

EX-CENTRIC EUROPE: VISIONS AND PRACTICES OF
HARMONIOUS MODERNIZATION IN THE 19TH-CENTURY
EUROPEAN PERIPHERIES (IRELAND, NORWAY, POLAND
AND TWO SICILIES)¹

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1. Modernization is notoriously a tricky and ideologically charged concept, especially since it has become such a powerfully hegemonic one. “Modernizing”, that is reaching modernity, has been since the Enlightenment ever more often identified with reaching maturity, both in cultural attitudes and in the capacity of assuming responsibility for an epoch and a set of institutions. The notion of modernity itself, since it began to take root in 17th-century Europe, has become *the* standard of judgment of the past and the present, at the same time as it has become a goal, to be achieved through a set of transformations – the process of “modernization” – that follow an evolutionary and incremental line of *growth* (of reason, population, urbanization, production, GNP etc.). In its evolution, the concept of “modernization” became indissolubly connected to the one of “backwardness”, giving rise to a linear representation of world societies, past and present, with those that had achieved modernity (Britain, the West) at the peak followed by a plethora of “second-” and “late-comers” and the “backward” or “traditional” societies trailing at the end, eternally attempting and failing to “catch up”.

This master narrative, written up in the literature of progress, with its arrogant normative language, was formalized in modernization theories prevalent in the 1950s, all increasingly prescriptive and mechanical. According to them, a model of modernization – England, Europe, the West – was one for all: any and every society had to go through the same stages of economic, social and cultural transformations, from traditional to modern. The specific historical Western European experience of modernization thus gained global significance, stepped out of historical time and covered all social space. Increasingly, this

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meaning of “modernization” has become exclusive, obliterating all different previous understandings of the concept.

Understandably, a scholarly and political reaction – from dependency theorists to relativists, to post-colonial studies – came to reject modernization theories because of their mechanical rigidity, atemporality, universality, moral complacency and the assumption of Western superiority. Because of modernization theories, however, the very concept of “modernization” became identified with Westernization and imperialism, and was discarded, as generated in and for Western European context and thus inapplicable to other socio-historical situations and ultimately an instrument of domination. Moreover, the industrial model of modernization itself came under attack because it has not fulfilled its promise of eliminating poverty from the world and has interfered heavily with the planet’s environment. As we enter the post-industrial 21st century and look to post-modern alternatives to industrialization, we seem to be more interested in pre-modern or differently modern alternatives in the past than in the old discredited modernization.

We should remember, however, that concepts such as modernization address actual problems of human social life, even if they do it in an overspecific and unreflective way. Rather than discard them, it might be advisable to rethink them in their specific spatio-temporal contexts. Such a rethinking has been attempted recently in terms of a more flexible and “patchwork” concept of “multiple modernities” which proposes to take into account and to cherish the difference in actual historical experience. This new concept was introduced in the social sciences in 2000 by the Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt in an essay under the same title. By “multiple modernities” Eisenstadt (followed by Peter Wagner and other scholars) means the alternatives to the European hegemonic modernity, as they emerged historically outside of Europe after, and in tension with, the original model. When re-enacted in different contexts, the same original “modernity” results in different outcomes. While the original Western modernity still preserves its hegemonic role in the multiple modernities interpretation, it becomes “provincialized”, to use Dipesh Chakrabarty’s fortunate term, i. e. contextualized in a historical time (be it the 17th or 18th or 19th century) and in a place, Europe. This original modernity is re-enacted in local contexts through processes of modernization that also become multiple.

So far, this revisionist thinking has focused on non-European places and on times later than the original “event”. Europe is still taken as one, with the English model of modernization still hegemonic, and the rest of the area analyzed in terms of relative backwardness, “latecomers”, and “catching up”.

