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Postcolonial Modernities

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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*

Abstract

A major feature of post-colonial theory has been its ability to analyse historical developments of culture: expressions of anti-colonial nationalism; the paradoxical dissolution of the idea of nation along with the continuous persistence of national concerns; the question of language and appropriation; of the transformation of literary genres; the question of ethnicity and its relation to the state. But the broader question for this century concerns the way in which postcolonial theory is positioned to approach the continuing issues of global power, global interaction and cultural difference in the coming century. One answer to this has been a growing, and now well-established, interest in cultural and ethnic mobility, of diaspora, of transnational and cosmopolitan interactions. This article goes beyond this to analyse modernity using the tools of postcolonial theory to argue for the multiplicity of modernities. Modernities proceed in various ways, but the process of transformation demonstrated by the literary model can be adapted to examine the proliferation of alternative and multiple modernities. Special attention shall be given to India and China as alternative modernities to help to re-think the nature of modernity itself.

Key Words:
postcolonial, modernities, Western modernity, transformation, India, China, Afro-modernity.

A great deal of economic and political thought from the 1990s has been rendered obsolete by events in this century. The global financial crisis that began in 2008 proved to be a curious boon to the credibility of the nation-state. That entity whose demise had been virtually assured by

globalization theory in the nineties asserted itself against the neo-liberal fiction of the supremacy of the market, and thereby ushered in an age of multilateralism. Francis Fukuyama's hyperbolic belief that liberal democracy was the final form of human government[1] and that a utopia of universal democratic capitalism would be the end of history, seems now like a quaint fantasy. Samuel Huntington on the other hand saw that modernity was not synonymous with westernization and that expecting consensus on universal issues was dangerous. Huntington's cure, however, was a virulent strain of Orientalism: we should accept that the world was divided into the West and the Rest and that future conflict will not be between states but clashes of civilizations.[2] Huntington's use of words such as the West and Islam should alert us immediately to their unsatisfactory monolithic blurriness. "The sad part is," says Edward Said, "that 'clash of civilizations' is useful as a way of exaggerating and making intractable various political or economic problems."[3] A very different view from these was one that accepted Fukuyama's thesis but rued the apparent homogenization of the world: the displacement of the 'state' by the market; the erosion of a variety of indigenous markets; the erosion of counter-cultures worldwide; the erosion of alternative centres of power.[4] In a bleak article "The Yawning Vacuum: A World Without Alternatives," Rajni Kothari admonished:

> The end of history thesis is not to be laughed out; it represents and announces the end of the era not just of the socialist challenge to the capitalist world but also the multipolarity of the world, of the system of nation-states. It has called into question a plurality of the world… It is the return of the capitalist-colonial framework that Fukuyama and other excited champions of western capitalism are celebrating.[5]

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1   Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

2   Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

3   Edward Said, "The Clash of Definitions," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Penguin, 2001), 571.

4   Rajni Kothari, "The Yawning Vacuum: A World Without Alternatives," in *Economic and Political Weekly* May 29, 1993, 1100.

5   Kothari, "Yawning Vacuum," 1101.

Different as these perspectives may be, Fukuyama and his critics both accept the monolithic western character of modernity, and consequently, that all world cultures stand helpless against its crushing onward progress.

These views have a long historical provenance. 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,' he intones, developed proper scientific procedures, historiography, musical notation, instruments such as the organ, the piano and the violin, architecture, the printing press. The list goes on to include universities, the civil service, parliamentary democracy and capitalism.[6] We recognise 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 civilasatrice* 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 want to propose a way of analyzing modernity by using the tools of postcolonial theory, to try to understand why globalization may now be characterized by the *multiplicity* of its modernities. To many, the multiplicity may seem irrelevant because capitalism and globalization are perniciously hegemonic. But if we put aside for the moment our regret at the delay of universal social justice, we may see that modernity can be an encompassing world system but at the same time one almost infinitely adaptable to cultural exigencies.

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

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6   Frank Schultz-Engler, "Border Patrols: Postcolonialism and the Topography of Modernity," in *Postcolonial (Dis)Affections*, ed. Walter Göbel and Saskia Schabio (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), 38.

hybridization that they imply.[7] But because the term 'alternative' has sometimes been confused with the idea of a totally different system, these multiple adaptations are perhaps better referred to as *transformations* of modernity rather than alternatives. Using the tools of literary analysis we can see that non-western modernities don't just emerge out of thin air, nor are they simple extension of a western modernity that has swamped indigenous cultures. They emerge first, out of a particular historical provenance, and second, out of a *relation* to other modernities. The processes of appropriation, adaptation and transformation have been their characteristic features. Thus, like postcolonial literatures, alternative modernities are transformative, appropriating and transforming global cultural forms, global technologies and practices to local needs, beliefs and conditions. Very often they respond and adapt to each other rather than some mythical global centre – not so much *adopted*, as adapted and re-created from other alternative modernities.

