

Introduction to New Modernities and the "Third World"

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Valerian DeSousa, Jennifer E. Henton, and Geetha Ramanathan,
"Introduction to *New Modernities and the 'Third World'*"
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Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010)
Thematic Issue *New Modernities and the "Third World"*
Edited by Valerian DeSousa, Jennifer E. Henton, and Geetha Ramanathan
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Valerian DeSOUSA, Jennifer E. HENTON, and Geetha RAMANATHAN

Introduction to *New Modernities and the "Third World"*

Guest edited by Valerian DeSousa, Jennifer E. Henton, and Geetha Ramanathan, contributors to the thematic issue *New Modernities and the "Third World"* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/>> of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* explore aspects of the arrival of people, ideas, and artistic movements in the "third world" and their impact on both the "third world" and the "first world." The larger context of the issues and problematics discussed in the articles presented in this thematic issue of the journal is based on the recognition that narratives of travel, exploration, conquest, (im)migration, and similar acts of contact are a major motif of literature and in the study of literature and other expressions of culture (for bibliographies relevant for work in new modernity and "third world" studies, see, e.g., DeSousa <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/14>>; Cheng, Wang, and Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/migrationbibliography>>; Tötösy de Zepetnek and Salzani <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/travelstudiesbibliography>>; Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/postcolonialbibliography>>; and Vieira <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol11/iss3/9>>).

With regard to the concept of the thematic issue, namely modernities and the "third world," we postulate that the use of the designation of "third world" is with a specific connotation as over the last twenty years several sets of labels have been used to gesture towards the legacies of colonialism. Aijaz Ahmad's critique is relevant here as Ahmad criticized the concept of "third world" on the grounds that when it is applied to literature its imprecision and capaciousness devolved to a form of "Orientalism" akin to nineteenth-century anthropological thought although at the same time he acknowledged the concept's potential as polemics (4). Other terms have suited particular disciplines more readily while in the humanities and social sciences the concept of the "third world" suggests that the loci of the designation are spaces of struggle to assert self-referential authority in economic, social, cultural, and political spheres albeit more often than not exclusively in relation to the West. We contend that the concept and its corollaries such as "developing world" or "postcolonial spaces" obscure relations of power. The question of whether many countries considered "third world" in the 1955 Bandung conference of non-aligned nations would still be in that category has been raised and the concept's pejorative connotations have been critiqued increasingly. The binary oppositions between "first" and "third worlds" seem to flatten the differences within each broad region, a problem that is addressed by references to the third world in the first (see Ahmad; Tambiah). It is owing to the controversial nature of the concept that our nomenclature has to reflect current positions towards both the world and our fields of study and that no one designation can encompass all the connections made between a field of study and the world at large. The notion of North/South retains some explanatory power, but does not have the influence and currency of the concept of the postcolonial and the myriad contexts in which it surfaces. Postcolonial, while seemingly neutral and more manageable in terms of constituting canons and constructing theories situates colonialism in the past and this appears to us not applicable in many instances.

The use and orientation towards a particular concept and term is a matter of emphasis. "World bank literature" (see Kumar) is one new conceptualization where the focus is shifted to how literature, film, and art are produced for a Western readership and Western consumers. A term with broader appeal, "transnational studies" (see Hannerz), while working with migration and the dispersion of populations also has currency at the moment, but is not quite appropriate for the studies in the present thematic issue where in several instances the flows of ideas to specific loci are discussed; the nuances attached to the term "cosmopolitanism" (see Cheah and Robbins), while intersecting with several articles in this thematic issue detracts from the investment in specific ideas of the modern; the specificity of "subaltern studies" (see Guha) and the differences drawn between colonized peoples also does not suit the articles here, as many of them are about metropolitan transactions. Another way of posing the validity of the use of the term "third world" with all its imperfections and its ability to forge connections between groups of peoples is to ask whether a moment of "post third world" has arrived and whether the issues presented by the connotations of the term can now be abandoned. This would be analogous to asking if the post-racial and post-feminist moments have been ushered in making the

frameworks both of critiques of race and racism and the subordination of women redundant. Granted, the slotting of countries into "third world" spaces is not stable, but arguably the unevenness of development within these countries is a function of purposeful underdevelopment.

