

Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post-Colonial

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Modernism and modernization have nourished an amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernization, to give them the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own.

(Marshal Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air* 16)

Modernities are everywhere, at precisely the time modernity as the epochal discourse of the West appears to be on its last legs. This is one of the more paradoxical features of the global. One might declare the end of modernity in a narrow sense as Jean-François Lyotard (and post-modernism in general) does, but to declare its end even as an epoch is either to fall into the fallacy that modernity has remained a Western phenomenon, or to colonize the world with the Western paradigm of the postmodern. The sense that modernity is at a turning point comes not, I would suggest, from its imminent demise either through the “end of history” (Fukuyama) or the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington), but from its global, transcultural, and variegated character. Globalization may now be characterized by the *multiplicity* of its modernities and post-colonial theory provides a way to understand why this is so. How it does that will require a closer look at the journey of post-colonial theory itself and the pitfalls its alliance with globalization studies has opened up.

The defining moment of the fallacy that modernity is the site of the West’s cultural triumph occurs in Weber’s “Introductory Note” to his *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* where he provides a list of Occidental achievements defining its separation from the rest of the world:

... only the West developed proper scientific procedures, while Babylonian astronomy lacked a mathematical foundation, Indian sciences lacked rational experiments, Chinese historiography lacked the Thucydidean paradigm and Asian jurisprudence lacked the strict juridical procedures of canonical law; although musical understanding and polyphonic music could be found everywhere in the world, only the West developed rational harmonic music, musical notation, and instruments such as the organ, the piano and the violin; while the principles of pointed arch and dome were known and practiced in the Orient, only the Occident developed them into a systematic style in medieval architecture; print was known in China, but only the West acquired a press; ... (Schultz-Engler 37–38)

The list goes on to include universities, the civil service, parliamentary democracy and capitalism. We recognize in this triumphant declaration the supreme self-confidence of the Orientalism that led to the expansion of European empires into the rest of the world with their *mission civilatrice* and quest for resources and markets, a self-confidence that looks extremely dated in the face of the range of alternative modernities that characterizes the ‘modern’ today.

I. Alternative Modernities

A substantial literature has developed on the related concepts of “multiple modernities,” “alternative modernities,” of modernity “at large,” “multiple globalizations” and the principles of fluidity, localization and hybridization that they imply.¹ Eisenstadt, for one, claims that the concept of multiple modernities is a refutation of the triumphalist theories of modernization of the 1950s, which assumed that all industrial societies would one day converge. The so-called classical theories of modernization (Marx, Durkheim, Weber) all posited a cultural program of modernity, which had its origins in Europe but was expected to become universal in time. And yet, the progress of modernization showed that “modernity” and “Westernization” were not identical (Eisenstadt “Multiple” 1–3). The temptation to equate modernity with a capital-

ist economy quickly runs aground. Communist Russia, for instance, often regarded as a revolt against modernity, offered a model that might “for all its disastrous flaws and irrationalities have been a distinctive but ultimately self-destructive version of modernity rather than a sustained deviation from the modernizing mainstream” (Arnason 61). Quite apart from the familiar deployment of Soviet state power for industrialization, it is no accident that the first modernist dystopian novel, Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We*, which ironically glorifies the triumph of the completely mechanized society, was written in communist Russia in the 1920s. If this is the case, if Russian communism is a distinct moment in modernity, it offers a fascinating opportunity to consider the ways in which multiple modernities have emerged and survived (some of them no less oppressive than the Russian example). Taking into account the fascist model and the expansion of modernity into the Americas, we see that Western modernity itself was never a single phenomenon: “practically from the beginning of modernity’s expansion multiple modernities developed, all within what may be defined as the Western civilizational framework” (Eisenstadt “Multiple” 13).

To think of alternative modernities, and to accept that modernity is not synonymous with Westernization, is not to abandon the fact that modernity as an epoch, a questioning of the present, an orientation to the future, and at the same time an ethic valuing the present over the past, emerged in the West. But it does remind us that modernity is plural, and it confirms the fact that the historical trajectory of Western modernity was not simply a sign of temporal progress (an assumption embodied in the idea of the modern) but a culturally situated phenomenon. Arguments for alternative modernities confirm the need for cultural theories of modernity—theories that foreground place as well as time—but also lead us inevitably to the issue of local agency. Alternative, or non-Western modernities emerge either by the development of hybridized cultural forms through the appropriation of those of Western modernity or by the introduction of innovative, and thus truly alternative forms of modernity. Yet neither of these forms has emerged out of thin air. They emerge out of a *relation* to other modernities and the processes of appropriation, adaptation, and transformation

have been their characteristic features. Indeed, even where concerted programs of Westernization have been undertaken by non-Western elites the cultural transformation of Western models has been almost unavoidable. Thus, like post-colonial literatures, the most characteristic alternative modernities are those we might call hybridized, ones that appropriate and transform global cultural forms to local needs, beliefs and conditions. This does not make them extensions of modernity, but new culturally-situated forms of modernization. Modernity is not so much adopted as adapted and re-created, and increasingly, modernities may adapt other alternative modernities.