How then did we get to the present condition of modernity's multiple character? 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? These questions remain recalcitrant and to many insoluble. From one point of view, modernity is like a wave "flowing over and engulfing

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7   See for instance, a special issue of *Daedalus* 129.1 (2000) on Multiple Modernities; see Andrew Feenberg, *Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington, eds., *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Tian Yu Cao, ed., *The Chinese Model of Modern Development* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); S.N. Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* (Leiden: Boston Brill Academic Publishers, 2003). See Simon Gikandi, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 627–58 for the postcolonial language of globalization studies.

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."[8] 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.[9] Cultures are not necessarily engulfed by modernity, but creatively adapt it to local needs. As we see in the model of postcolonial literatures, transformation is the way "people 'make' themselves modern, as opposed to being 'made' modern by alien and impersonal forces."[10]

To accept that modernity is not synonymous with Westernization – is not to abandon the fact that modernity as an epoch, a privileging of the present over the past, a triumphal teleology oriented to the future, emerged in the West. But the historical trajectory of Western modernity was not simply a movement of temporal progress, despite that assumption being embodied in the very idea of 'the modern.' Modernity is plural. It is a *culturally* situated phenomenon, even in its economic manifestation of capitalism, and to accept this fact radically changes the way we understand it. 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. But if we don't examine Western modernity, says Charles Taylor, "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."[11]

8   Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip P. Gaonkar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 182.

9   Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip P. Gaonkar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 17.

10   Gaonkar, "On Alternative," 18.

11   Taylor, "Two Theories," 180.

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.[12] Although these upheavals involve a radical break with cultural traditions, "that break was *rationally motivated* by the patterns of meaning in the West's cultural heritage."[13] 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. 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. Europe constructed itself as 'modern' and constructed the non-European as 'traditional,' 'static,' and 'pre-historical' and thus justified its expansionism. The imposition of European models of historical change became the tool by which these societies were misconceived as lacking any internal dynamic or capacity for development. The prominence of reason as a philosophical mode,[14] and the radical restructuring of time and space became the most powerful discursive tools in the European construction of a modern world reality. Perhaps predictably, a universalist view of modernity as historical progress and development went hand in hand with Western cultural dominance.

Western modernity, then, may be usefully understood as coterminous with both imperialism and capitalism. Wallerstein's persuasive claim that the world system has been capitalism since the sixteenth century[15] leads

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12   Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity vs. Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 5.

13   Frank M. Kirkland, "Modernity and Intellectual Life in Black," in *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*, ed. John Pittman (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 138.

14   See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987).

15   Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 16.4 (1974).

to the conclusion that capitalism is the economic discourse of modernity, the natural concomitant of European imperialism. Indeed the link between globalism and the imperial dominance of subject nations is clearly articulated by Adam Smith, perhaps the first globalist, whose view in 1776 of the role of commodities in distinguishing the civilized from the barbarous is deeply embedded in the ideology of empire. Having an abundance of "objects of comfort" is the litmus test that distinguishes "civilized and thriving nations" from "savage" ones, "so miserably poor" they are reduced to "mere want."[16]

Compelling as Wallerstein's world system theory may be, its centre-periphery model is far too structurally static to explain the multi-directional flow of global exchanges, a flow that was most noticeable in cultural exchange. It also fails to explain the present polycentric state of world capitalism. The world system theorist might reply that the system of inequality exists within countries as well as between them, but if that is the case, we need something a little more satisfactory than the geometric model of centres and peripheries to explain it. Postcolonial societies are not necessarily pre-industrial, nor necessarily peripheral according to Wallerstein's view of the world system. They may represent feudal, industrial or global capital modes of production at the same time. Most obvious is India, a growing and gigantic player in global capitalism where a large proportion of the population has not even encountered modernity.

We need a concept of the world system that is much more polyvalent. Neither imperialism, nor globalization can be described simply as programs of homogenization because their operations are characterized by multidirectional and transcultural interactions – operating rhizomatically rather than hierarchically or centrifugally. This is why the postcolonial example is so useful because it shows that this transcultural process begins at the level of subjectivity. Postcolonial cultures break the clear

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16   Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Modern Library, 1994), ix.

distinction between the identity of the colonizer and the identity of the colonized. And thus, as Bonaventure Santos puts it, in the case of Brazil

> postcolonial identity must be constructed in the margins of representation, and by a movement that goes from the margins to the center. This is the privileged space of culture and the postcolonial critic, a liminal, in-between or borderland space. Cultural enunciation creates its own temporality. This specific temporality is what renders possible the emergence of alternative modernities to western modernity, precisely by means of "postcolonial translation." The anti-colonial liberation struggle itself is hybrid and based on translation. It does not sustain itself either in precolonial ancestrality or in pure and simple mimicry of western liberal ideals.[17]

This 'translation' process, which I call 'transformation,' describes various transcultural interactions between imperial powers and colonial cultures and these 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.