Our use of the concept "third world" is to foster a dialogue about modernity and modernism within traditions and cultures that did not benefit from the accumulation of wealth during the colonial period but contributed to that capital. Our effort, then, is to engage in this discussion without adopting a model much current in comparative literature in the 1980s and 1990s between East and West and between one Euro-American text and one from the "rest." Here, the emphasis is within and between "third world" nations. One imperative of scholarship in the last two decades has been to seek out the meaning of the twinned motifs of arrival and loss that pervade the discourse of the European presence in the "third world" as seen, for example, in the work of Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, T. Mitchell, Laura Doyle and Laure Winkiel, Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby, and Luis Roniger. The notion of arrival itself, of the imperial project's legitimizations of the arrival in the name of evolutionary progress in the first instance of the modern has been relegated to the footnotes of colonial historiography (see Guha; Spivak, "Subaltern Studies"). However, the myth of the arrival of the modern, of Europe's stranglehold on scientific modernity buried in this discourse is harder to shake off. Social Darwinism, that great foundational discourse for the importation of modernity as an essential good for the civilizational development of humanity, combined with emphasis on the Enlightenment and its rationality stabilized definitions of the modern to Western industrial centers, thus conflating technology with modernity. This framework pressed ideologies and aesthetics of the modern into the service of the West. We postulate that such overly flattened views of the flow of modernity moving from imperial capital to colony has been subverted by the sometimes tentative hold of the center on its own self-image. Indeed, in the field of letters, British high modernism — including Conrad, Joyce, Lawrence, or Woolf — have been recruited to unfold the crisis of the ego both in the case of the consolidation and collapse of empire or the arrival of the modern and to explore the emergence of the "new woman," again both to advance her cause and to inhibit it. Raymond Williams and others have argued that Western modernism itself could not be constituted without the arrival of migrants, strangers, foreigners, others to the metropolis. He asserts that an unthinking diffusion of the category of the modern across the globe is and has been untenable. Discussing early twentieth-century aesthetic modernism that regulated the category, Williams suggested that "The central product of that earlier period, for reasons which must be explored, was a new set of 'universals,' aesthetic, intellectual and psychological, which can be sharply contrasted with the older 'universals' of specific cultures, periods and faiths, but which in just that quality resist all further specificities, of historical change or of cultural and social diversity: in the conviction of what is beyond question and for all effective time the 'modern absolute,' the defined universality of a human condition which is effectively permanent" (38).

The problem of modernity and its aesthetic movements has been its local derivation, its ownership, and its persistent lack of acknowledgement of other, more unrecognizable modernities and modern aesthetic movements. While extreme pronouncements against the possibilities of modernity for the "third world" made by Hegel and Marx edged out other more nuanced voices, modernity, as a Western imperative, has influenced our understanding of modernist art and literary and social movements in the twentieth century. This over-articulated framework has, over the last ten years, been challenged by historians, sociologists, and scholars of literature who have put forward the notion that modernity is a provincial commodity, a vaunted import structurally uninformed in its emphases on colonialism and native responses to Western economic and cultural incursions. Over the last twenty years, offshoots from primary critiques of modernity that charge the West with co-opting the intellectual wherewithal of modernity and shaping it in its own image are vast and rich. Current scholarship seeks to redress these lacunae in our knowledge of "third world" modernity by studying the loci of modernity rigorously. In contemporary discourses, the idea of an expanded modernity has become axiomatic and definitions and illustrations of the modern have been amplified to include other regions often with reference to the West or to grapple with the different forms of modernity in these spaces. Studies presented in this thematic issue supplement this larger effort and tackle the central question of whether, indeed, modernity was an import and thus unravels perceptions of the illusion of modernity's arrival in diverse spaces in the "third world." The very notion of the arrival of modernity to the

periphery raises epistemological issues. Is modernity's arrival marked by temporality or is it recognized as a shift in the mapping of spaces? The articles gathered here address the complexities around the concept of the arrival of modernity to the "third world" and more generally the various ways in which modernity plays out when "third world" investments in modernity are included.