Charles Taylor suggests that there are both cultural and acultural theories of modernity and the two can become confused. Western modernity clearly emerges from a particular cultural milieu, but it is invariably seen in acultural terms as the inevitable (and universal) march of progress towards reason and enlightenment. A purely acultural theory, says Taylor, not only impoverishes our understanding of the West but imposes a falsely uniform pattern on the multiple encounters of non-Western cultures with the exigencies of science, technology, and industrialization. If we do not examine Western modernity “we will fail to see how other cultures differ and how this difference crucially conditions the way in which they integrate the truly universal features of modernity” (180).

Nevertheless, the term “alternative modernities” calls into question what we mean by modernity. It is not clear, suggests Frederick Cooper, “why an alternative modernity should be called a modernity at all. If any form of innovation produces a modernity, then the term has little analytic purchase” (114). This point is well taken and perhaps we should remind ourselves that *alternative* means alternative to the West, and increasingly, to other alternatives, rather than alternative to modernity (although many advocate this option). This is a situation in which modernity itself becomes transformed and multiplied. Cooper asks further

is modernity a *condition*—something written into the exercise of economic and political power at a global level? Or is it a *representation*, a way of talking about the world in which one uses a language of temporal transformation while bringing out the

simultaneity of global unevenness, in which “tradition” is produced by telling a story of how some people became “modern”? (114)

One answer to this is that, of course, it is both. The problem is that “modernity” is a word, and like all words typifies the range of experiences and actions, the conditions, it represents. The term “alternative modernities” introduces the plurality of modernity, and the agency multiplying its forms. Alternative modernities emerge firstly through the redeployment of modern Western cultural forms: material, discursive, social and even ethical. “The phenomenon of ‘political modernity,’” says Dipesh Chakrabarty, “namely, the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise—is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe” (4). Yet political modernity *has* been appropriated and enculturated by post-colonies. Nowhere is this more dramatic than in India.

The closer we look at Western modernity the more we see its cultural features. As an epoch modernity is generally regarded as referring to modes of social organization which emerged in Europe from about the sixteenth century, broadly represented by the discovery of the new world, the Renaissance and Reformation (Habermas “Modernity” 5). Although these upheavals involve a radical break with cultural traditions, “that break was *rationaly motivated* by the patterns of meaning in the West’s cultural heritage” (Kirkland 138). In this way modernity comes to be seen as a distinctive and superior period in the history of humanity, a notion that became habitual as successive generations saw their own present time enjoying a prominent position within the modern. As European power expanded, this sense of the superiority of the present over the past became translated into a sense of superiority over those pre-modern societies and cultures which were locked in the past—primitive and uncivilized peoples whose subjugation and introduction into modernity became the right and obligation of European powers. Ironically, an acultural view of modernity as historical progress

and development went hand in hand with Western cultural dominance. The prominence of reason as a philosophical mode (see Habermas *Philosophical*), and the radical restructuring of time and space became the most powerful discursive tools in the European construction of a modern world reality.

Therefore as a cultural formation Western modernity has been tightly linked to the political concept of the state and to the discourse of imperialism and its practice of territorial expansion. This expansionism is a key feature of the cultural character of Western modernity, an assumption of authority that enabled the large-scale regulation of human identity both within Europe and its colonies. Modernity emerged at about the same time as European nations began to conceive of their own dominant relationship to a non-European world and began to spread their rule through exploration, cartography and colonization. Europe constructed itself as modern and constructed the non-European as traditional, static, and pre-historical. The imposition of European models of historical change became the tool by which these societies were denied any internal dynamic or capacity for development. The link between globalization and the imperial domination of subject nations is clearly articulated by Adam Smith whose view of the role of commodities in distinguishing the civilized from the barbarous is deeply embedded in the ideology of empire. Trade, for instance, has caused certain parts of the world to progress, leaving others (such as Africa) in a “barbarous and uncivilized state” (Smith lx).

Western modernity, then, may be usefully understood as coterminous with both imperialism and capitalism.² The inevitable effect of this was that globalization came to be seen aculturally so that the diffusion of capital, industrialization, urbanization and the spread of education implied a unified world and a homogeneous program of development available to all. But neither imperialism nor globalization can be described simply as a program of homogenization because their operations are characterized by multidirectional and transcultural interactions, operating rhizomically rather than hierarchically or centrifugally. The various transcultural interactions between imperial powers and colonial cultures have a correlation in one of the most interesting features of the

present globalized world: the degree to which local modernities have come to characterize the global, in their adaptation of the principles and technologies of modernity to local cultural conditions. Whereas modernity relegated the local to the past “as an enclave of backwardness left out of progress, as the realm of rural stagnation against the dynamism of the urban, industrial civilization of capitalism” (Dirlik 464), the local has been the site of the emergence of alternative modernities.