A very dramatic example of the cultural movement of modernity occurred in the black diaspora: people scattered across the world in that immense *aporia* of the Enlightenment – slavery. 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 postcolonial modernity. Paul Gilroy has problematized the African diaspora's relationship to the West, arguing that Afro-modernism and the Black Atlantic represent a counter-culture of modernity. 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,"[18]

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17 Bonaventure de Sousa Santos, "Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism and Inter-Identity," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 39.2 (2002): 14.

18 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 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 postcolonial 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: postcolonial 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.

Transformation: The Literary Model

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. Whereas 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 the local transformations of Western modernity and reveals that transformation may be a much better word than 'alternative.'

But according to Achille Mbembe, colonization, "Like Islam and Christianity, […] is a universalizing project. Its ultimate aim is to inscribe the colonized in the space of modernity."[19] 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,

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19   Achille Mbembe, "On the Power of the False," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 634.

or did the colonized take hold of the pen and inscribe themselves in that space in a curious act of defiance modelled by postcolonial writers? Such ambivalence now operates globally. The phenomenon we now call 'Glocalization' is modelled consummately in the transcultural interactions of postcolonial literatures. 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 postcolonial transformation illuminate. Postcolonial 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 imperial cultures themselves.

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. Postcolonial literatures therefore stand as a metonym for transformed modernities: they are a specific practice, an enterprise engaged by agents who locate themselves in a discourse in a resistant, counter-discursive way through the transformation of dominant technologies. They are a specific example of how individual subjects could "change the world that is changing them," as Marshall Berman describes Modernity.[20] This doesn't 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.

Postcolonial literatures amplify the ambivalence we find in Mbembe's description of colonialism's 'universalizing project.' For instance, the

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20   Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1982), 16.

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."[21] This apparently 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 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 see postcolonial writers as agents of 'alternative' literatures we can see a similar dialectic between: (a) the colonial function of language education; (b) the cultural function of the canonical values of English Literature; (c) the economic aims of publishing companies capitalizing on postcolonial writing (Heinemann African Writers Series being the classic example); and (d) 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.

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21   Yan Yunxiang, "Managed Globalization: State Power and Cultural Transition in China," in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. L.P. Berger and S. Huntington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

India and China as Alternative Modernities

This introduces a central question for postcolonial studies in the coming century: should we, and if so, how should we, include China? Although never fully colonized one 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. Yet on the other hand, China is an empire, almost as vast and diffuse as the British Empire, yet operating as a nation. I am not totally sure how to include China in postcolonial studies until the impact of its minority literatures – the literatures of its own colonial subjects – becomes apparent. But one thing is certain: we can no longer be tempted to place alternative modernities on the periphery of global interactions, nor can we, for that matter, see them as necessarily heroic in their modernizations. Alternative modernities are neither 'peripheral' nor subsidiary and may also have taken alternative *routes* to modernity.

Both China and India, two of the largest global participants, reveal the magnitude and possibilities of alternative modernities. The immense antiquity of diverse cultures is maintained at the same time that innovative, modern interventions into global processes are made. Why have India and China taken to globalization with such alacrity? Why is their involvement characterised by the discourse of celebration, rather than the discourse of crisis that has dogged the recipients of IMF funding? The political 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 cultural basis of their modern development.

Both represent entirely different approaches to the globalization process that stem from the ancient character of their civilizations and which have characterised 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 "westernisation" 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, "even after they are imported to a non-Western society?"[22] 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.[23] Chinese modernity is characterised, 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.

One culturally specific consequence of this state control is that many businessmen prefer to become "Confucian merchants," or successful

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22 Yunxiang, "Managed Globalization," 32–33.
23 Yunxiang, "Managed Globalization," 25.

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."[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"[25] – traditions that have existed in India for millennia. Despite common assumptions, Democracy doesn't 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

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24 Yunxiang, "Managed Globalization," 24.

25 Amatya Kumar Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 13.

perhaps the defining statement of postcolonial appropriation when he said: "Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours, wherever they might have their origin."[26] This may be a common postcolonial, transformational strategy but it describes 6,000 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."[27] 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 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 Kolkata since 1957 – is based on the 1954 Morris Oxford, maintaining the body style and the basic motor of the Morris until the present. The Ambassador has achieved iconic status in India. The preferred means of transport by the Indian leadership (even today Sonia Ghandi 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.

26   Sen, *Argumentative*, 86.
27   Sen, *Argumentative*, 349.

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 both relying 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.

