(UN)MAKING MODERNITY AND MODERNISATION: A CONCEPTUAL INQUIRY

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Abstract

"The world about us has changed and is continually changing at an ever-accellerating [*sic*] pace. So have we. With the increase in media coverage and information technology, we see more of the world, comprehend its working a little more clearly, and as a result our perception of ourselves and the society surrounding us has been modified. Consequently, we begin to make demands upon the art and culture that is meant to reflect the constantly shifting landscape we find ourselves in. We demand new themes, new insights, new dramatic situations. We demand new heroes" (Alan Moore, 'An Introduction' to Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*).

Key words: modernity, post-modernity, (post) colonialism, capitalism, Buddhism.

Introduction

The concept of 'modernity' is a key one across a range of philosophical traditions, as well as within anthropology and sociology. Thus, a consideration of 'modernity' is at the core of this article. Closely related to modernity is the issue of subjectivity, which is a key one amongst the disciplines under discussion. In the philosophical tradition, at least, subjectivity is at the very heart of 'modernity.' In order to accomplish this, some basic parameters of the discussion need to be established, such as what is meant by 'modern' and 'modernity.' A more detailed discussion of modernity and modernisation will therefore follow below, developing issues associated with defining these terms.

It is not my intention to attempt a definitive overview of all the debates, over all the various disciplines and over all their histories, surrounding the issue of modernity. Rather, I would like to provide a brief background to my own theoretical positioning and argument concerning the topic. As such, the following discussion is not exhaustive, but is intended to lead to a productive articulation of modernity in general terms.

(Un)making Modern

At the risk of pedantry, the explication of *modern* and the related terminology, modernity and modernisation, becomes necessary largely due to their very 'common-sense' status. We all know what 'modern' means because we are 'modern.' It is this same assumption, or other like assumptions, which probably leads to the often loose usage of the terms mentioned, and to the, perhaps unconscious, practice of denying 'modernity' (or post-modernity) to others (Morley 1996b). I have employed

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the phrase 'the modern' as a heuristic marker, which refers to that self-same 'common-sense' definition of modernity, i.e., capitalism, democracy, and the nation-state. Though this model is highly problematic, it is also (rightly or wrongly) the default 'yard-stick' -serving as the model to either work towards or against. Many of the world's leading nation-states, such the United Kingdom, and most transnational businesses and agencies (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) are ideologically based upon, and in certain cases proselytize, this model. As such, its employment or deployment is far from 'value-free.' In practical terms, however, *realpolitik* ensures that this also becomes the preeminent 'goal' for nation-states classed as Second or Third World, even if the ideological objectives are not necessarily shared.[17] This is not to argue that the above is the only definition of 'modern' available or possible, nor that this model must be accepted, merely that it is the 'winning' model at this time. As we will see, this has implications beyond that of how 'democratic,' or economically 'open,' a particular country is. Further, as this model is the basis for 'real world' government policy, discursive agendas, or indeed wars, it also forms part of the foundation for the theoretical arguments of this article.

'Modernisation' will refer to the historical or 'practical' aspects of the move to 'the modern,' i.e., social, political and economic reforms. However, modernisation also includes a more ephemeral 'bundle' of assumptions and/or expectations, inherent to the processes of modernisation, and that is both the result and the prerequisite of these processes. I will be discussing this point in more detail below, so for the moment I merely wish to clarify my usage and to signal a problematisation of another 'common sense' term. 'Modernity' is also imbued with a 'common sense' definition and usage. The term is usually taken to refer to a fixed moment in time where there is/was a tangible and discrete shift to 'the modern.' However, modernity is taken to mean that point in time where there is a perception of, or discursive agendas developed upon, a shift to 'the modern.' Further, both the realisation and the discourse may involve that of a *lack* of 'modernity,' either in whole or in part. Modernity is a *process*, rather than a fixed end-point.

In the formulation thus proposed, democracy would fit into the sphere of modernisation, as a move towards a 'modern' form of authority and political control. This move includes the formation of political, bureaucratic and social institutions. However, there are also subjectivities related to the individual and the nation-state; an individuated, rational subject with inherent rights and obligations to civil society. This subject is both assumed by, and is the basis for, democracy. 'Modernity' relates to the site of discourses surrounding the awareness of a 'break' with past institutional manifestations, such as feudal or autocratic. These sites may be co-terminous with their respective modernising activities. The French and American Revolutions, where the 'bundles' of individual freedoms and equality/egalitarianism were employed as ideological tools, illustrate this point. The revolutionaries created more widespread discursive arenas surrounding these issues. However, the

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[17] For example, the binding together of financial aid with political or economic reforms, as is the case with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the United States; or acquiring favourable trading relations with First World nation-states.

34

construction of these sites may also occur long afterwards. When discussing the long-term development of democracy, various points in time, and various contexts, are positioned as being 'when we became modern'.