"New modernity studies," the rubric for a venture that fills in the lacunae of our recognition of modernity, has energized our understanding of how both the social and aesthetic modern are composed. Defined as explorations eschewing received Enlightenment shibboleths on modernity, and including historically and culturally specific reflections, the approach of new modernity studies has now established that modernity in non-European contexts can have features that do not necessarily cohere with received ideas of post-Enlightenment modernity and early twentieth-century modernism (see, e.g., Kaup). In this scene of exploration, focus is to question the very arrival of modernity and the sense in which it arrives. If the "third world" subject believes modernity arrives, how does it arrive and how is it received? Indeed, in the field of literature and the study of literature, the valorized features of high modernist aesthetics are challenged by many texts from the periphery and represent themselves as modern. Modernist/modern movements and instances are understood as occurring in specific spaces at the intersection of multiple and uneven fields making inter-disciplinary engagements crucial to opening up this field of endeavor. Historically, during the last two hundred years, the ideas of Western philosophers of a specific modern era, those that enabled the construction of a specific modern identity through radical discourses such as a theory of capital and of the psyche have been vaunted exports. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's alerts us in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* to the coercion of a philosophically and geographically specific modernity that, while ideologically inclusive, is yet unable to accommodate philosophically the native informant. On the matter of the modern aesthetic, Andreas Huyssen quarrels with the "high culture" appropriation of modernism and its narrative of one-way flows (9). Given that these arenas are hefty in their coverage of the modern, contributors to the volume discuss claims to the modern, modes of modernism, and the diffusion of self-consciously modern discourses in the "third world." The articles find an opening into this terrain through careful scrutiny of the trope of arrival within local contexts that are already in the process of engaging modernity for themselves in the nexus of complex debates entertaining the national and its relationship to the world. Yet, the enigma of what comes from outside is both debated and confronted if in highly mediated ways that compromise the arrival.

Work in *New Modernities and the 'Third World'* delineates disciplinary understandings of the arrival of modernity in order to develop a dialogue that formulates an inter-disciplinary comprehension of modernity in the "third world." The collection covers the fields of sociology, philosophy, literature, history, women's studies, and cultural and visual studies. The articles are bound together by the twin axes of the interrogation of the enigma of arrival and the definitive space of periphery. The thematic issue consists of three sets of articles based on the foci of narration (Joseph, DeSousa, Vishwanathan, Aggarwal, Keith and Keith, Ramanathan, Munoz, Van Liew, Masmoudi, Henton, Thomas, Greenberg). These articles raise questions regarding the export of the modern into the periphery. In discussing the paucity of theoretical terms available to analyze the complexity of notions of the modern that are circulating, they suggest that "modernity" itself as a Western package was countered by powerful rearrangements of the modern in local spaces. In developing the course charted by new modernity studies, these studies evaluate the claims to the modern in very specific instances where a compulsory modernity was enjoined. These prescriptive dictates are moderated, absorbed, contested, subverted, and subsumed in the second focus with regard to case studies (Joseph, DeSousa, Vishwanathan, Aggarwal, Keith and Keith). Contributors here suggest that despite the stability and virtue credited to the packet of modernity, the parcel comes with strings attached to the colonial apparatus, the colonial imaginary, and bourgeois national aspiration. The texts explored here concern colonial studies, law, art, popular culture, and philosophy. The claims of Western Enlightenment to modernity in the fields of the sciences, mathematics, philosophy, and theories of society have been naturalized to the extent that they have become commonsensical discourses and as such are too familiar to bear repetition here (on this, see, e.g., see Dussel). How these claims stand up in non-metropolitan areas provides the third focus of articles in the thematic issue (Aggarwal, DeSousa, Munoz, Greenberg, Henton, Joseph, Keith and Keith, Masmoudi, Ramanathan, Thomas, Van Liew, Vishwanathan).

The overarching idea that links the studies presented in the thematic issue posits that modernity, while ostensibly unshakeable on the absolute authority of the law, the nation, and the modern subject practiced a contingent ethics in the application of these ideas, both in the center and in the periphery, albeit in different registers. Modernity, as sign, was exalted, while as signifier it was deployed instrumentally. This instrumentality, used in the interests of an idealized modernity, succeeded in preserving the ideal while allowing practices that fostered the notional modern with scant respect paid to the universal promises that the Western modern had promised the human subject. Consequently, Western modernity became its own rationale, Western proponents of modernity showing a willed forgetfulness for the effects they had sought to achieve through modernity.

