

Mediated modernities: (Meta)narratives of modern nationhood in Indian and Pakistani media, 1947–2007

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Abstract

This article proposes a theoretical framework for understanding modernity as lying at the intersection of two dimensions: (1) the *narrative* of modernity as interpreted variously in particular nations and (2) the *metanarrative* of modernity as a universal goal that nations tend to share. It demonstrates that interpretations of modernity vary among nations, and even within nations over time. But modernity in former European colonies is nonetheless an ideological construct that seeks validation from the West. News media, this article shows, constitute a vital mechanism through which both the narratives and the metanarrative of modernity become collective. The media naturalize particular interpretations of modernity while also making ‘becoming modern’ a necessary objective of nationhood in non-Western societies. Empirical evidence comes from the comparative study of India’s *Hindustan Times* and Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspapers over a 60-year period (1947–2007) after the two nations gained freedom from British colonialism, using Derrida’s method of deconstruction.

Keywords

Deconstruction, globalization, hybridity, India, media, modernity, modernization, nationalism, news, Pakistan

For some time now, English has been perceived as the language of hegemony, a tool that has helped foster the cultural, economic and political subjugation of the East by the West (Macedo et al., 2003). And with good reason. But when low-caste Dalit villagers of

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Banka in northern India laid the foundation of a temple dedicated to ‘Goddess English’ (*The Times of India*, 2010), they saw the language in a very different light. English, for them, was the language of subversion, a means to thwart the nation’s rigid caste hierarchy and uplift those who have wallowed at its lowest rungs. It was Goddess English that would help them leave the village for the metropolis, compete for the best jobs and finally put centuries of penury behind. As one villager puts it, ‘If you don’t know English, you are a failure’ (BBC News, 2011).

Nestled within this deification of English is a paradox that lies at the heart of globalization. On one hand, Goddess English reflects the disruptions that can be caused by the active audience’s meaning-making, disruptions that turn the instrument of global hegemony into a weapon of local insurrection. On the other hand, she illustrates that meaning-making itself follows an inflected logic – a logic that reproduces the East–West binary and accords ontological privilege to the latter. It is *because* English is the language of global hegemony that Banka’s villagers were able to use it to challenge their local status quo: the language gained unprecedented social value in India once the nation entered the Anglicized world of international capitalism, levelling the playing field within the nation and affording new opportunities to underprivileged sections of society. It was, therefore, not without reason that the villagers modelled the statue of Goddess English after the Statue of Liberty, the global symbol of Americanization (BBC News, 2011).

This article explores this duality that undergirds globalization by looking at the idea of *modernity* and how it has been interpreted and reinterpreted by the news media in India and Pakistan. The concept of modernity is intimately linked with globalization (Appadurai, 1995; Kraidy, 2005), but remains as extensively debated as globalization itself. It was once taken to be simply another name for ‘Europeanization’ or ‘Americanization’ (Lerner, 1958), but that view no longer holds. As Partha Chatterjee observed, ‘It could be the case that what others think of as modern, we have found unacceptable, whereas what we have cherished as valuable elements of *our modernity*, others do not consider to be modern at all’ (p. 45) (quoted in Shome, 2012: 202, my emphasis). This particularized sensibility of modernity is often discussed in terms of cultural hybridity (Bhabha, 1994; Joseph, 1999).

Even though societies differ over *what* modernity is, they all seem to agree that they do *want* to be or become ‘modern’. The most important thing about modernity is not that it is (or was) an epoch, but that it remains an ideology (Latham, 2000) and a hallowed objective for the former colonies of Europe. As Asad (2003) pointed out, ‘The important question, therefore, is ... why [modernity] has become hegemonic *as a political goal*, what practical consequences follow from that hegemony, and what social conditions maintain it’ (p. 13, emphasis in original). Nations may make their own meanings of modernity, but they do so because ‘becoming modern’ is perceived to be a necessity of nationhood itself. Significantly, both the ideology and the interpretations of modernity constitute an intersubjectivity that stretches across time and space, shared by millions of people. Thus, explorations of *what* constitutes modernity and *why* it becomes an ideology cannot ignore the question of *how* its meanings and motivations become intersubjective.