Developing Modernity

Debates regarding modernity have a long and distinguished history, and the subject remains a prime focal point for arguments both within and without the academic community. A prime incidence of this, and in direct relation to this article, would be the 'Asian Values' debate.

Described briefly, the 'Asian Values' debate centred upon a series of claims and counter-claims vis-a-vis the universality of Western liberal/humanist socio-political ideologies. Ironically, the flashpoint for the debate was the less-than-liberal essay by Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), though Frances Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis (1992) also raised the occasional eyebrow (Lingle 1996; Mahbubani 1998). Huntington argued that there is a shifting of power amongst the world's 'civilisations,' principally from Western civilisation, to Confucian and Islamic 'civilisations.' Fukuyama, on the other hand, famously stated that with the collapse of communism in Europe, the West has 'won' the ideological battle, hence the 'end' of history.

The upshot was a debate over aspects of Western liberal thought, such as free press and individual liberty. [Proponents of Western liberalism such as Christopher Lingle engaged with the proponents of 'Asian Values,' such as Kishore Mahbubani.?] Mahbubani, in a series of articles published in the early 1990s, questioned the uncritical acceptance of various liberal/humanist dogma, and proposed that there was another path available for Asia and Asians. Mahbubani and others of the 'Singapore School' (Lingle 1996: 30) advocated 'a period of strong and firm government' necessary for Asian countries (Mahbubani 1998: 48), and that liberal criticisms of 'authoritarian capitalism' or 'authoritarian democracy' were counter-productive and dismissive of the specifics of Asian society. Asian nation-states could be modern without being Western or liberal (1998: 115-137). In terms of this latter point, the 'Asian Values' proponents claim that economic modernisation could, and more importantly, should, take place without social and political modernisation. The response to the Asian Values proponents were various counter-challenges to the values espoused by the 'Singapore School,' principally that their arguments were fundamentally the acts of 'would be losers' seeking to protect the *status quo* (Lingle 1996: 37), and that attempting to control individualism and democratisation through the censure of the press and draconian legislature is ultimately futile.

Since the economic problems of 1997, the debate has died away, but the questions raised are of lasting importance. Is the Western model of modernity the only one? Is modernisation of one institution, such as the economic sphere, possible without the modernisation of other institutions? Through the course of this article, some of these questions will be addressed. Before tackling these questions however, it

is time to take a step back, and deal with some of the other issues that surround 'modernity'.

Modernity, Cascardi argues, is inherently linked to the development of human consciousness, specifically that of the self-aware human subject, i.e., subjectivity (1992: 2). The forms, or stages, of consciousness, following Hegel (Habermas 1987: 5), are typically depicted as being: *Ancient* - wherein humans and the universe are indivisible, as in shamanistic or magical beliefs and practices; *Medieval* - where there is the belief that human consciousness is determined by God; and *Modern* - with the focus upon the individuated and self-aware being; the self aware of itself as self. While Weber is a prime example of this tripartite division of human consciousness, this formation has had a profound impact upon the way that thinkers have approached the issues of modernity and subjectivity (Giddens 1971; Kolb 1986; Habermas 1987; Cascardi 1992). The beginning of the philosophical debate of 'modernity' centred on the move from deterministic awareness (Medieval) to self-awareness. To provide an epistemological history for modernity would necessitate a discussion extending back to the Classical period of Plato and Aristotle at least (Flew 1971: 15-38); however, the overt discussion of subjectivity has a slightly shorter pedigree. It is with Descartes' claim that 'I think; therefore, I am,' and Kant's arguments with Spinoza over human consciousness that the subject *qua* subject becomes formally articulated (Solomon 1981; Caws 1984; Neuhouser 1990). Here, Flew suggests David Hume as 'the first major thinker of the modern period to develop a world-outlook which was through and through secular, this-worldly, and man-centred' (Flew 1971: 84). Flew also mentions that Spinoza is at once regarded as 'the God-intoxicated man' and 'one of the founding fathers of modern atheist materialism' (Flew 1971: 383). Indeed, most commentators have their own favourite suggestion as to the 'father' of modernity, and this in itself is arguably a rationale for the argument to follow.

Whether or not these were indeed the 'primal moments,' the critical point is that there was, over time, a move away from a deterministic view of human consciousness to that of a subjective view (Habermas 1987). What we typically refer to as 'The Enlightenment' was a culmination of the philosophical points mentioned earlier, along with political and economic discourses developed through thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes (Caws 1979; Cascardi 1992).[18] However, this is somewhat disingenuous, as the French, English, Scottish, and German Enlightenments were diverse in their approaches and trajectories, and were at times antagonistic (Solomon 1981; Koepping 1995). What justifies the overarching delineation of 'The Enlightenment,' however, is that it is the subject which is of central importance in these discourses, as it provides the foundation for the nation and civil society, which 'placed strong emphasis on the powers of human reason and the importance of science and philosophical criticism' (Solomon 1981: 3-4).