In part one of the collection, coming to the topic from British discourses on government and capital, Nigel Joseph in his article "Robert Clive and Imperial Modernity"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/2>> questions the West's claim to being the birthplace of modernity resting on philosophical discourses. He suggests that the delineation of the modern was imperative for the maintenance of empire and reminds us of the role that empire played in constituting the modern British national subject as both docile and rapacious. Working with philosophy and literature, Joseph advances the argument that the "modern," as understood in the eighteenth century, was itself developed to shore up imperial capital and to accumulate wealth for the nation. Valerian DeSousa, in "Modernizing the Colonial Labor Subject"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/3>>, approaches the issue of the relationship between the modern and imperial capital from the perspective of the role of colonial law. Arguing that the law is only one of a system of discursive signs that was invested in constructing a British concept of modernity in India, he focuses on the law and its use in interpellating the "modern" labor subject. Using factory labor legislation laws, DeSousa shows how the governmental project of reforming Indian laws contained the rising labor movement by employing restrictive techniques to limit its potential and participation in modernity. Continuing the theme of colonial discourses on bringing modernity to India, Kedar Vishwanathan uses nineteenth-century British writing on the role of women in Hindu tradition as a point of departure to discuss Indian nationalist figurations of the female. In his article "Aesthetics, Nationalism, and the Image of Woman in Modern Indian Art"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/4>> he analyses the work of Indian painters and writers and contends that the colonial discourse on women served as the template for Indian nationalist writing and painting of the nineteenth century. Vishwanathan notes that Indian nationalists, following colonial authorities, used the trope of woman to imagine the modern nation. Vidhu Aggarwal's article, "The Anti-Colonial Revolutionary in Contemporary Bollywood Cinema"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/5>> is about the contemporaneity of colonial discourses in popular culture today. She uses Mumbai and Western cinema to suggest that globalization reifies the colonial trope of masochism. Fictional relationships played out during the British *raj* are today repeated, speaking to the imaginative power of the arrival of modernity. Commenting on the disjuncture in the West and India on the reception of the Oscar-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*, she observes that the masochistic thread in representations of India have not been challenged by the global modern. In describing the work of philosophers of modernity on how the aims of social justice can be achieved, Novella Z. Keith and Nelson W. Keith in "Philosophy of Modernity and Development in Jamaica"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/6>> take particular issue with theories of modernization advanced for the "third world." They call our attention to the ethical issues embedded in these theories and seek to provide a clearing ground whereby we might be able to understand how epistemologies of modernity continue to haunt practices of development even today. They offer us a model of activism informed by scholarship on modernity. Together, these five studies challenge the claims made for the Western modern in their insistence on the aporia of the modern: the "third world" subject.

The arrival or imposition of specific ideologies tied to colonial instrumentality belies the benevolent disinterestedness of a universal modernity. If ideas of the modern were restrictive, theorizing modernist aesthetics has remained, until recently, an exclusively Western affair, confined to a small club. The next set of articles in the volume follow the development of aesthetic departures from the valences of

Western high modernism through case studies linked to the concept of arrival realizing the culture's relationship to modernity and the text's to modernist aesthetics. Here, the emphasis is on how "third world" cultures may have traditions of arriving at the modern that influence the aesthetic designs of the texts. The notion of rewriting modernist aesthetics expands our acknowledgement of modern modalities by exploring the roots of cultural traditions and suggests that neo-modernities arising out of particular moments in each tradition inscribe what is indubitably modern, but in modalities that differ from received understandings of European modernism. Among definitions of alternative modernist aesthetics, one of the more powerful is the notion of modern in Arab letters as embracing the present moment, thus denying the teleology of the modernization of narration. The text is aware of its rupture from the past, includes demotic and regional uses of language, and refuses to buy modernity through the nationalist impulse. The work of Mahfouz, Tayib bin Salih, Michael Khleifi that reject the *nahda's* version of a modern renaissance as creating boundaries between Arab states would be "modernist" (on this, see, e.g., Makdisi). The concepts here are relevant because they engage similar efforts to indicate what might be a different type of modernism, displacing the nationalist version as suggested in several articles of the collection (Ramanathan, Munoz, Van Liew, Masmoudi).