How then did we get to the present condition of alternative modernities? Did modernity simply travel from the West? Was it brought with colonial conquest? Was it a gift of the civilizing mission? Can we talk about modernity without invoking Western modernity? What does the concept of alternative modernities mean to the structure of global relations?

From one point of view, according to Taylor, modernity is like a wave “flowing over and engulfing one traditional culture after another.” In terms of “the emergence of a market-industrial economy, of a bureaucratically organized state, of modes of popular rule—then its progress is, indeed, wavelike” (Taylor 182). But the metaphor of a wave is typically acultural. A cultural theory, in contrast, holds that modernity is not simply a function of historical development but of cultural difference. It always unfolds within a specific cultural or civilizational context and different starting points for the transition to modernity lead to different outcomes (17). Cultures are not necessarily engulfed by modernity, but creatively adapt it to local needs. As Dilip Gaonkar writes,

Creative adaptation is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practice to soften the impact of modernity; rather, ... it is the site where a people “make” themselves modern, as opposed to being “made” modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and a destiny. (“On Alternative” 18)

Explaining forms of creative cultural adaptation has been a crucial function of certain forms of post-colonial theory in that they engage with the material realities of colonized and diasporic peoples.

The people dominated and scattered in that immense *aporia* of the Enlightenment—slaves, for example—have demonstrated this proc-

ess most dramatically. Violently captured and transported, dispersed throughout the New World, placed in plantations with speakers of different languages, deprived not only of a common tongue, but a common history and birthplace, they eventually succeeded in articulating their own post-colonial modernity. Paul Gilroy has problematized the African diaspora's relationship to the West, arguing that Afro-modernism and the Black Atlantic represent a counterculture of modernity (Gilroy). If this means, as it seems to, that African modernity is the antithesis of Western modernity then it begs many questions. If "the cultures of diaspora blacks can be profitably interpreted as expressions of and commentaries upon ambivalences generated by modernity and their locations in it" (Gilroy 17), then they become a significant feature of modernity itself. If slavery is the counter-culture of modernity, it is also its central, defining contradiction. We can *more* profitably see this post-colonial modernity as an *alternative*, not only in its selective appropriation of modern discourses and technologies, but in its profound influence on modern global perceptions of transnational space and time. The vast and dramatic African diaspora points to an historical phenomenon central to modernity and yet fundamental to the emergence of alternative modernities: post-colonial literatures. The literatures written by colonized people in the languages of their colonizers are both a model for, and a key feature of the operation of late modernity itself. Writers from the African diaspora are one source of the transformation of modernity, which begins soon after colonial contact, when colonized, invaded or enslaved people take hold of the imperial languages in which modernity is systematized and diffused.

II. Post-colonial Theory and Modernity

At this point, in order to understand how post-colonial theory might illuminate global modernities, I want to examine how and why a quite specific post-colonial theory, developed to address the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism, quickly became dragooned into the role of the 'Grand Theory of Global Cultural Diversity.' Post-colonial theory was conceived as a methodology for analyzing the complex strategies by which colonized societies

have engaged imperial discourse, and for studying the ways in which many of those strategies are shared by colonized societies, re-emerging in very different political and cultural circumstances. Developed fundamentally as a form of literary analysis, it was doomed from the start to become a protean term, because, quite simply, by the late 1980s the world was hungry for a language to describe the diversity of cultures and the intersecting global range of cultural production. Post-colonial theory provided that language, a way of talking about the engagement of the global by the local, particularly local cultures, and, most importantly, provided a greatly nuanced view of globalization that developed from its understanding of the complexities of imperial relationships.

Although greatly exceeding its brief, a post-colonial-inspired language became the language of globalization studies in the 1990s. Varied as the discourses of postcolonialism and globalization might be, according to Simon Gikandi,

... they have at least two important things in common: they are concerned with explaining forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state, and they seek to provide new vistas for understanding cultural flows that can no longer be explained by a homogenous Eurocentric narrative of development and social change. (627)