Post-Enlightenment thinkers carried on and developed the debates around the subject along two paths, the hard rationalism of English Liberal/Utilitarian thought,

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[18] As we see even with the mention of these two names, and their diverse conceptualisations of the human condition, there is at least as much diversity as unity in The Enlightenment (see also Todorov 1993: 20-21).

and the idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel (Solomon 1981; Cascardi 1992; and Koepping 1995). In either case, however, the subject was no longer an idea needed to be argued, but the assumed foundation for their discourses. Indeed, by the time of Hegel,

the modern age stood above all under the sign of subjective freedom. This was realized in society as the space secured by civil law for the rational pursuit of one's own interests; in the state, as [the in principle?] [sic] equal rights to participation in the formation of political will; in the public sphere as ethical autonomy and self-realization (Habermas 1987: 83).

We had, with apologies to Latour (1993), become 'modern.' Through the course of eighteenth century philosophical thought, particularly amongst idealists, modernity and subjectivity were increasingly constructed as self-referential systems, carrying on the Enlightenment project. Modernity increasingly constructed 'its own normality out of itself' (Habermas 1987: 7; Cascardi 1992). Subjectivity was intrinsically involved in these normative processes, creating the situation where 'subjectivistic rationality' became the only forum of authority possible (Giddens 1971: 169-184).

Although the deterministic idea has never disappeared completely, it is the various mutations of the concept of the self-aware human subject (Idealism, Liberalism[É?]) which have held sway in Western sciences and popular thought. However, there was a 'backlash' against Enlightenment thought. This offensive has come from different arenas of thought, discipline, and position. The 'grand discourses' of the Enlightenment have come in for particular challenge, whether this is in terms of power and authority (Foucault 1978, 1982; Clifford & Marcus 1986), the generalising and controlling discourses of colonialism (Said 1978; Bhabha 1990), or the more particular relations of Enlightenment thought to vision and visualising (Mulvey 1975; Jay 1994).[19] In the philosophical tradition, Nietzsche and Heiddeger (amongst many others) brought the underlying self-referential precepts of modernity and subjectivity into question. While Heiddeger's criticisms of Enlightenment-esque constructs continue to be influential, he, and those who have followed his lead, operate mainly from a counter-Enlightenment (or anti-dialectic) stance. That is, they operate within the same paradigm, but take an oppositional stance (Kolb 1986: passim; Habermas 1987: 133-134). Nietzsche, on the other hand, attempted to step beyond the dialect evolved through Kant, the Enlightenment, and Hegel (Habermas 1987: 87). Modernity thus is no longer constructed as an epoch, but rather as the latest period in the continuing transformation of human rationality. Subjectivity also loses some of its privilege, and becomes a concept to be surpassed, rather than an issue of ontological archaeology (Habermas 1987: 214; cf. Heiddeger 1962, 1971, 1972). It is in this context as well as in relation to other thinkers of 'the modern' such as Todorov (1993), Latour (1993), Taylor (1995, 1999), and Aug• (1995) that the present discussion of modernity takes place.

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[*] This is most definitely not intended as a comprehensive listing of all those critical of the Enlightenment or to delineate their individual epistemologies, but to provide a 'taste' of the authors and positions of criticism.

Modernity, however, entails more than just a shift to self-awareness. The nature of modernity is marked not only by the emergence of the subject [...], but by a redistribution of the authority of reason and value, by the consolidation of the position of the individual as subject to the authority of the sovereign in the Liberal-Absolutist State, by the simultaneous increase in the mobility of the psyche and a heightening of the repressive powers of society, and by a reconception of the relationship between nature and the literary work of art (Cascardi 1992: 24-25).

As such, the instruments by which modernity, the move to 'the modern,' developed from another arena of debate. For some other commentators, the discussion of modernity, and particularly the 'invention' or development of modernity, is largely limited to institutional structures such as economic rationalisation, development of new manufacturing techniques, or indeed 'sciences of order'. The more 'sociological' approaches to modernity, including work by many anthropologists (applied and otherwise), have tended to concentrate upon these very aspects, and have their roots in the works of Marx and Weber (Giddens 1971; Habermas 1987).[20] Leaving aside Marx for the moment, one of Weber's fundamental 'tasks' was to explain why rational modernity took place in the West, and only in the West (Garth & Mills 1946; Giddens 1971; Kolb 1986; Habermas 1987). In doing so, Weber argued that the West underwent a process of *disenchantment* during the shift from the medieval to the modern. This disenchantment came *via* several agencies; particularly science, capitalism, Protestantism, and state bureaucracy (Giddens 1971; Habermas 1987). However, in attempting to explain what he saw as a unique phenomenon (Western rational modernity), Weber ultimately became involved in a project of *explaining away* non-Western rationality (Kolb 1986).