Circulation

The principle that complements local transformation and adaptation is the circulation and re-circulation of locally adapted modernities. A fascinating model for the emergence and proliferation of alternative

modernities is the phenomenon of Bollywood. Cinema was born in Paris with the Lumière show that opened on 28 December 1885. Maurice Sestiere, the Lumière man was on his way to Australia, but owing to shipping routes between the colonies had to stop over in Bombay where he decided screen the Lumière film. Thus virtually by an accident of history and imperial geography, the Indian film industry was born. But that industry, appropriating and transforming a technology from the West, became a profoundly different cultural phenomenon with a different range of effects upon *other* modernities outside the scope of Western modernity.

　　This can be seen in a story told by Shyam Benegal, one of India's most original filmmakers. He recalls how the Ethiopian filmmaker Haile Gerima told him that

> ... if there was one film that influenced him to the extent that he wanted to become a film maker it was the film *Mother India*. In Ethiopia, he said they would view films every month; his grandmother would gather her whole group, children and grandchildren, and they would all go to see *Mother India*. The story [...] which somehow expressed the deepest needs and aspirations of the Indian people, had a message not only for the Indian people but for people from outside India like Haile and his fellow Ethiopians.[28]

　　Quite apart from the questionable ideological sub-text of *Mother India*, the fascinating thing about this story is that it demonstrates the proliferation of a quintessential modern technology with no reference to the West. Today Bollywood films, not always dubbed or sub-titled, are the entertainment of choice throughout Africa and Asia. Film becomes the way in which the deepest source of national and ethnic identity, an identity very often formed in opposition to the West, can be imagined and depicted, as metonymic of a transformed modernity. And it is transferred from India's nationalist *ur-text – Mother India –* to Ethiopia. The journey of the Bollywood film is not one that necessarily moves from Mumbai to audiences of diasporic Indians, it more often travels to audiences who respond not only to its lavish colour and musicality but to its capacity to

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28　Mihir Bose, *Bollywood: A History* (Stroud, UK: Tempus, 2006), 20.

represent an alternative way to celebrate cultural modernity. We don't need to resort to the triumphalism one finds in some commentary on South Asian cinema, Bollywood is not Hollywood and it probably won't colonize the world but it does demonstrate something of the capillary and rhizomic circulation of alternative modernities.

A rarely considered example of the circulation of alternative modernity is that of Afro-modernity. The African example of it 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."[29] 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.[30] 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.

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29   Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics and the African Diaspora," in *Alternative Modernities*, ed. Dilip P. Gaonkar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 273.

30   Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity," 275.

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,[31] 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"[32] inequalities of temporal access to institutions, goods, services, resources, power and knowledge – effects that can be seen in the daily interactions of multi-racial societies.[33] Ralph Ellison in *Invisible Man* expressed this concept of racial time as a feeling of being off the beat.

> Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead. And you slip into the breaks and look around. That's what you hear vaguely in Louis' music.[34]

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 postcolonial character of Twentieth Century modernity was established.

The third consequence, and the most far-reaching, is the attitude to the future that is shared with all postcolonial peoples and revealed particularly in their literatures. We see in a statement by the African-American formulator of pan-Africanism, Alexander Crummel, the beginnings

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31 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).
32 Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity," 280.
33 Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity," 281.
34 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage 1972), 7–8.

of what I take to be a revolution in the postcolonial 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.[35]

Crummel's desire exemplifies a strategic utopianism that comes to be one of the most powerful instances of the postcolonial transformation of modernity. Where Western modernity became characterised by openness to the future we see now a situation in which that openness is revolutionized by the political agency of memory. These various features of Afro-modernity: its supra-national character; its circulation and re-circulation of liberating discourses of identity; its recovery of history in a vision of the future are all, incidentally, features of the utopian in African literature, features shared and augmented by a growing utopianism in other postcolonial literatures.

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 diasporic populations is not characterized simply by loss and absence from the nation-state. Such circulation supervenes national boundaries, but *inward* as well as outward. The antiquity and adaptability of Indian civilization, and the nature of its engagement 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.[36]

Similarly China, despite its historic inwardness, "can no longer be limited to the more or less fixed area of its official spatial and cultural

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35 Alexander Crummell, *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969), 13.

36 Vijay Mishra, "The Diasporic Imaginary: Theorizing the Indian Diaspora," *Textual Practice* 10.3 (1996): 422.

boundaries," nor, conversely, as Ien Ang says, "can it be held up as providing the authentic, authoritative and uncontested standard for all things Chinese."[37] This 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," according to Ang, 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 modernity is multiple. When we use the example of postcolonial 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. Multiple modernities are a phenomenon in which socio-political theories of modernity find a harmonious conjunction with postcolonial 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.

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37 Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 225.

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