What made post-colonial theory so useful was its ability to comprehend the postmodern movement of culture beyond the nation state at the same time as it addresses the particularity of the (largely non-Western) local. This represented not just an appropriation of the language of the post-colonial but also an unprecedented dominance of the Humanities in the descriptions of global culture. It can be explained in two ways: first, the systematization of post-colonial theory occurred at about the same time as the rise to prominence of globalization studies in the late 1980s. Second, and more importantly, it was around this time that literary and cultural theorists became convinced that the debates on globalization that had dominated disciplines such as sociology and anthropology had become hopelessly mired in the classical narrative

of modernity, in dependency theory and in centre periphery models. It was within *cultural* practices where concepts that undermined the Eurocentric narrative of modernity—difference and hybridity, diffusion and the imaginary—were most evident. Not surprisingly, the interpolation of post-colonial theory in the analysis of globalization and the mainstreaming of cultural discourse has meant the reappearance of the local, though characteristically, now a local culture much more ambivalent and much more globally inflected than that rural backwater dismissed by modernity. But, it is nevertheless a local that compels a re-thinking of the present proliferation of modernities. Clearly the cultural turn in globalization studies, and the influence of a post-colonial inspired language in that turn, meant that ‘post-colonial’ could now be used to refer to all forms of cultural diversity, often rendering the term so diffuse and endlessly employable as to be virtually useless. This process might be hard to reverse in practice, at least until some other language of global cultural diversity has been adapted, but I think that rather than making the post-colonial synonymous with cultural globalization, there are specific analytical tools developed within post-colonial theory that help us to understand the present global dispersal of modernity. The growing literature on multiple modernities recognizes the multiplicity of Western modernity itself, the principle of creative adaptation, and the processes of localization, and has provided many specific analyses, but there is little theoretical explanation of the strategic principles by which modernity has been localized, appropriated and adapted, nor any recognition of their prevalence in other forms of cultural contact. We make a critical start to this task when we recognize the prominence of post-colonial literary and other cultural production in the shaping of modernity. But the concepts that focus on how this shaping occurs are those that emphasize local agency in the appropriation and adaptation of literary writing: transformation and circulation.

III. Transformation

It is clear that the dissemination of modernity in imperial civilizing projects produced consequences as unexpected as those that occurred when English literature was deployed as the primary civilizing discourse

of the British Empire. Whenever local writers appropriated the language of English literature, the literatures that developed bore a complex relation to English Literature, either in its canonical forms or its filiative relation to an historical tradition. This appropriation and transformation of literature can be taken as a metonym for what I have referred to as the creative adaptation of Western modernity. This raises an issue of great ambivalence captured in this statement by Achille Mbembe: “Like Islam and Christianity, colonization is a universalizing project. Its ultimate aim is to inscribe the colonized in the space of modernity” (634). If colonization is a universalizing project, did it succeed? Did it “inscribe” the colonized in the space of modernity, and if so was that a wave-like engulfment, a cultural disorientation, or did the colonized take hold of the pen and inscribe themselves in that space in a curious act of defiance modeled by post-colonial writers? Such ambivalence now operates globally. The *diffusion* of global influence makes the relationship between the local and the global all the more complex, because when we examine local cultures we find the presence of the global within the local to an extent that compels us to be very clear about our concept of the local. The term “Glocalization” more adequately describes the relationship between the local and the global as one of interaction and interpenetration rather than of binary opposites. “It makes no good sense,” says Roland Robertson, “to define the global as if the global excludes the local” (“Glocalization” 34). Neither is their interpenetration a one-way process of contamination from an imperial discourse to a colonized subject. The view that the local and the global should not be seen in a simple homogenizing power relationship, but that the local contributes to the character of the global, is now widely held. But how this occurs is less clear, and it is precisely this phenomenon that the processes of post-colonial transformation illuminate.

We can begin to understand the relationship between the local and global by observing the dynamic of colonial engagements with dominant imperial discourses. Post-colonial theory addresses these engagements by analyzing the impact of imperialism on colonized societies, and the transformative resistance demonstrated in local cultural production, and by tracing the transcultural interactions that came to transform im-

perial cultures themselves. The development of post-colonial literatures can be described as follows. The appropriation by post-colonial societies of the language and genres of English literature entailed the continuous selection, reinterpretation, and reformulation of its themes, ideas and techniques. These brought about continual transformation of the institution and practice of literature, with new forms of narrative and poetic language emerging. Appropriation and transformation were marked by a persistent ambivalence toward both the institution of literature and the colonizers themselves, an ambivalence that pivoted on the relationship between resistance and transformation.

This is a recasting, in terms of literary production, of Eisenstadt's description of the emergence of multiple modernities ("Multiple" 15). Despite the ambivalence towards both colonial culture and its 'Literature,' transformation was a particularly enterprising form of resistance that utilized the technologies of European modernity without being engulfed by them. Post-colonial literatures therefore stand as a metonym for alternative modernities: they are a specific practice, an enterprise engaged by agents who locate themselves within a discourse in a resistant, counter-discursive way through the transformation of dominant technologies. They are specific examples of how individual subjects could "change the world that is changing them" (Berman 16). This does not mean that they act independently of the forces acting upon them, but they *act*. Whereas development, the acultural theory of modernization, acts to force the local into globally normative patterns, transformation shows that those patterns are adjusted to and by the requirements of local values and needs. Subsequently, the features of these alternative modernities may be re-circulated globally in various ways.