Marx was in some ways even more focused in his theories regarding modernity as with the base-superstructure argument. Capitalism and the economic sphere *are* the modern world. This situation is both a process of history and an artefact of Capitalism and the Enlightenment's own projects and processes. Thus, for Marx capitalism/modernity creates its own normative logic, truth, and validity. Indeed, Weber's own project illustrates this point. The very formulation of the questions he was attempting to answer (why rational modernity was limited to the West) was based upon a modernist assumption, namely, modernity's own uniqueness (Habermas 1987: 7). While certainly far from 'wrong', these conceptualisations of modernity leave several questions unanswered. How do we account for instances of various institutions which are ideologically positioned as being 'modern,' but which show up in pre-modern, or non-western, societies? How do we explain the seeming creation out of nothingness of these instrumentals; and what happens if aspects of modern society are 'imported'? In the hope of providing some answer to these questions, I will make four suggestions, and concurrently, outline my proposal for the framing of modernity.

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[20] The 'instrumental' or institutional approach to modernity/modernisation has a long history in the applied anthropology canon. A legacy of this approach is the lingering perception of globalisation and or modernisation in narrow black and white terms. Work by Miller (1987, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2000), Appadurai (1990, 1991, 2000), Thomas (1994, 1995), and O'Hanlon (1995) amongst many others have challenged facile renderings of globalisation and/or development, demonstrating how global institutions may be appropriated and strategically re-deployed at the local level.

After Modernity

As mentioned above, I would like to make four proposals for ways in which to discuss modernity/modernisation productively. While these points will be discussed as discrete units, they are inter-related. For the moment however, they will be presented separately.

The first of the four proposals is that we should regard modernity, as much as modernisation, as a *process* rather than a formalistic endpoint. While few, I think, would argue that modernisation is a not process, modernity, as stated previously, is regarded as somehow being a discrete, bounded, point in time. Ironically, this may be a by-product of that very same process of modernity itself:

> Insofar as the invention of subjectivity marks the beginning of the modern age by laying claim to an absolute break within time, it is aligned to a concept of modernity that is equally abstract and false; for, strictly speaking, there is neither a temporal nor an absolute break, only what amounts to the consciousness of such a break, combined [...] with the attempt to subordinate it to "rational" ends (Cascardi 1992: 69; see also Habermas 1987: 7, 55-56).

The attempt to compartmentalise 'modernity' as developing in some primal moment necessitates the elision of any elements potentially classifiable as modernity within pre-modern societies or periods (Kolb 1986). Even without going into the potentiality for claims of Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism or some form of temporal-centrism, which this move engenders, the result is one of an epistemological 'Immaculate Conception.' Jameson discusses this problem in terms of the 'post-modern':

> Historical and periodizing questions [É], however, requires attention to the ambiguity of the term postmodern itself, which must designate a whole historical period and its 'structure of feeling' [É], but which risks slipping inappreciably [É] into the rather different sense of an aesthetic style or set of formal properties. The slippage is significant, since it has been argued that much of the content of what has been called, in art, architecture or thought alike, postmodernism is in reality modernist indeed, that a pure postmodernism may well be *a priori* impossible as such, always involving the treatment of essentially modernist residues (Jameson 1992: 116).

Perhaps, as we have already seen with Weber, the 'problem' lies in the very formulation of the question. Without the formalism of 'a whole historical period' and 'pure postmodernism' then post-modernism may not be so 'impossible.'[21] If the 'modernist residues' are regarded not as problems, but as inevitabilities (or at least as likelihoods), then perhaps the analyses can also move on to new agendas, such as illustrating and analysing these sites of changes and residues, rather than attempting to delimit what is or is not 'post-modern' and *explaining away* those 'residues' (see also Kolb 1986).

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[21] Indeed, a 'pure' postmodernism *is* impossible, and as I hope to show, as impossible as a 'pure' modernity.