But it was simply not so. In the first six or seven decades of the 19th century, the period that is the object of my investigation, modernity in Europe was neither a single and constant basic structure nor was a single process of modernization the ossified model. “Modernity” referred, yes, to Europe, but by far not yet to the single (English) case. The ingredients of potential modernization – in terms of institutions, social and economic phenomena and cultural attitudes – were multiple (modernization theories would eventually reduce them to five!) to be used, discarded and combined at will. “Rationalization” was an important guiding principle of state bureaucracy, representative government and relations with the non-modern regions of the world, as well as of industry, markets, transportation, agriculture and economy in general. “Liberalism” was another one, applied to the economy, the democratic polity, autonomous knowledge-producing institutions and systems of information (such as the press). “Nation-state” was emerging as an organizing concept for politics as was “the masses” as a political and economic force. Mass literacy was advocated. Cultural attitudes inclined towards scientism, materialism, individualism, self-exploration, the authority of reason, the belief in progress and in change. Basically any combination of at least few of these ingredients would make “modern”, as none had triumphed yet, or certainly not in full.

At the same time, modernization was crucially important. The educated classes of post-Napoleonic Europe desired passionately to become modern, to improve and to lead their countries to progress – and all this they saw as a process of modernization. These elites, as Michel Foucault points out in his “What is Enlightenment?”, perceived reaching modernity as the equivalent of reaching maturity, in cultural attitudes and in the capacity of assuming responsibility. Through modernizations, they believed, theories and visions of the European Enlightenment would assume mass corporeality in the progressive 19th century.

In this paper, I am concerned with one of these possible combinations of the multiple ingredients of modernity, namely a land-centered modernization project that, I argue, was prevalent in Europe during the first half of the 19th century. I examine it on two levels. In the first place, I show the existence of the “project” by examining a coherent vision of, and a set of practices aiming at, a land-based modernization, which defined itself self-consciously as an alternative to the so-called “Manchester model” of industrial civilization. In the second place, I argue that, while widespread in the whole Europe, this alternative project played a special role in the European peripheries where it acquired a status of a comprehensive “civilizational” solution capable of bringing about moral and national redemption and become a master road to national and political sovereignty. The latter argu-

ment is based on four case studies at Europe's outskirts: Ireland to the West, Norway to the North, the Kingdom of Poland to the East and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the South, in the period roughly from the 1815 Congress of Vienna to the 1860s. This interpretation, however, may carry a potential heuristic value applicable to other peripheral areas of 19th-century Europe, such as Bulgaria, in some ways similar to Norway; Rumania and Anatolia, closer to Poland; or Andalusia, similar to the Two Sicilies.

2. The Europe that was so eager to adopt modernization was a real patchwork of contradictory features. It was not one Europe, but many, not necessarily divided along West/East or North/South lines: a Europe of autocrats and of political representation; of serfdom and of free tenancy; of colonial markets and of self-sufficiency; of the steam engine and of the hoe; of olive oil and of rye; of silk and of hemp. On the other hand, it was a Europe predominantly and uniformly rural, which surprised all the non-European travelers. Jerome Blum shows that the lands of the old rural order stretched from the Alps to the Baltic and from the Atlantic seaboard to the Urals. The greater part of the Europeans lived in rural areas and belonged predominantly to two classes, peasants and landowners. The peasants, accounting for 78 percent of Europe's population in 1800, lived most often in conditions of indebted penury, while a relatively small number of wealthy landowners, noble or not, owned and controlled the best arable soil and pastureland. In most areas, the small bourgeois class deferred to the agrarian class.

Restoration Europe was a good place and time for agriculture and for landowning elites. These were also good times for rural modernizers. The Congress of Vienna restored some of the old prerogatives of the nobility and the landed estates and guaranteed the landowners the security of their possessions. At the same time, the deliberations of the Congress were not hostile to moderate modernizing action (as long as the *Carbonari* were kept at bay, Metternich used to warn). Economically, the long period of steadily rising agricultural prices made market- and profit-oriented agriculture attractive. Food requirements of the rising population forced the pace of agricultural change. Major effort was put into improving the productivity of staple foodstuffs, grain and other high-starch-content foods and livestock and in promoting high-yield crops such as buckwheat, potatoes and maize.

The period of the Napoleonic Wars had encouraged innovation and import-substitution productions, for example the sugar-beet cultivation that spread widely when the English naval blockade cut off supplies of sugar cane. The post-war slump did not break the enthusiasm for agriculture. Agricultural production entered a growth cycle again in the 1830s

and more than doubled in the next four decades. More intensive use of the soil led to interest in chemical fertilizers, the old three-field system gave way to permanent crop rotation and mechanization proceeded albeit very slowly.