These are the issues this study attempts to deal with. It proposes a theoretical framework for understanding modernity as an intersection of two dimensions: the *narrative* of modernity as interpreted variously in particular nations and the *metanarrative* of modernity as a

universal goal that all nations tend to share. It demonstrates that interpretations of modernity vary among nations, and even within nations over time. But modernity in the East is nevertheless an ideological construct that perpetually seeks validation from the West. Cultural hybridity does not preclude ideological hegemony. Finally, the article argues that news media constitute a vital mechanism through which both the narratives and the metanarrative of modernity become collective: the media naturalize particular interpretations of modernity and they simultaneously make becoming modern a necessary objective of nationhood itself in non-Western societies. Empirical evidence comes from a comparative study of India's *Hindustan Times* (*HT*) and Pakistan's *Dawn* newspapers over a 60-year period (1947–2007) after the two nations gained freedom from British rule, using Derrida's (1972) method of deconstruction.

Literature review

Modular modernity

As European colonialism started winding down after World War II, replaced by nation-states across Asia, Africa and Latin America, which adopted political and economic structures that appeared and sounded Western, the notion that the whole world was moving along the same path of 'modernization' – the Western path – gained traction. The West, especially Anglo-America, came to be viewed by social scientists as the epitome of human progress and development as well as the 'model' of modernization that emerging nations must pursue for their own benefit. These modernization theorists unmoored the idea of modernity as a period of European history and 'stylized it into a spatio-temporally neutral model for the process of social development in general' (Habermas, 1987: 2). Crucially, they also argued that the West, especially the United States, should play an active part in bringing about this transformation.

At a conference in New York in 1959, the sociologist Edward Shils observed,

In the new states 'modern' means democratic and equalitarian, scientific, economically advanced and sovereign. 'Modern' states are 'welfare states', proclaiming the welfare of all the people and especially the lower classes as their primary concern Modernity entails democracy, and democracy in the new states is, above all, equalitarian ... [Modernity] believes the progress of the country rests on rational technology, and ultimately on scientific knowledge. (Gilman, 2003: 1–2)

Shils 'crystallized into an aesthetic whole the ideas about development' that many modernization theorists had been espousing for a decade (Gilman, 2003: 2). The word 'whole' is crucial here: while various theorists stressed different aspects of modernity, all agreed that modernity was necessarily holistic. Lerner (1958) privileged urbanization and political mobilization, while Almond (1960) saw the transition of 'traditional' societies into modern ones as a process driven by industrialization. Huntington (1965) viewed the establishment and entrenchment of modern institutions – political parties, parliaments and so on – as the pivot of successful modernization.¹ For all modernization theorists, however, modernity followed what Lerner called an 'autonomous historical logic' (Lerner, 1958: 61). The guiding principle for these scholars was that '(t)he model evolved

in the West is a historical fact ... the same basic model reappears in virtually all modernizing societies on all continents of the world, regardless of variations in race, color, creed' (Lerner, 1958: 46).

This modular view of modernity as techno-scientific development became so successful that the United Nations declared the 1960s as The Decade of Development (Thussu, 2000). But it was also criticized by political economists and cultural and post-colonial theorists. Baran (1957), Sunkel (1972) and Wallerstein (1974) argued that modernization theory was an apology for Western capitalism and an excuse for its incursion into former colonies. Challenging the temporal distancing of 'tradition' and 'modernity', a central proposition of modernization theory, they noted that both feudal landlords and industrial entrepreneurs now existed side-by-side in former colonies, together constituting a politico-economic system that repressed the poor. Furthermore, relations of production in the global economic structure forced these nations to serve as suppliers of cheap labour and natural resources and destinations for Western products, making their so-called modernization impossible to achieve. Pletsch (1981) suggested that the idea of a 'third world' was itself a myth created to justify the ideology of modernization. Others (e.g. Said, 1978; Schiller, 1976; Spivak, 1988) argued that modernization theory not only provided normative validation to the West's political and economic agenda but also normalized Western cultural imperialism.