The second proposal is that it may be productive to regard modernity and modernization as 'openings of discourse' in thought and society, creating new discursive spaces in religion, economics, family, and/or sexuality, where various forces, rhetorics, interpretations, and counter-interpretations are brought to bear. The mechanics of these openings will be different, but regarding each as creating discursive spaces for other discourses takes the discussion away from 'first causes.' As an instance, it has often been posited that 'the modern' came with the Enlightenment; however, this positioning dismisses the role of other historical periods and non-European influences. Various groups and individuals involved in the various Enlightenment projects most certainly have had a great deal of influence not only for contemporary Western society but also for other peripheral countries as well. One instance, and highly topical at the time of writing, is the issue of the 'rule of law,' the highly formalistic legal ethos upon which the judicial and legislative systems of 'modern' nation-states are based. The formulation of this system, based upon ideas of civil society and the individual, was a critical agenda of the French Enlightenment (Koepping 1995). However, this rule-based legal system is intrinsically part of Judeo-Christianity, as well as Islam, which in turn has an antecedent in the Hammurabian legal codes of Babylon. What is more interesting, if not important, is not 'who did it first,' but why did a particular form of law become the dominant referent. To this end, the analysis may benefit from the positing that as part of a historical process and discourse, the form of law in question has precursors both in terms of discursive agendas and socio-historical events. These precursors (such as Christianity, anti-feudal movements, or nascent capitalist and liberal ideologies) opened a site of discourse wherein 'law' as we accept it became intrinsically linked to other 'modernising' discourses (the individual, the state, etc.). What is more, formalistic legalism in turn would have opened other sites of discourse, such as reconceptualisations of the relations between subject and state (and of 'the modern' itself), which were part of the discursive arenas initially framing the issue of 'law.' Eisenstadt also uses Central Europe as an example in his discussion of the tensions within the programme of democracy and modernity, such as what the boundaries are for the political sphere (Eisenstadt 1996).

The third proposal is that modernity and modernisation are relational. As modernity and modernisation are processual, that there is no 'absolute break in time,' they exist in, and as, strategic relations to that which has gone before (and by implication, that which is to come after). This point is in some ways close to that of the previous principle, but differs in the agency of the usage of 'pre-modernity.' As defined above, modernity refers to the site of discourses surrounding the perception of a 'break' with the past. This site is also the locus wherein various groups engage in debates over the necessity, the implementation, and the perceived achievement, of the goals of modernisation - the creation of modern institutions. I should point out here that not all of these contestants are equally powerful, for instance, certain elements will have more control of the discourse, particularly in terms of wider spheres of political and socio-economic authority. As strategic tools, the past and historical institutions are particularly useful in the debates over what is, should, will, constitute 'the modern.' As I have pointed out, various commentators position various times and places as being where 'the modern' began. These sites, or at

least aspects of these sites, are thus opened to strategic (ab)use. Indeed, modernisation can take place, or be seen to need to take place, within a modern nation-state as neither modernisation nor a 'modern' nation-state are unified monolithic structures. 'Pre-modern' (or at least that which is deemed 'pre-modern') structures and institutions may therefore be employed as modernising tools (Roff 1973; Kolb 1986; Giddens 1994; Wallerstein 1996). In the process, those 'pre-modern' institutions may themselves be 'modernised.'

Finally, the fourth proposal is that the various elements comprising 'the modern' (particularly in terms of the 'bundles' of expectations) should be regarded as dialectically linked. While the intended change towards 'the modern' may be in, and of, one particular aspect of modernisation, such as economic reform, the introduction (opening of discourse) of this one element leads to changes in expectations and to new discourses (Scott 1999, 2004, Charkrabarthy 2000, 2002). David Scott, in his *Conscripts of Modernity,* points the way toward a rethinking of the present postcolonial moment. He argues that if scholars of modernity and post-colonialism want to alter understandings of the stalled and disillusioned present - and thereby offer new prospects for the future - they must reconceive the relation of the past to the present (Scott 2004). Dipesh Chakrabarty, the author of *Provincialising Europe*, whose meditations on the limits of Western notions of modernity and history are impelled by work of Benjamin but who also has the word 'postcolonial' in his subtitle, was born in Calcutta. His inquiry is partly directed by the contingencies of being a South Asian historian in America, and also by being a founder member of the subaltern studies project, which attempted to write a South Asian or, specifically, Indian history 'from below', by bringing the 'subaltern' (Gramsci's word for the peasant or the economically dispossessed) into the territory largely occupied by nationalist history. However, the inquiry is also shaped by the Calcutta Chakrabarty was born in, as much as Benjamin's work is shaped by the Paris he reimagined and, to a certain extent, invented. From the early 19th century, the growing Bengali intelligentsia in Calcutta was increasingly exercised by what 'modernity' might mean and what the experience of modernity might represent, specifically, to a subject nation, and, universally, to a human being. His argument on 'modernity' is not only an unusually sustained and nuanced argument against European ideas of modernity, but also an elegy for, and subtle critique of, his own intellectual formation and inheritance as a Bengali. The kind of Bengali who was synonymous with modernity and who believed that modernity might be a universal condition - irrespective of whether you're English, Indian, Arab or African - has now passed into extinction (Chakrabarty 2000). Chakrabarty inquires into why that potent Bengali dream did not quite work - why 'modernity' remains so resolutely European. These latter developments may, or may not, have been foreseen by those implementing the reforms.