On the other hand, restored monarchs were not prepared to humor the defenders of privilege. Landed elites could count no longer on economic revenues from feudal prerogatives; they had land, but they had to make it yield. That meant modernizing. And the landed classes, after 25 years of wars and revolutions, were ready to associate social and political responsibility with property and to justify their elevated position with labor and merit. They were everywhere quite eager to transform the old privilege into merit and to earn/justify with labor and commitment what they had inherited, i. e. their leading role in society. Hence the oft-quoted verse of Johann Wolfgang Goethe can be seen as the rural modernizers' motto: "Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast// erwirb es// um es zu besitzen."

3. What kind of modernization did Europe desire? From the late eighteenth century, the pessimistic belief that Europe was a vast territory of poor farming and impoverished peasants helped to promote radical transformations in farming and spurred legal reforms. Agricultural improvers insisted upon transition from communalism to individualism, that is to clearly defined private property and freedom of action for individuals; and central governments entered the village to promote agricultural reforms and reinforce the impact of individualism. European elites revelled in a veritable *agromanie* (a term already used by Voltaire) with poets and painters, bureaucrats, pastors, educators, society ladies and citizens from all walks of life passionately discussing methods of planting clover, mulberries, cotton or sugar beets, fertilizers and the acclimatization of foreign crops. During the continental blockade, as mentioned above, many of these novelties were actually implemented.

With the Restoration, agromania did not decline, but turned into concrete ventures. The modernizers launched a veritable project of land-based modernization, setting a number of practical goals and establishing economic, social and cultural practices. The aim of this project was the economic, social and moral advancement of Europe's backward areas. It advocated a slow and gradual modernization – with Land at its center, and landed elites in charge – radiating from a well-organized agriculture through a pertinent development of local manufacture, to ever-extending trade. This was to be a "harmonious modernization", meant to preserve and improve existing social and family hierarchies, engage local tradition and know-how and (re)produce harmonies on various levels: social (class) harmo-

ny, harmony between the economy and nature, between change and continuity, between art and industry. Modernization was to follow – in Adam Smith’s oft-quoted words – the “natural course of things”.

“Harmonious modernizers” defined their vision as different from, alternative and opposed to what they called “Manchester civilization”. The latter stood for the English paradigm of modernization, with its prevalent urban concentration, class polarization and mass factory production for export markets. The opposition was *tout-camp*, in terms of economic doctrine, geo-historical philosophy, class agency and means employed. The modernizers referred to the English model as historically “inverted” (again, in reference to Adam Smith), socially disruptive and economically unsound.

Such critiques of “Manchester civilization” were widespread in Europe, including England itself. The frightening plight of England’s working class was a frequent topos in novels, such as Dickens’, in socio-economic studies, such as Engels’, in poetry such as Mathew Arnold’s. In his famous essays, Thomas Carlyle contrasted “Manchester’s” capitalistic coarseness and brutality with merry and green rural England.

4. The case could be made further for the pan-European diffusion of this agrarian model of modernization and for its prevalence until the radical transformations of the European order in the 1860s with infra-European wars, geo-political reorganization, political, social and economic reforms and cultural upheaval. However, even in the previous decades, in Europe as a whole the agrarian alternative had a rather patchwork character. It was only in Europe’s peripheries that agrarian modernization acquired a status of a comprehensive “civilizational” approach. There, this model of modernization had a far-reaching goal of bringing about moral and national redemption under the leadership of landed elites. There, modernization was to be the master way both to national and political sovereignty and to the survival of the old agrarian class in a new role.