Post-colonial literatures amplify the ambivalence we find in Mbembe's description of colonialism's universalizing project. For instance, the appropriation and creative adaptation of modern global culture is further complicated by the strategies of multinational companies to adapt to local conditions. Yunxiang Yan reports the example of a McDonalds' manager in China claiming that "they were not a multinational company, but a multilocal company," and another where Kodak, after purchasing seven Chinese film companies, claimed to be "a first rate Chinese

company” (Yan 35). This ambivalent intersection of local appropriation and global adaptation is almost a universal feature of multiple modernities, a chicken and egg situation in which agency is difficult to pin down to individual subjects, but which seems rather to occupy a shared and overdetermined discursive space in which actors are both subjects and objects of globalization. At any given time the forces acting in globalization may include transnational companies, the state, state-controlled and private media, intellectuals and other cultural elites, and ordinary consumers of all kinds, who demonstrate the culturally productive capacity of consumption.

If we refer to the model of post-colonial writers as agents of alternative literatures, we can see a similar dialectic between the colonial function of language education, the cultural function of the canonical values of English Literature, the economic aims of publishing companies capitalizing on post-colonial writing (Heinemann African Writers Series being the classic example), and the interpolation of these dominant systems by writers appropriating and transforming literary language. The task of identifying the *origin* of resistance in these intersections can be futile, but transformative resistance flowers nevertheless, because in the literary example, the writing constructs a world audience. By appropriating strategies of representation, organization, and social change through access to global systems, local communities and marginal interest groups can both empower themselves and influence those global systems. By localizing and transforming technologies, the non-Western society may re-circulate those technologies globally.

IV. India and China as Alternative Modernities

We can no longer be tempted to place alternative modernities on the periphery of global interactions, nor should we, for that matter, see them as necessarily heroic in their modernizations. But we find that alternative modernities may also have alternative *routes* to modernity. India and China, emerging as two of the largest global participants, reveal with stark clarity something that has been becoming clearer for some time: that alternative modernities *are* globalization. In addition, just as in one way theories of globalization keep rendering the nation

an obsolete category, in another these countries appear to have re-established the nation as an open *cultural* site taking a significant place in global economics. While the nation-state may be an exhausted if not entirely absent structure as the global impact of the American sub-prime crisis has revealed, the emergence of India and China may force us to reconsider the importance of the *nation* as a cultural phenomenon, a horizontal reality separate from the vertical authority of the *state*.

Within these nations the antiquity of diverse cultures is maintained at the same time that innovative, modern interventions into global processes are made. The questions become: Why have India and China taken to globalization with such alacrity? Why is their involvement characterized by the discourse of celebration, rather than the discourse of crisis that has dogged the recipients of IMF funding? The politicized answer will say something about the success of democracy in India and the freeing up of socialism in China; the economic answer will say something about the enormous consumer base, the opening of free markets, the proliferation of technological innovation and the expansion of education. These answers will all be partly correct. But fundamentally, the answer lies in the relation of their modernities to the West and the civilizational basis of their modern development. While China seems oddly placed in a post-colonial analysis, never having been fully colonized, we cannot overestimate its *sense* of the imperial dominance of the West, at least since the Opium Wars, and its ambivalent sense of the imperialist tendencies of Westernization. India, on the other hand, has proven to be one of the most energetic transformers of imperial technologies.

Both represent entirely different approaches to the globalization process that stem from the ancient character of their civilizations and which have characterized their historical relationships with the West. China operates from a long history of introspection in which it regarded itself as the centre of the world and carefully protected itself from cultural pollution. One of the consequences of this introspection is the unshakable belief in the strength of Chinese culture, which has withstood the turmoil of the last two hundred years in which a major crisis has occurred in China about every fifteen years. This means that it is impossible to talk meaningfully about “westernization” since

imported culture is radically transformed and localized. “Do cultural values and cultural products that originate in the West always belong to the West,” asks Yunxiang Yan, “even after they are imported to a non-Western society?” (32–33). This is similar to the question of whether English continues to belong to Britain even after it becomes an African or an Indian language.