By deconstructing and subsequently reconstructing the terms modernity and modernisation in this manner, the depiction of either modernisation or modernity as monolithic entities will, hopefully, be avoided. For instance, this formulation allows the conceptual space to argue that 'pre-modern' structures can be used strategically, that is, as tactical 'weapons' in the negotiations over modernisation

and modernity. As the 'traditional' structures which modernisation and modernity are operating in relation to are diverse, the 'paths' to becoming 'modern' will/can also be diverse. To what extent the outcomes of these diverse paths will be similar is debatable, but I would argue that while the manifestations or discourses of modernity may be different, the underlying shifts in attitudes and expectations will lead to similar (though as pointed out, not identical) outcomes. To return to the example already used, in terms of democratisation, modernity necessitates an individuated subject who is in particular sets of relations with the nation-state. For various socio-historical reasons (even biographical factors), the relations and expectations of particular subjects to their nation-states will be different. As an instance, within the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim sections of Sri Lankan society, rural ethnic groups are less integrated into the processes of modernisation than are urban Sri Lankan (whether that means less affected is another matter entirely). Within the urban population the working and lower-middle class are less integrated than are the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim elite. Sinhala Buddhists are arguably even more integrated than are the Tamil and Muslim elite in contemporary Sri Lanka. An important consideration here is that this tight integration positions the new urban middle class as an internal 'Other,' who, along with the external 'Other' (Westerners), can serve as exemplars of modernity, both in terms of its benefits and dangers.

To sum up, none of the above is intended to argue that the shift to the modern is necessarily smooth and seamless. The changes inherent to modernisation and modernity will cause socio-cultural, political and economic disjunctures. Regarding modernity, the locus of disjuncture typically surrounds the issue of individuality; and is made manifest in the social and discursive arenas of gender and/or sexuality, religion, authority, and the family. In other words, modernity, and its expectant/ expected subject, has direct consequences for the problem of legitimisation: some groups in modern society will in fact have more power than others, and yet no group seems more entitled to dominate the rest.

'Modernity' Project(s) in Sri Lanka

As Talal Asad points out, modern projects do not hang together as an integrated totality, but they account for distinctive sensibilities, aesthetics, moralities. What is distinctive about modernity *as a historical epoch* includes modernity as a political economic project (Asad 2003:14). But what evidence is there of such a thing as " a modern project"? Is there one? How was such a modern project conceived and developed in the soil of Lanka? What I want do in the final part of this paper is to examine a few 'modernity narratives' in Sri Lanka, which were vividly set out by a few distinguished sociologists/anthropologists, namely, David Scott (Colonial Governmentality), Gananath Obeyesekere (Protestant Buddhism), Newton Gunasinghe (Peripheral Capitalism) and Nira Wickramasinghe (Modern Age).

Through a series of linked essays on culture and politics in his native Jamaica and in Sri Lanka, the site of his long scholarly involvement, Scott examines the ways in which modernity inserted itself into and altered the lives of the colonized. The institutional procedures encoded in these modern postcolonial states and their legal

systems come under scrutiny, as do our contemporary languages of the political. Scott demonstrates that modern concepts of political representation, community, rights, justice, obligation, and the common good do not apply universally and require reconsideration. His ultimate goal is to describe the modern colonial past in a way that enables us to appreciate more deeply the contours of our historical present and that enlarges the possibility of reshaping it.

Scott seems to be suggesting a renewed focus on uncovering a history of the *deep structures* of modernity (in Sri Lanka and Jamaica) and how these epistemic forms entered into colonial and postcolonial societies. In making his case, he introduces the decidedly Foucaultian notion of "colonial governmentality" as the mechanism through which the deep structures of modernity's epistemic forms entered into the colonial—and ultimately postcolonial—consciousness. The turning point, he suggests, was in the mid-nineteenth century when the imperial project, and its institutional expression as the colonial state, initiated new disciplinary forms of domination. New colonial legal practices *vis-à-vis* land and property ownership were thus more than mere economic procedures but were "a new organization of social power in which the division of labour and the exchange mechanism of the market were to operate in such a fashion as to oblige a progressive desire for industry, regularity, and individual accomplishment" (1999: 48). The new school systems and the court systems under colonial rule likewise ushered in not only new social procedures, but also new cultural forms "that would reach down to the very 'motives' of the native and not only constrain or induce him to alter them but also encourage him to appreciate the alteration" (1999: 50).

In the story of the formation of Sri Lanka's modernity, as Scott puts it, the reforms known historiographically as the Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms established the definitive moment of the break with the "medieval" or "feudal" past. These reforms were far-reaching and comprehensive: they led to the unification of the administration of the island, the establishment of executive and legislative councils, judicial reform, the development of capitalist agriculture, and modern means of communication, education, and the press (ibid. 42). The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms of the 1830s onward - with its new social institutions and social spaces – constructed the modern individual as a disciplined, receptive, reasoning subject with a sharply delineated identity. These new conditions amounted to new social and legal conditions of property and labour, a new social and legal space for the desiring subject. For Scott, to create such conditions colonial power had to direct itself at breaking down those "ancient usages" that irrationally connected people to obligations of service and through the construction of a notion of rights. Now the native would be obliged to learn the new relation between temporality and voluntary productiveness, but not by the old forms of authority and hierarchy that *rajakariya* entailed, those based principally on caste. For now the only principles of economic authority and self-regulating demands of the market, which operated not on such aggregates as caste but on individuals responding only to the rational or natural pressure of want and self-interest (ibid. 47-48).