The four cases selected for this study are Ireland to the West, Norway to the North, the Kingdom of Poland to the East and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to the South. These areas were chosen for reasons of symmetry (West, North, East and South), diversity (three are Catholic, one Lutheran) and autobiography (the author has lived in Poland and Italy). Each of them is, however, representative of a “peripheral condition” in the following meanings of the term:

- they were peripheral in the topographical sense that they constituted the outermost regions of Europe, but were, at the same time, already fully incorporated into the European system (in a way that Russia, for example, was not).
- they were peripheral in the structural sense, as areas with economic activities that commanded only a very small share of the total surplus produced within a commodity chain. They remained agricultural producers of foodstuffs and raw materials (timber, hemp and linen, silk, sulphur, etc.) for export to the manufactories in the core.
- they were peripheral in the political sense that they were dominated by other free states, as colonies, semi-colonies or almost neo-colonies: Ireland became, after 1800, a fully integrated colony of Great Britain; Poland was, in 1795, definitively partitioned among Austria, Prussia and Russia; and Norway had passed in 1814 from an oppressive colonial dominion by Denmark, to a less oppressive but still colonial dominion by Sweden. The Two Sicilies, an independent state, had a relatively low degree of autonomy, treated by both Great Britain and Austria as a dependent territory.
- typically for peripheral areas, indigenous state machinery – where it did exist – was weak, and the state managers did not play the role of coordinating a complex industrial-commercial-agricultural mechanism. Rather, they were simply one set of land-lords amidst others, with little claim to legitimate authority over the whole.
- finally, urban bourgeoisie was almost totally absent there, and those present were often foreigners. In consequence, land-owning elites were the only possible agents of modernizing action. Even if deprived of political power, they detained an almost total cultural hegemony within their societies.

In these four peripheral areas, the Restoration opened a space for a cautious modernizing action. The rulers themselves sought it: they revived old universities (like Naples), opened new ones (Christiania/Oslo, Vilna and Warsaw) and planned a Catholic one in Dublin. They reformed the administration, initiated railroad construction and encouraged the development of industry and banking. Poland and Norway, within their respective unions with Russia and Sweden, were granted liberal constitutions. Poland even had her own army, until 1830. Ireland obtained the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 and a national primary education system set up under state auspices. The economy flourished, with local textiles, lumber, weapon factories in Poland, steam power mechanized spinning in Ireland.

The monarchs were also ready for a collaboration with the local landed elites, the only “indigenous” partner possible, although strict limits were imposed on the scope of this collaboration: no nationalistic or parliamentary politics, no challenging the institution of mon-

archy, no radicalism of any kind. And the elites were ready, too. In addition to the general reasons mentioned above, landed elites needed some occupation, because their traditional jobs – civil service, military – were now precluded to them. As a leading Polish modernizer, Count Andrzej Zamoyski put it, “la noblesse doit aujourd’hui se mettre à la tête d’améliorations intéressantes pour le pays, privée qu’elle est d’autre emploi”. The new generation of peripheral modernizing landowners drew a lesson of prudence, gradualism and moderation from the experience of their fathers. In all four countries, a season of reforms in the late 18th-century gave way to revolutions in the 1790s, during which the landed elites lost a disproportionate number of their members to death and exile. Thus the sons became wary of radical insurgence and favored gradual change, harmonious modernization.

5. The term “generation” emphasizes shared cultural attitudes among the modernizers in the four areas. As in Goethe’s verse quoted above, these young members of the agrarian elites attempted to preserve their dominant role in the society by transforming the privilege into merit, by deserving and earning with labor and commitment what they had inherited. In post-Vienna Europe, they saw a historical role for themselves, certainly tinged with a huge dose of class egoism – after all, they were fighting for their class’s economic and social survival.

They are best defined as a combination of a milieu, a network of frequentations, a cohort and an opinion. This combined concept is well expressed by the Norwegian term *Slegten fra 1814*. *Slegten* means a generation or a cohort, but also family and lineage. *Slegten 1814* refers to the foundation myth of modern Norway, that is to the well-educated generation of Norwegian upper class and civil servants, *embetsstand*, who in 1814 called for a national assembly, promoted the Constitution and gave rise to a period of political, economic and cultural modernization.