Dialectical modernities

If political and economic transformations after World War II spawned a modular view of modernity, the onset of globalization touched off a more culturally oriented and critically inclined approach to the subject. Scholars eschewed not just a West-centric modularity, but modularity per se, developing instead an understanding of modernity that feted the local, the contextual and the diversified. In line with what some have called the 'post-modern turn' (Best and Kellner, 1997), they now talked about multiple and contested *modernities* – of which Western modernity was but one example, and contested itself (Chakrabarty, 2000).²

Modernity for them was more spontaneous than rational, more cultural and humanistic than scientific and technological, more reflexive than deterministic. While accepting and even celebrating 'change', this revisionist scholarship challenged the received wisdom that change was taking place in a historically ordained direction that would remodel all societies into replicas of Western nation-states. It even questioned the temporal gulf between tradition and modernity that modernization theory was built around, arguing that a society need not let go of its past as it moved towards the future. As Bhabha (1994) noted, 'cultures of a postcolonial contra-modernity may be ... resistant to its oppressive, assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to 'translate', and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity' (p. 6). Indeed, the traditional–modern binary was just one of the many 'problematic binaries' that the universalization of Western modernity had imposed upon the rest. Viewing religious and secular, state and civil society, authoritarianism and democracy and rural and urban as mutually exclusive was just as problematic in non-Western contexts (Shome, 2012: 203).

Modernity, in this approach, was conceived as a dialectical process informed by both local traditions and global conditions and referred to as 'glocal' (Robertson, 1992), 'alternative' (Gilroy, 1993), 'hybrid' (Bhabha, 1994), 'multiple' (Eisenstadt, 2000) and 'co-eval' (Harootunian, 2000). While differing in various details, these scholars emphasized the *sui generis* exploration and understanding of non-Western societies' engagement with a rapidly changing world.³ Perhaps, most significantly, their approach ascribed agency to the post-colonial societies of Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, rejoicing in their ability to transcend colonialist structures and neo-colonialist relations of power to chart their own path of 'progress'. As Joseph (1999) observed, '[T]he modern move to deploy hybridity as a disruptive democratic discourse of cultural citizenship is a distinctly anti-imperial and antiauthoritarian development' (p. 1).

But some post-colonial scholars have questioned the equivalence between colonizer and colonized that this approach appears to take for granted. They argue that the apparent agency of post-colonial societies in constructing their own modernity is a chimera that serves only to legitimize the hegemony of the West: a condition they term 'neocolonialism'. Appiah (1991), for instance, drew attention to 'the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery' (p. 348, italics in original). It is this indigenous clique's opportunistic appropriation and dissemination of Western cultural symbols and forms that pose as local agency in the post-colonial encounter (see also Ashcroft et al., 2001: 55). Chow (1993), thus, called hybridity a 'masquerade of deconstructing anti-imperialism' (p. 35). For Van der Veer (1997), the agency that post-colonial societies seemed to possess in constructing their own modernities 'has little revolutionary potential since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and modernity which it claims to displace' (p. 104). With all their apparent reflexivity, these nations still buy into the capitalist vision of progress and development propagated by the culture industries of the West. The celebration of hybridity, therefore, was not simply naive: it amounted to 'endorsing the cultural claims of transnational capital itself' (Ahmad, 1995: 12) and indicated the 'implicit collaboration of the postcolonial in the service of neocolonialism' (Spivak, 1999: 361; see also Kraidy, 2002).

Media and modernity

The media play crucial, but very different, roles in both modular and contested versions of modernity. Among modernization theorists, Lerner (1958) and Schramm (1964) espoused using mass media to transmit 'modern' ideas from the West to alter attitudes and values and quicken the pace of modernization in the third world. Their task was to 'speed and ease the long, slow social transformation required for economic development, and, in particular, to speed and smooth the task of modernizing human resources behind the national effort' (Schramm, 1964: 27). Schramm (1964) also argued that mass media could 'encourage both personal and national aspirations' and make people 'desire a better life than they have and ... be willing to work for it' (p. 130). These ideas formed the basis of decades of research in international communication, often funded by global development agencies. But in this formulation, 'mass media were assumed to be a

neutral force in the process of development, ignoring how the media are themselves products of social, political, economic and cultural conditions' (Thussu, 2000: 58).