43

Beyond Sri Lanka, Scott's picture of the postcolonial present, after the collapse of the socioeconomic and political hopes that animated ani colonial and independence movements, is bleak. He identifies an "acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination, the rampant corruption and vicious authoritarianism, the instrumental self-interest and showy self-congratulation" as symptoms of a utopian project that has run out of steam and turned into a "nightmare" (2004: 2). Scott sees asking new questions about the colonial past as a way of working out new answers for the present and maybe the future. According to him, post colonialism continues to emphasize the dismal effects of colonialism and the agency of the colonized in resisting and overcoming the hated structure. While not denying colonialism's violence and exploitation, he contends that there is a need to reconceive the object of discontent. Although his alternative may not be satisfactory, Scott makes a convincing case for the limits of postcolonial criticism as it currently stands.

Gananath Obeyesekere is certainly correct in claiming that Buddhism is going through significant transformations in Sri Lanka (and elsewhere) and that it is necessary to identify with modernity or rapidly changing socioeconomic and political conditions in order to make sense of these religious changes. It is essential to grasp how modernity [rather radically different socioeconomic conditions] have contributed to new suffering, needs, expectations, alienation, and frustration, and how new forms of Sinhala Buddhism have arisen from and responded to these new conditions.

"Protestant Buddhism, a term previously coined by Obeyesekere, started in the late nineteenth century under the formative influence of Anagarika Dharmapala. It was strongly influenced by the "modern" values of the British colonialists, it incorporated the characteristics of Protestant Christianity, and at the same time it represented a modern Buddhist revival and protest against the privilege and domination by the British in general and Protestant Christian missionaries in particular (Gombrich & Obeyesekere 1988).

Unlike spirit religion, Protestant Buddhism appeals to the more privileged urban middle class and reflects the cultural values of a bourgeois Protestantism, as Obeyesekere puts it, "the emergent political and social self-consciousness of urban Buddhists" (1972: 48-47). In departing from traditional Theravada, it blurs the sharp dichotomy between the hierarchically dominant and indispensable monks and the subordinate laity, emphasizing the greater capacity of the individual to seek his or her own salvation without the need of intermediaries and traditional authorities. Within Protestant Buddhism, this has contributed not only to the laicization of much of the religion, the undermining of the status and role of the sangha, greater social egalitarianism, and the increased status of women (including the reemergence of monastic orders of nuns) but also greater social fragmentation and some rather bizarre new phenomena often described as Buddhist "fundamentalism" and claiming to be more authentically Buddhist than traditional Theravada (see De Silva 2006). No doubt, the "Protestant Buddhism" opened the space for the telling of a conceptually coherent story about the relation between Buddhism and modern, specifically nationalist politics.

The socio-political challenge issued by the concept of 'Protestant Buddhism" was later taken up by anthropologists, namely, Kitsiri Malalgoda (1973) and H. L. Seneviratne (1999). What is interesting here is the way they set up their arguments to tell the story about the relation between religion and colonialism and, by extention, between religion and modernity in Sri Lanka. Let us focus on the most recent work: *Work of Kings: Buddhist Modernism in Sri Lanka.* Seneviratne's main subject of inquiry is the Sinhala Buddhist monkhood—the sangha. Part of his labour is to trace, in a somewhat genealogical fashion, "the definition of a new role for the Buddhist monk" (p. 7) in the dynamics of early 20th-century Sri Lanka. He holds that this new definition, "which was one aspect of the movement to modernize Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism... has been detrimental to the happiness and well-being of the people of Sri Lanka" (p. 7), a point that, as the author himself seems to conjecture, is bound to be controversial (p. xii). Dharmapala is one of the model examples of the intricate interplay between the colonized and the colonizer, the orientalist and the native that produced particular authoritative knowledges about Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Seneviratne reads Dharmapala's career in terms of the Buddhist revival and views him as the "founder of Buddhist modernism" (p. 27). He argues that Dharmapala was influenced by certain ideas of canonical Buddhism and those of the Christian missionary, and thus insisted upon cultivating a culture of "true" Buddhism divested of ritualism and consisting of hard work geared towards the economic betterment of the Sinhalese (pp. 27, 35). Dharmapala's message, although romantic and idyllic, inaugurated a "spiritual army" (p. 42) of "[monk]-soldiers and hero-giants of regeneration" (p. 189). Dharmapala, as Seneviratne explains, understood the new task of the monastery-led national regeneration to be twofold - economic and cultural. The economic project was taken up in the 1930s and 1940s by a section of the monks, primarily those of the Vidyodaya monastic college, founded in 1873 in the City of Colombo (ibid. 56-129). Their project, following Dharmapala's plan, was 'rural development' for an impoverished peasantry, and their general outlook, according to Seneviratne, was to accept ethnic and cultural diversity as a fact of Sri Lankan life (ibid.).