In 1814, at the invitation of Crown Prince Christian Frederik, twenty-one leading citizens of Norway met at Carsten Anker’s estate at Eidsvoll to deliberate on Norway’s claim to independence. They adopted the principle of self-determination and called for a constitutional convention, with 112 delegates who represented fairly the property-holding Norway, including 37 landowning peasants. The May Seventeenth Constitution quickly became sacrosanct, the “men of Eidsvoll” became the fathers of the nation, and the year 1814 – the *annus mirabilis*. A “flame of feelings” melded older identity elements into a new patriotism, and gave birth to the *Slegten fra 1814*, the generation-group opinion of modernizers who had the power of local, if not national government, the public opinion of parlia-

ment, and marked the culture of the country. The names known from Eidsvoll – the Ankers, the Wergelands – Nicolai’s son the great poet and activist Henrik and his daughter the writer Camilla Collett – the Sverdrups, the Falsens and the Adlers became *the* intelligentsia of the country, reformers and romantic dissidents. This *Slegten* defined the discursive mode for decades to come.

Poland, Ireland and the Two Sicilies had similar *Slegten* that defined the modernizing discourse. In all cases the foundation myth included a romantic prince-hero, who either went mad, perished in a battle, died of wounds or was executed; an idealistic, altruistic founding event that quickly acquired a mythical status; and subsequent sober, realistic, practical positive action.

Poland’s Count Andrzej Zamoyski, later known simply as “*Pan Andrzej*”, a scion of a venerable magnate family, promoted annual meetings of landowners known as *Zjazdy Klemensowskie* on his estate, which attracted all the progress-oriented gentry of Congress Poland. He published a remarkable journal *Annals of National Economy*, founded the Steamer Maritime Company for transportation on the Vistula, launched steam and barge ships manufactures and was the initiator and the chairman of the *Agricultural Society*, which developed into a de facto representation of the main liberal-conservative political forces active in Poland. His milieu included simple gentry, writers, bourgeois, even some Jews.

The Irish modernizing *Slegten* included the Young Ireland radicals such as Thomas Davis, along with the activists of the Kildare Place Society and of the Royal Dublin Society, like the Edgeworths, the epitome of the sort of responsible landlords they hoped would one day characterize Ireland.

The Neapolitan milieu of modernizers gathered in the seventeenth Economic Societies, spread widely over the whole kingdom, and many Agrarian Societies and academies; and they also published influential journals.

Table 1: Slegten fra 1814

Romantic Prince Hero:

Norway	Christian Frederik
Poland	Józef Poniatowski
Ireland	Edward Fitzgerald
Two Sicilies	Francesco Caracciolo

Founding Events – Myths:

Norway	May 17 th , 1814 Constitution (Eidsvoll)
Poland	Kościuszko Uprising, 1794; May 3 rd , 1791 Constitution
Ireland	United Irishmen Uprising, 1798
Two Sicilies	1799 Partenopean Revolution

The Slegten:

Norway: the Ankers (Carsten and Peter), the Wergelands (Nicolai, son Henrik, daughter Camilla Collett), Georg Sverdrup, the Falsens, the Adlers, the Dunkers (Corradine and brother Bernard), Johan Welhaven.

Poland: Adam Czartoryski, Leon Sapieha, Andrzej Zamoyski, Władysław Grabski, Leon Kronberg, Leopold Lelewel.

Ireland: Daniel O’Connell, Thomas Davis, John Dillon, Charles Duffy, William Smith O’Brian, the Edgeworths (Richard and daughter Maria).

Two Sicilies: Giuseppe Ricciardi, Ignazio Rozzi, Luigi Maria Greco, Luigi de’ Medici, Giuseppe Zurlo.

The modernizers across borders were remarkably similar in their education and cultural attitudes – they themselves recognized the common trait in their social bearings. They dressed soberly, read much, worked much, ate little and basically led a healthy life. They valued practical education – the men often studied law, economics, agronomy and engineering in Warsaw, Naples-Nunziatella, Zurich, Paris-Grignon, Dresden, Geneva or Edinburgh; the women read political economy and practical guidebooks, in addition to French novels. They took good administration and good public administration as a proof of their merit and a public duty and denounced absenteeism as foolish, wasteful and unpatriotic.

