁷

This monstrous present, Hartog concludes, ‘is at the same time everything (there is nothing but the present) and nearly nothing (the tyranny of the moment),’⁶⁸ and has since 1989 replaced the modern regime of temporality. In other words, the present crisis of time means the disappearance of both the past, replaced by memory, and the future, replaced by precaution and responsibility in favour of the absolute, ever-expanding present.

A related analysis of this crisis of time and its result, the monstrous present, can be found in the works of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, dealing with what in English has come to be called ‘social acceleration’. In modernity, according to Rosa, acceleration is the norm. In his analysis, the crisis of time occurs when the acceleration, in terms of a synchronisation and speeding up of all social processes, reaches a point when it turns dialectically into its opposite: desynchronisation and standstill. Society starts to disintegrate temporally. ‘Late modernity’, Rosa writes, ‘is nothing other than modern society accelerated (and desynchronised) beyond the point of possible reintegration.’⁶⁹ The two most striking symptoms of this crisis are, firstly, what Rosa calls ‘the de-temporalisation of life’, making it virtually impossible for individuals to plan their existences. Only situational decisions are possible.⁷⁰ This again threatens the idea of identity, based on our motives, decisions, and plans. Secondly, on a collective level, the ‘de-temporalisation of life’ leads to ‘the de-temporalisation of history’ which can be observed on a political level, when progressives want to conserve and conservatives to move on, because both have lost sight of the future as something to be achieved or avoided.⁷¹ The result of both these de-temporalisation processes is the complete de-synchronisation, disintegration of society. We end up with a society out of synch with itself, in which there is no regime of historicity capable of structuring the relationship between past, present, and future, in a way that can be shared by all or most members of a society.

To sum up: We live in a *time of crisis*, conceptually speaking, where concepts of ‘crisis’ are proliferating and increasingly more areas of society or human life enter into an alleged stage of crisis, not just the economy and the climate, but identity and culture, as well. Furthermore, these different crises are drawn together, into the collective singular, indicating a crisis of global, even universal, scope. But if we are to believe historians and sociologists like Assmann, Hartog, and Rosa we also live in a *crisis of time*, in which the

67. *Ibid.*, 216.

68. *Ibid.*, 217.

69. Hartmut Rosa, ‘Social Acceleration: Ethical and Political Consequences of a Desynchronized High-Speed Society’, *Constellations* 10, no. 1 (2003): 18. See also Rosa, *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 402–27.

70. Rosa, ‘Social Acceleration’, 18–20.

71. *Ibid.*, 20–2.

modern temporal regime, structuring the relationship between past, present, and future is collapsing, and gives way to a condition of what Rosa calls 'de-temporalisation' and Hartog labels the 'monstrous present'. We will conclude this article by asking how this configuration of crisis and time, found in the concept itself, impacts the field of International Relations and particularly the literature dealing with 'securitisation'.

Conclusion: Crisis and Securitisation

Labelling something a *crisis* can be thought of as a speech act that shapes political contestation over a particular issue or field.⁷² In this sense *crisis* entertains a symbiotic relationship with another concept abundantly used in the field of IR; namely *security*. And if calling something *crisis* (and having it accepted as such) is a speech act on par with uses of the concept *security*, then we may glean some insights from 'securitisation theory'. The point here is that managing to label a particular issue, topic or field a matter of *security* excludes a great many actors who would otherwise be party to discussion from legitimately debating it.⁷³ Rather than a matter open to debate within a public sphere, matters of *security* are monopolised by specialists. 'By uttering "security",' Ole Wæver writes, 'a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it'.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver have argued that 'the Cold War' and 'the Global War on Terrorism' constituted a kind of 'macrosecuritisation' – into which a number of microsecuritisations were nested.⁷⁵ We would say that the ways that the concept of *security* was used across different geographies and knowledge fields synchronised a set of 'threats' and made them legible by reference to one another, thus warranting similar responses.

This analysis of securitisation is to a certain extent anticipated by Koselleck in his first larger study of the concept of *crisis*, his doctoral thesis from 1959, which was later published under the title *Kritik und Krise*. According to Koselleck, what characterises a crisis is the way it presents 'absolute alternatives' and demands clear choices: right or wrong, salvation or damnation, life or death.⁷⁶ By contrast, in the philosophical and political discourse of Enlightenment, the concept of *crisis* came to represent the pinnacle of 'hypocrisy' – in the way it was employed by philosophers and intellectuals such as Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, Schiller, and Kant, in order to invest history with a form of

72. For speech acts, see John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. James Opie Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962) and Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

73. Jennifer Milliken, 'Intervention and Identity: Reconstructing the West in Korea', in *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger*, eds. Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 91–117; Hansen, *Security as Practice*.

74. Wæver, 'Securitisation and Desecuritisation', 55.

75. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, 'Macrosecuritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory', *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 253–76.

76. Koselleck, 'Krise', 617.

necessity, *Evidenz*.⁷⁷ In evoking *crisis* the philosophers, according to what Koselleck sees as their hypocritical strategies, avoided direct political confrontation with the absolutist state and instead submitted it to a form of moralising, a moral criticism deemed to bring about its collapse.⁷⁸ To talk of *crisis* is to bring crisis about, without ever having to face up to questions of motives and consequences – just sitting back and awaiting the collapse, in terms of revolution or civil war, to arrive.

Like calling something *security*, calling a particular issue or set of events a *crisis* shapes how actors may take part in discussing and deciding the issue. It divides a political constellation into a ‘right answer’ and a ‘wrong answer’, delineated by the actors calling the crisis. The two are related discursive moves, and given sufficient urgency a *crisis* or a *security threat* tends to move discursive power into the hands of experts, and the room for debate closes. Following the advice of the experts then tends to come with a notion of ‘doing the *right* thing’. Although both *security* and *crisis* often have strong *kairotic* elements, we would argue that the latter is increasingly used as a tool for synchronising the temporal arrangements of international order.

To organise and take control over time, state leaders, politicians and intellectuals of statecraft use concepts as tools of synchronisation. In this article we have discussed how two such concepts, *progress* and *crisis*, have been used in synchronising multiple temporalities across different cultures, polities, languages and political issues. We have moreover argued that there has been a shift – most saliently in Western discourses – from one to the other, synchronising temporalities in very different ways. Rather than international order being ‘in crisis’, we argue that *crisis* is increasingly used to order the international. In this connection we should of course note that the shift in Western discourses from *progress* to *crisis* is not always matched by similar shifts in *all* the world’s languages. After all, these shifts are never total and seldom synchronic. State leaders in China, Turkey, and India continue to legitimise their political projects by use of concepts of *progress*.⁷⁹ Thus, what we see at present is a heterogeneous set of competing temporal arrangements that have not (at least not as of yet) gained the hegemony that the temporal arrangement of *progress* enjoyed for almost three centuries. But it might very well only be a matter of time before *crisis* has assumed that position.

Funding

This research was conducted as part of the project Synchronizing the World: The Making of Global Progress, financed by the Research Council Norway. RCN project no: 236858.

77. Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise: Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 98–104.

78. Ibid.

79. See for e.g. Wigen, *State of Translation*.