The 'cultural' aspect of Dharmapala's nationalist project which, as Seneviratne explains, was more favoured by the monks of Vidyalankara, the other prominent monastic college founded in 1875, also located in Colombo (Seneviratne 1999: 130-188). This part of the project became visible in the mid 1940s and reached its climax in the electoral victory of the nationalist forces in 1956. Seneviratne goes on to say that, unlike the rural development monks of the Vidyodaya college, these monks advocated an exclusivist and hegemonic appropriation of the country for the majority ethnic group, the Sinhalese, and their religion, Buddhism. These monks borrowed Dharmapala's slogan 'country, nation, and religion' (*rata, jathiya hâ agama*) and made it a rallying cry for the Sinhala Buddhists so as to justify depriving the Tamils and other minorities of their rights to equal citizenship (ibid.). Finally, Seneviratne sadly concludes that the cultural part of Dharmapala's vision triumphed over 'the more sober and benevolent economic part' and prepared the country for social turmoil, economic stagnation and civil war (see 1999: 333-348). Put more simply, in Seneviratne's view, the Vidyodaya monks were the good patriots, while the Vidyalankara monks were the "narrow nationalists", who perpetuated an

ideology that led to the path of moral "degeneration" (ibid. 128). I am sympathetic to these disciplinary attempts that aim to disarticulate and disarm the hegemony of nationalist claims about nation, religion, identity and development, but I suspect the theoretical soundness of such exercises that seek to excavate the foundation of an authentic cultural past upon which a modern multi-cultural society can be reconstructed. Such reconstruction itself, in my view, is authorized by and rooted in the assumptions of (post)colonial modernism.

The Marxist sociologist Newton Gunasinghe (1984, 1990) argues how Sri Lanka's modernity project was constituted under the "peripheral capitalism" that led to "reactivation of archaic production relation". He describes the Kandyan social formation and its disintegration after the imposition of capitalism. For Gunasinghe, the articulation of this social formation is a highly complex and uneven process which reproduces a vast network of archaic relations and a minute network of 'free' wage labour relations at one and the same time. "This produces a loosely integrated structure with many deformations" (1990: 230). This deformed structure, he argues, which initially rose from the experiences of the early (modern) colonial period, had already concretised itself into an identifiable peripheral capitalist system by the mid nineteenth century. In spite of the important changes that have occurred during the last three decades, he further argues, the peripheral capitalist structure itself has not radically changed, unless it breaks totally from the capitalist mode of production itself. Gunasinghe's argument implies that the possibility of achieving Sri Lanka's capitalist modernity lies within the capitalist modernity itself.

In her recent book "Sri Lanka in the modern age : a history of contested identities" (2006), Nira Wickramasinghe argues that the prevalent liberal, Marxist and nationalist interpretations of modern Sri Lanka succeed in telling only a part of the country's complex story of modernity. These approaches undervalue the role of the common people in major political developments, and the evolution of social identities. The book attempts to correct the biases of the positivist and static view of what constitutes political history, by exploring the impact of colonial and postcolonial knowledge and rules on the Sri Lankan people's consciousness, culture and identity. The cases analysed here demonstrate how Sri Lanka's communities negotiated modernity during the period of late colonialism, and how political consciousness was culturally grounded. The author's goal is to unravel the many layers of multifaceted associations between culture, identity and politics. The book sensitises the reader to the fact that Sri Lanka's multiple identities have not remained passive or dormant as social symbols. They have also been politicised into passive social movements and sometimes violent rebellions. She therefore attempts to understand 20th century Sri Lanka not in the context of its institutionalised politics, upheavals and conflicts, but rather through the prism of its peoples and identity-centred politics. It highlights the growing recognition that there is no single, definitive interpretation of what constitutes Sri Lanka's modernity. The alternative perspectives presented here challenge the traditional and often misleading perceptions and representations of Sri Lankan nationhood, and suggest possible lines for its reinterpretation.

46

The key point, however, is that the prevailing socioeconomic system in modern Sri Lanka is not necessarily about subverting ethnic, racial, or gender identities but, rather, in many ways may work to affirm them. This constitutes a powerful reminder that theorizing modernity effects must take into account the differences between forms of crossover and forms of mobility. What does emerge with some clarity, however, is that modernity may not be definable as an original condition that is emulated or fallen short of but, rather, is constituted out of the multifarious ways in which it is enacted.

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