Some of them belonged to the highest aristocracy, some came from the middling gentry, some from the landed bourgeoisie, some even were wealthy farmers, but they stressed their commonality in being landowners, who came from the land and lived from the land. They considered the land the key to modernization, but also to stability and moderation. Land was the main argument Andrzej Zamoyski used when he tried to convince prince Metternich that there was no danger in Poland of *carbonarism*: there is no proletariat, he wrote, but only “deux classes bien distinctes: la Noblesse et les paysans, toutes les deux attachés à

la terre, qui les fait exister et passionnément amoureuses de cette terre natale ... nous sommes tous ... propriétaires fonciers, intéressés à l'ordre, à la stabilité.”

6. The modernization program that the *Slegten* put forward used, in appearance, the same political economy references as the followers of the Manchester school. Many modernizers were schooled in economics, but their whole milieu read political economy, which was extremely popular at that time. In reclaiming the agrarian model, they relied upon the authority of Adam Smith, the “true Smith” of the “natural order” and “natural course” of things.

In the natural order, land and agriculture had priority. In Smith’s words, the land was “the greatest, the most important, and the most durable part of the wealth of every ... country”, and the most productive too, as nature assisted labor and capital applied to land. Agriculture was “the original destination of man” and was also “by far the most advantageous to the society”.

“Had human institutions ... never disturbed the natural course of things, the progressive wealth and increase of the towns would ... be consequential, and in proportion to the improvement and cultivation of the territory” – progress would proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from local semi-autarkic realities to larger markets: first, well-ordered agriculture, followed by the development of local manufacture, followed by the growth of domestic trade, and last by transport and foreign trade. But in the England of his time, lamented Smith, “this natural order of things [is being] ... inverted ... into [an] unnatural and retrograde order.”

In the 19th century, however, Smith’s work was increasingly seen as merely an economic doctrine that created bases for Jean Baptiste Say’s and David Ricardo’s iron laws of economy, following which the gradualism and social responsibility of “the natural course” were being sacrificed to the brutality of the ultra-liberal Manchester School. But the peripheral modernizers desired to develop industry, manufacturing and trade following Smith’s scheme; like the Master, they believed these developments had to wait till the supply of foodstuffs could satisfy the effectual demand through modernization of agriculture. Progress was to be gradual and slow. If the main tenets of Smith’s teaching, as the peripheral modernizers saw them, were to be preserved, the concerns of the 19th century required a modern re-elaboration of Smith. A “harmonic school” of political economy was emerging in the peripheries, in connection with other schools in Europe. In Norway, Anton Martin Schweigaard and Torkel Halvorsen Aschehoug elaborated a theory of *harmoni liberalis-*

men, which gave a sound theoretical grounding to the agrarian modernization alternative. Like the “harmonic school”, derived from Frédéric Bastiat, *harmoni liberalism* was critical of the “English theory” because the latter was only concerned with economics without regard to “natural and social laws” as norms for moral behavior and productive choice; while the former aimed at achieving harmony between population and production. It was from these economists that peripheral modernizers adopted the concept of “harmony”.

They found, however, their own prophet, a 19th-century rendition of Adam Smith, in Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, or rather in the so-called “second Sismondi”. Initially an acclaimed laissez-faire interpreter of Smith, in 1819 Sismondi wrote the *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique, ou la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population*, a stringent critique of ruthless laissez-faire two-class capitalism and an advocacy for an agriculture-based progress, an economics for the common good and a hierarchical system of social and economic harmony. This book was virtually ignored in the core of Europe, but found enthusiastic following among the economists at the periphery. “Harmonious modernizers” also followed Sismondi’s teaching on social policy, on connections between literature, history and economics and on constitutions.

Of course, both Sismondi and the peripheral modernizers were in many ways the followers of the physiocrats. On one important point they parted, however, from physiocratic universalism: they preached “localization” of modernization and believed in *vocazioni territoriali*. Each territory, they claimed, had its own local vocation (and its own soul) constituted by morphology, history, anthropology and the *Zeitgeist*, and it was different in the plains, the mountains and the hills. Southern Italian modernizers derived this concept from the 18th-century philosopher Giambattista Vico’s idea of progress as specific to a place, its “physical” and human history, its traditions and its cultural context. Thus, the modernizers strove to understand the “vocations” of a given territory to find out what economic, technological or social choices were appropriate for it. Agriculture, of course, was by its nature region-specific, but so was the small- and medium-scale industry that they promoted, based on raw materials locally available.