In part two of the collection, working with ideologies of form Geetha Ramanathan argues that magical realism, a mode derived from Latin America's baroque and viewed critically as a form of modernist aesthetic, refuses modernity. In her article "Modernity in Márquez and Feminism in Ousmane" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/7>> Ramanathan contends — based on aesthetic and social criteria identified as "modern" in Western scholarship — that realism, in certain contexts such as the African, can be theorized as modernism. On the other hand, in "Nordestina Modernity in the Novels of Freitas, Queiroz, and Lispector" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/8>> Fernanda Patricia Fuentes Munoz Fuentes tackles the topic of how modernist aesthetics can be created because of a deliberate underdevelopment of the northeast of Brazil, indeed, because of a refusal to allow modernity to arrive there. The mark of a distant urban modernity frames the very contemporary entrance into modernity from the vantage point of southern women in the work of three Brazilian women novelists. In looking at three Spanish films about migration and trans-national subjects, Maria Van Liew in "New Modernity, Transnational Women, and Spanish Cinema" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/9>> turns the notion of arrival on its head by arguing that in contemporary Spain, the flow of modernity is reversed by "third world" (im)migrants who ratify Spain's longings for the modern, even as the social apparatus carries traces of colonial sentiments on modernity's place of derivation as Europe. Next, in "Modern Migration in Two Arabic Novels" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/10>> Ikram Masmoudi discusses arrival as an occasion to take stock of comparative modernities. Interpreting Arabic texts and gesturing towards V.S. Naipaul, Masmoudi shows how recognitions of modernity can be fulfilled only by journeying through multiple modernities. Taken together, these studies bear out the promise of locating the modern aesthetic.

The impact of Western epistemologies in the development of "third world" subjectivities has been of central importance to postcolonial studies. In part three of the collection articles intersect with the notions of new modernity studies in identifying both the influence of psychoanalysis, existentialism, and Marxism on Caribbean writing and Iraqi literature and art (Henton, Thomas, Greenberg). They locate the disturbances, psychic, social, economic, and cultural that occur when Western knowledge is brought to bear on "third world" phenomena. The authors of these studies further the sets of knowledge from these places and point to the failure of Western epistemologies to apprehend modern subject formation as seen in these literary and cultural texts and processes. Modernity at the price of cultural suicide is rejected and a cautious but prized, if fragile, sense of a modern self is uncovered. The focus in these studies is on literature and art and the way these texts re-inscribe modern Western discourses through the introduction of "third world" subjectivities.

Jennifer E. Henton in her article "Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/11>> questions the psychoanalytic narrative of entrance into subjectivity in examining the psychic space of arrival in Edwidge Danticat's 2004 novel, *The Dew Breaker*. Situating the novel in its cultural and political contexts, she examines the arrival of the migrated subject to the trajectory of the psychoanalytical terrain. She argues that the Lacanian concept of lack needs to be reformulated as loss, when the Haitian subject is at stake. Using myth in the

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Western and Haitian contexts, Kette Thomas in her article "Haitian Zombie, Myth, and Modern Identity" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/12>> works with the impact of Haitian cultural traditions on a seemingly absent subjectivity, signified by the figure of the zombie. Thomas challenges the distance between the myth of the zombie and the narrative of Lazarus in the New Testament. This comparison augments an important distinction: there has been no arrival or departure to the modern that can be distinguished from the non-Western world. Thomas pursues what it means for the "third world" subject to be always already there, waiting for the West to catch up to its advanced insight into subjecthood. Dealing with an equally compelling discourse from the West and existentialism, Nathaniel Greenberg in his article "Political Modernism, Jabrā, and the Baghdad Art Group" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/13>> considers Palestinian exile and Iraqi citizen Jabrā Ibrahim Jabrā's explication of the modernist subject in the cosmopolitan setting of post-liberated Palestine. For Greenberg, Jabrā articulates the "street level" struggle for liberation against the backdrop of experimental forms emerging in the West. This struggle, intensified by Jabrā's contact with Western variations of philosophy and art, indicates the arrival of a new modernity. In Jabrā's landscape, the value of national identity need not be thrown over for the ephemeral promises of the modern. The authors of these studies take a closer look at what we construe as modern and what we regard as "primitive." They insist that the expressions coming from non-dominant groups occupy the site of a modernity that has not yet been fully considered.

In order to facilitate further scholarship on modernities and the "third world," the thematic issue includes, by Valerian DeSousa, a "Selected Bibliography for Work on Modernities and the 'Third World'" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/14>>.

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