Chinese modernity is complicated by the fact that it is *managed* by the state and seems devoid of those political features that acultural theories of modernity take for granted: the inevitable growth of instrumental reason; the valuing of individual freedom; the emergence of a participatory public political culture; the jettisoning of traditional ideas and beliefs. Deng’s insistence on the four basic principles of the party-state: the socialist road, dictatorship of the proletariat, leadership of the Communist Party, and Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong thought, remain the core of the old ideology as well as the symbol of Communist rule, and challenges to them are severely punished (25). Chinese modernity is characterized, then, by a separation of the state and the nation at the very same time that the state attempts to control every aspect of the life of the nation. Chinese modernity is a complicated intersection of the local or ordinary social appropriations by individual agents, and those made by state and corporate policies. This tension can lead to severe ethical problems such as those involved in the Sanlu milk scandal.³

One culturally specific consequence of this state control is that many businesspeople prefer to become “Confucian merchants,” or successful scholar-businesspersons, similar to the scholarly officials in imperial China. Here the term “Confucian merchant” refers to a businessperson who is also a scholar, devoted to the promotion of cultural affairs, a person whose “behavior must conform to Confucian norms, such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, intelligence, and sincerity” (Yan 24). The Confucian merchant is a response to the unique features of the business environment in China. The State controls strategic market resources, owns most of the large enterprises and firms, and can to a great extent, determine the fate of private companies through the implementation of specific policies and regulations. In most cases, special connections to key people who are in charge of relevant government

agencies are the key to business success. Thus the Confucian merchant develops as an entrepreneur deeply embedded in the cultural verities of Confucian values: such a figure embodies the principle of globalization married to deep cultural internalization.

India's approach is profoundly different from China's, being in every way exogenous, outward looking, and inquisitive, and for this reason it is a society whose globalization may be much more implicated in the circulation of its own cultural ideas and influences. It has a long history of heterogeneity, argumentative reasoning and democratic interchange, which reveal a more complicated route to democracy than purely Western inheritance. According to Sen, "democracy is intimately connected with public discussion and interactive reasoning" (13), traditions that have existed in India for millennia. Despite common assumptions, democracy does not gain its strength in India from the strength of the modern nation state but from a long history of interacting with, absorbing and transferring intellectual and cultural practices both internally and externally.

The spirit of India's fluidity, acceptance and capacity to change is virtually embodied in the giant figure of Rabindranath Tagore, who made perhaps the defining statement of post-colonial appropriation when he said: "Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin" (qtd. in Sen 86). This may be a common post-colonial, transformatory strategy but it describes six thousand years of India's cultural history as well, and it is quite clearly the operating principle of an alternative modernity. In a letter to C.F. Andrews in 1924, Tagore wrote that "the idea of India itself militates against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others" (qtd. in Sen 349). This remarkable statement has two profound implications: first, it asserts itself against an idea of India as a mixture of separated and alienated cultures and communities, sharply distinguished according to religion or caste, or class or gender or language or location. Second, it argues against an intense sense of the dissociation of Indians from people elsewhere (349), particularly the idea that local culture is so fragile it will break if exposed to outside influences.

Local transformations occur in virtually every aspect of cultures throughout the world. But undoubtedly the transformation that symbolizes the principle of local adaptation is the Ambassador Car of India. The Hindustan Ambassador, manufactured continuously by the Hindustan motor company near Kolkatta since 1957, is based on the 1954 Morris Oxford. It has maintained the body style and the basic motor of the Morris until the present. The Ambassador has achieved iconic status in India. As the preferred means of transport by the Indian leadership (even today Sonia Gandhi uses one), it has become *the* Indian car. In some respects this seems to fly in the face of the principle of modernity, particularly in the frenetic world of global automobile production, in which motor cars must be on the cutting edge of modernization. But the Ambassador, with a rugged body, an easily accessible motor, cheap spare parts, easily maintained, represents the very principle of an alternative modernity – the appropriation of a technology and its transformation to adapt to local conditions.



A taxi-cab version of the Ambassador.

The question is not why the Indian leadership has lately upgraded to armoured BMWs, but why it has taken so long. The answer, in some part, is that the Ambassador, with its insouciant rejection of the fashionable, its total suitability to local conditions, its democratic ambience and material convenience, is the embodiment of India.

This suggests that the modernities created in India and China, though they both rely to a large extent on the appropriation of systems and technologies from the West, and deeply dependent on the global circulation of capital and trade, operate in a curiously adversarial position to Western modernity, a relationship that emerges from creative adaptation. Both China's and India's alternative modernities, despite their interdependence on global economy, demonstrate the scope of transformation and its cultural grounding.

V. Circulation: The Transnation

The principle that complements local transformation and adaptation is the circulation and re-circulation of locally adapted modernities. This circulation is never equal or similar in character. Japan, which has been one of the most energetic adapters of technology, has transformed itself from a copy culture to one in which automotive and electronic products have earned their reputation for reliability. Consequently, Japanese notions and techniques of quality control have greatly influenced European and American industry as well as consumer behaviour. Berger cites the interesting case of Shiseido cosmetics that combines modern products with traditional Japanese notions of aesthetics and finds that this has an appeal beyond the borders of Japan (14). Tulasi Srinivas calls this the principle of emission, and although the most prominent emissions from Asia have been those emanating from religious culture, the emissions of Indian fabrics and food have reached a truly global span.