7. These were the main tenets of the agrarian modernization project. The project as such was never fully implemented anywhere, but some of the practices were widespread and enthusiastically followed. The almost maniacal character of the interest in land was well captured by the Irish term, *bogmania*, a frantic rush to drain the marshes prevalent in Ire-

land in the 1830s, when a great number and variety of shareholding companies and credit institutions were formed.

It must be emphasized, however, that the “agromania” that seized the modernizing elites throughout rural Europe was not Arcadian, bucolic or backward-looking. It is true that often agriculture was presented as art, and land as natural and feminine – *Madame la Terre* – soft, fertile and rooted, opposed to the rootless, cosmopolitan and universal *Monsieur le Capital*. But modernizers aimed at rational agricultural improvement, with the new science of rural economics, with new chemistry, physics and zoology, replacing the former blind empiricism. They promoted agricultural societies, elaborated popular technological programs, model farms, and rural education and funded fellowships to agricultural academies or colleges. The new journalism and associationism mushroomed and were amazingly popular; even society ladies were passionately debating the merits of artificial fertilizers, wetlands, cottonseeds or veterinary techniques.

But the rationalization of agriculture was only the first step towards an overall rational re-organization of the countryside and then of the country as a whole. Modernizers strove for the development of rural industry and credit, improvement of the peasants’ hygiene and living conditions and the building up of the infrastructure – as bases for the regeneration of society. This was a proto-positivistic concept and practice of “*praca organiczna*”, organic labor, prevalent in the Polish lands since 1815. Derived from the organic conception of society, *praca organiczna* called for a joint effort of all classes (organs) of the solidaristic society in defending and reconstructing the bases of economy and society. Its final aim was to assure the survival of the nation and to prepare the society for regaining national sovereignty.

One of the most important tenets of *praca organiczna* was education, of peasants and landowners alike. While the latter was crucial for the long process of transformation, the former – the creation of a literate self-conscious peasant class – was seen as a necessary factor of future freedom and independence. Southern Italian modernizers formulated this imperative in terms of a transformation of *plebe* into *popolo* through popular public education and basic social reforms. This transformation was in itself a modernization, a transition from traditional to modern: the *plebe* was traditional, i. e. illiterate, emotional and fanatical, and as such an easy prey to the Throne and the Altar, while the *popolo* was modern, i. e. mature and conscious. Only when transformed into *popolo* would the *plebe* be capable of acquiring property and citizens’ rights and eventually take their place as fully legitimate citizens and members of society.

8. The ultimate goal of all these labors – which makes the case of peripheral modernizers different from other rural areas of Europe – was to regain national sovereignty and political liberty. “Yes, we rub shoulders,” wrote Zamoyski, “with practical farmers, we speak the same language, but for us, agriculture is not a goal, but a means ...” By this, he meant a means to national sovereignty and to freedom. Land, the fathers’ bequest, was seen as a patriotic estate (*ojczysty zagon*); and the well-run country estate was the *zagroda polskości*, “enclosure of Polishness”, as the poet Kajetan Koźmian called it in his epic poem *Ziemiaństwo* (Landowners). In such *zagrodas*, after the partitions and the fall of the Kingdom of Poland, the national spirit (“eternal Polishness”) found its refuge, in the home of a landed family. It became a haven where the national spirit found its refuge and where the national tradition was cultivated and a hothouse where future leaders were formed. Working one’s land, the patriotic estate, was thus the master way to future independence.

It was in the same spirit that the Norwegian John Collett gathered poets and agricultural patriots in *Landbrug paa Ullevold* to work together according to the traditional odel law; it was so that the Irish writer Maria Edgeworth and her father Richard carried out a program of agricultural improvement from the family mansion at Edgeworthstown; it was the meaning of Marquis Cosimo Ridolfi’s model farm at Meleto, a shrine visited by all the modernizers, writers and poets of the period.

The agrarian modernization project found its most efficacious propagators in writers and poets, whose texts attempted to assert the values and “order” of tradition within a context of modernization and to transmit an acute sense of the patriotic value of land.