However, I want to capture this principle of circulation in a concept stimulated by the ambivalent concept of nation in post-colonial societies. Whereas the contemporary buzz-word for global cultural diversity is cosmopolitanism, a venerable and evocative term meaning "at home in the world," I want to propose the concept of transnation that emerges from the very different experiences of nation in post-colonial societies.

The transnation is more than the international, or the transnational, which might more properly be conceived as a relation between states. The transnation does not refer to an ontological object. It is not a formal reality in political space but a way of talking about subjects in their ordinary lives, subjects who live in-between the positivities by which subjectivity is normally constituted. Transnation is the fluid, migrating *outside* of the state that begins *within* the nation. This is possibly most obvious in India where the *nation* is the perpetual scene of *translation*, but translation is but one example of the movement, the betweenness by which the subjects of the transnation are constituted. It is the inter—the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.

The concept of the transnation disrupts the structural relation between the nation and the state, and while it is characterized by dispersal and circulation it begins *within* the nation. The transnation has had an impact on modernity in two ways, by demonstrating that the nation as an imagined community may exceed the boundaries of the state, and by revealing that the nation-state is already the scene of migration, exile and diaspora. The claim here is that the circulation of people constitutes a circulation of modernities as the corollary of human movement. The example of Afro-modernity is a particularly significant example of the first impact and it has had a powerful effect on global modernity. Again India and China are examples of the second, internal transnation, showing how the nation itself, however determinedly its identity is managed by the state, is the beginning of the transnation.

The African example is useful not only because it is commonly held to be the antithesis, or the Other, of modernity but also because “there has been a popular academic tendency to diminish, deny, or neglect the impact that African peoples, practices, and civilizations have had on the West’s development, as well as to forget the extent to which these populations have sought paths that have veered away from Western modernities even while being interlocked with them” (Hanchard 273). This ambivalent relationship has been a feature of alternative modernities, but there has been little attention to the impact of Afro-modernity on the West.

Furthermore, it makes no good sense to describe the African diasporic subject as cosmopolitan, for such a subject is located in a supra-national identity, an “imagined community” that is not territorially demarcated but based on the shared belief in the commonalities of Western oppression experienced by African and African-derived peoples. This community has developed alternative political and cultural networks across nation-state boundaries, and critiques the uneven application of the discourses of the Enlightenment and processes of modernization by the West (Hanchard 275). The consequences of this particular transnation can only be suggested in this short space, but the most prominent are a) the development of the experience of racial time in multicultural societies, b) the circulation of a supra-national identity back to African states, and c) the deployment of that aspect of modernity that opens to the future through a recollection of the past.

Whereas the cultural impact of Afro-modernity on Western modernity is clear in popular culture in its music, fashion, art, and even sport, a more subtle impact was that of the African diaspora on concepts of time. Whereas modernity had “disembedded” time as Giddens puts it in *The Consequences of Modernity* (21–29), the emergence of what Hanchard calls “racial time” may be said to have ‘re-embedded’ it. “Racial time is defined as an awareness of the inequalities of temporality that result from power relations between racially dominant and subordinate groups” (Hanchard 280). These effects can be seen in the daily interactions of multi-racial societies: inequalities of temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power and knowledge (281).

The re-circulation of a shared sense of oppression and purpose back to newly independent African states is one of the more interesting consequences of the African transnation. The emergence of the New Negro and calls for transnational solidarity were heard in Ghana and characterized Kwame Nkrumah’s demand for a free Africa. Although Nkrumah was murdered, the tide that had begun in the African transnation had turned against colonialism and the post-colonial character of twentieth-century modernity was initiated.

The third consequence, and the most far-reaching, is the attitude to the future that is shared with all post-colonial peoples and revealed

particularly in their literatures. We see in a statement by the African-American formulator of pan-Africanism, Alexander Crummel, the beginnings of what I take to be a revolution in the post-colonial relation between memory and anticipation:

What I would fain have you guard against is not the memory of slavery, but the constant recollection of it, as the commanding thought of a new people, who should be marching on to the broadest freedom in a new and glorious present, and a still more magnificent future. (13)

Crummel's desire exemplifies a strategic utopianism that comes to be one of the most powerful instances of the post-colonial transformation of modernity. Where Western modernity became characterized by openness to the future, we see now a situation in which that openness is revolutionized by the political agency of memory. For Edouard Glissant, "the past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present" (64). He proposes a view of the past that projects into the future, *a prophetic vision of the past*. Such a vision, claims Glissant, is neither "a schematic chronology" nor a "nostalgic lament," but a prophetic vision may be the most powerful contribution of the transnation to the concept of modernity itself.

India and China have a complementary relation to this example of Afro-modernity, because their size demonstrates the extent to which diaspora begins at home. The circulation of the transnation is not characterized simply by loss and absence from the nation-state. Such circulation supervenes national boundaries, but *inward* as well as outward. Transnation elaborates the way in which these two civilizations tend to separate the concept of the nation from the state. Despite assertions that Indian identity begins and ends in geography, principally the great Bharat of mother India, the spiritual bond between child and mother is made in 1821 places of pilgrimage (Kapoor 30–31). So it is by pilgrimage, by movement *and travel* that the centrality of place is established in the Indian psyche. The great centrality of the Hindu self is already a traveling self. The antiquity and adaptability of Indian civilization, and the nature of its engagement of the transnation

with globalization, is suggested in its writing in which two magnetic poles seem to organize the landscape of identity: the pole of memory which perpetuates cultural tradition, and the pole of possibility which represents an Indian identity whose overriding characteristic is one of mobility and transnationality (Mishra 422).

Similarly China, despite its historic inwardness, “can no longer be limited to the more or less fixed area of its official spatial and cultural boundaries,” nor, conversely, as Ien Ang says, “can it be held up as providing the authentic, authoritative and uncontested standard for all things Chinese” (225). This dislocation represents a dialectical disruption of the linking of the nation and the state. For while diaspora entails “a disruption of the ontological stability and certainty of Chinese identity,” it does not negate the operative power of that identity as a cultural principle. China’s diasporic writings in English demonstrate the same cultural energy as the Indian transnation, though perhaps not with the impact that the work of Rushdie and Mistry, Ghosh and Tharoor have had on English literatures. Thus the phenomenon of Chinese and Indian transnational writing provides a *cultural* framework through which we may consider the possible movement of political economy in globalization: dispersion, fluidity, asymmetry, the porosity of borders and the transformation of the technologies of power.

The conclusion we can make from this is that alternative modernities *are* modernity. When we use the example of post-colonial engagements with dominant imperial technologies, and take particular account of their transformation of imperial cultures, we see that these engagements are both models for and agents in the transformation of modernity. In some cases, such as India, the cultural engagements transfer seamlessly into glocalizing encounters of various kinds as alternative modernities both transform and re-circulate adapted versions of Western modernity. Alternative modernities are a phenomenon in which socio-political theories of modernity find a harmonious conjunction with post-colonial cultural analysis. But the critical path of discovery opened up in this conjunction is the further revelation of the degree to which Western modernity (and the West itself) has been transformed by the creative adaptation of the formerly colonized world.

Notes

- 1 See, for instance, a special issue of *Daedalus* on “Multiple Modernities”; see also Feenberg; Appadurai; Gaonkar; Berger and Huntington; Cao; Cooper; Eisenstadt. See Gikandi for the post-colonial language of globalization studies.
- 2 It is important to remember that the concept of “the West” really rose to prominence in contrast to the Communist “East” rather than the older “Orient,” and its capitalist modernity should be distinguished from that ‘alternative’ form of modernity that arose in the USSR.
- 3 In 2008 children throughout China, but particularly in Hebei province, began to develop kidney stones. Five children eventually died and sixty thousand more fell ill. This was the result of an apparently long-standing practice in which dairy farmers added melamine to milk to falsify its protein content. On August 2, Fonterra, a co-operative dairy group of New Zealand farmers that owns 43% of Sanlu, learned about the contamination and recommended a full public recall. Sanlu dithered and requested a meeting with Shijiazhuang officials and instituted a partial trade recall. A full public recall was not made until September when the New Zealand government, on information from Fonterra, urged the Chinese central government to recall all Sanlu milk products. The chairwoman of Sanlu, Tian Wenhua, Communist Party secretary for Hebei province, was dismissed after it was discovered that Sanlu had known about the problem for months.

Mrs. Tian’s predicament highlighted the problems of a managed economy in which party officials occupy senior management positions in ostensibly private companies. When Fonterra first raised the issue on August 2, it was less than a week before the opening of the Olympic Games. Every Chinese knew the games took priority over everything else for the central government. Being good Party cadres and without being told to do so, Mrs. Tian and her colleagues instinctively realized the repercussions that went with causing another food scare at a time when the eyes of the world were focused on China. So great was the Chinese commitment to the “one world” propaganda of the Games that the conflicts in a manager who was also a Party official were insoluble. Critically, the policy of non-transparency, which had been a central feature of Government control and maintenance of public order and ‘social harmony,’ resulted in an impossible situation for Mrs Tian (Lo A14).

What would have happened had the central government known about the problem on August 2? One can only speculate that Mrs. Tian chose to save the government the embarrassment of having to cover up the scandal itself. The conflict that appears endemic in China’s alternative modernity is the conflict between a completely non-transparent political system and the apparent necessity for transparency (or information) in a market capitalist system to maintain and increase profit.

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