Norway’s best known novelist of the period, Camilla Wergeland Collett, resided in Eidsvoll, where her father Nicolai was a pastor and a member of the 1814 constitutional convention and where the action of her best-known novel *The District Governor’s Daughters* takes place. Significantly, Collett saw herself as a political essayist and a scholar of social mores.

Jozef Korzeniowski, one of the most prolific writers of the period, came from old but relatively impoverished nobility in the Wołyń region, where the action of *Kollokacja* takes place.

Maria Edgeworth, as mentioned above, spent all her adult life at the family mansion, of which a contemporary wrote, “Edgeworthtown may almost be regarded as public property. From this mansion has issued so much practical good to Ireland ... that [it] possesses larger moral interest than any other in the Kingdom.” She considered her novels as a com-

ponent of the various experiments in agricultural improvement, pedagogy and estate management conducted on the Edgeworthstown estate.

The harmonious model did not win then, and by the 1860s it seemed all but defeated. The reforms in Norway and Ireland, the Kingdom of Italy's conquest and incorporation of the Two Sicilies and the January insurrection in Poland contributed to marginalizing the rural modernizers and their project. But the idea of an alternative modernization constituted a thread that went through the rest of the 19th and 20th centuries, returned in all the debates on land reforms and may well be re-emerging in the ecology-conscious 21st century.

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A note on the method

Comparative history is always somewhat questionable, and it is particularly so when the question is "modernization", a hegemonic concept *par excellence*. The problem we face is how to investigate "modernization" without obliterating the whole range and variety of local ways of living, working and thinking. How to preserve the comparison with the "English model", explicit in the modernizers' discourse, without according it an *a priori* strategic priority and without positing certain invariables as external and "objective" terms of reference?

In this text, I tried to elaborate empirically a method of comparison based on a circular transfer of terms/concepts among the different national contexts. I borrow names given and concepts elaborated in one cultural context and transfer them, with the function of interpretative tools, into another cultural context. In this, I apply the approach of *emic/etic* or insider/outsider, a methodology derived from cultural anthropology. One culture's *emic* becomes here another's *etic*, and so forth.

The emics/etics distinction was derived from linguistics' *phonemics* and *phonetics* as tools to understanding and comparing verbal behaviors. This distinction migrated into cultural anthropology, where it became known as the distinction between *emics* and *etics*, or *insider* and *outsider*, an attempt to reconcile the "native point of view", with its stress on mental and emotional conditions, with the "objective" point of view, with its stress on behavioral and infrastructural conditions and processes, involving longer time spans (Clifford Geertz's "experience near" and "experience distant"). *Emic* interprets events according to their particular cultural function; *etic* characterizes events by spatio-temporal criteria. The

discipline of history, in its turn, translated this distinction into a tension between a “cultural” approach (from within) and a sociological one (from without), and also between “soft” facts (*mentalité*) and hard facts (statistics).

The following terms were used in this paper as *emics* and *etics*, borrowed from their context of origin (*emic*):

Slegten fra 1814 (Norway)

Harmoni-liberalismen (Norway)

Vocazioni territoriali (Two Sicilies)

Bogmania (Ireland)

Praca organiczna (Poland)

Zagroda polskości (Poland)

Plebe into Popolo (Two Sicilies)

I strove to apply the emic/etic approach according to a *géométrie variable*, with no invariables posed as “objective” terms of reference. This approach has a number of advantages:

- in different cultures, the same terms do not denote the same realities, so the transfer of a term can help to unlock certain meanings initially hidden.
- in different cultures, similar groups of phenomena are not equally perceived as such (i. e. as groups), so they are given a collective name in certain contexts, but not in others; naming them with a borrowed term can help uncover their very existence.
- because this method is circular, it allows us to get beyond binary histories and assures a relationship of parity between emic and etic.

The emic/etic distinction does not resolve the question of comparability, of course, because it may be used equally for a centri-cultural argument that historical situations are idiosyncratically incomparable, as well as a tool in comparing them cross-culturally. It does allow us, however, to operate cross-national comparisons while preserving the specificity of local contexts.