In contrast, scholars who view modernity as complex and contested have drawn attention to the diversity of global media culture and the significance of national and local customs and values in media production and reception. Drawing upon theories of active audience and polysemy (Hall, 1980; Williams, 1980) as well as structuration (Giddens, 1984), they argue that 'diverse audiences bring their own interpretive frameworks and sets of meaning to media texts, thus resisting, reinterpreting and reinventing any foreign 'hegemonic' cultural products' (Sreberny, 2006: 608). Media products as varied as Brazilian telenovelas (Straubhaar, 1991; Tracey, 1988), Arab television programmes (Kraidy, 2005), Indian religious television (Chatterji, 1989; Mitra, 1993) and Korean reality TV (Lee, 2004) have been shown to deftly negotiate the global and the local to create spaces for alternative cultures and hybrid forms of modernity.

Straubhaar (2006) conceptualized hybridization of media production and interpretation in terms of Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, according to which structures contain both constraining rules and enabling resources and extend over space and time through agents' reflexive actions. Hybridization, viewed in these terms:

... is an historical, temporal, reflexive cultural structuring process. Over time, cultures interact, mediated by technology, migration, and institutional and economic forms. Frequently, those cultures hybridize, with local elements and imported ones combining to create new forms of culture, like Latin Americans fusing local culture into the imported soap opera to create the telenovela. (Straubhaar, 2006: 687)

This, he argued, reflected 'the continuing importance of national governments, national producers, and national identity among communication audiences in selecting and interpreting cultural products and messages' (Straubhaar, 2006: 682). Various other scholars (e.g. Billig, 1995; Skey, 2014), while not necessarily dealing with issues of modernity, have also pointed out the continuing primacy of nations in the globalized era and the role of mass media in maintaining nationhood. This view is reinforced by theoretical and empirical research on the sociology of nationalism, which links it indelibly with modernity as both an epoch and an ideology (e.g. Breuilly, 1993; Malesevic, 2006).

Despite cultural and post-colonial theorists' nuanced approach to modernity and its relationship with mass media, some key issues remain. First, while this scholarship has denaturalized the *meaning* of modernity as 'Westernization' and established this notion as a hegemonic construct, it has rarely questioned why non-Western societies want to modernize in the first place. The *motivation* of modernity thus continues to be treated as natural, rather than as a social construction. But if societies are to be understood as reflexive agents, their collective motivations too need to be problematized and explained (Asad, 2003; Latham, 2000).

Second, if modernity is conceptualized as a process of interpretative negotiation between multiple and even opposite values, the relationships among these values also need to be threshed out. While reflexive agents make their own interpretations of modernity, the values themselves cannot necessarily be assumed to be epistemologically on par with each other in these interpretations. One purpose of empirical research on modernity,

therefore, ought to be laying bare what Derrida (1972) has called the ‘violent hierarchy’ between opposites that underlies the construction of all meaning (p. 41).

Third, most research on dialectical modernities theoretically relies and empirically focuses on ‘boundary-defying’ electronic media, particularly television (e.g. Chatterji, 1989; Kraidy, 2005; Lee, 2004; Mitra, 1993; Straubhaar, 1991; Tracey, 1988). This leaves open the question of whether hybridity is a general post-colonial condition or simply a product of the electronic age. If it is the latter, then hybridity fails as a challenge to modular modernity, which flourished in the pre-electronic era, and reduces modernity itself to technological determinism. If it is the former, then theoretical frameworks and empirical research need to address how spatially limited non-electronic forms of media, such as newspapers, construct hybrid modernities – both before and in the electronic age.

Theoretical framework

In line with the cultural and post-colonial approach, this article views modernity as a contested process of meaning-making, contested both spatially and temporally. It thus assumes that, ontologically, there is no universal model of modernity that all societies aspire to at all times. Different collectives – nations especially, but they may also be sub- or supranational – interpret modernity differently and these interpretations vary over time. They negotiate between global and local values in this process, but even the understandings of ‘global’ and ‘local’ are not fixed. Societies constantly reinterpret them to create new *narratives* of modernity. The term ‘narrative’ is helpful here in three ways. One, it indicates the fabricated nature of modernity. Two, it suggests movement and change through time. Three, it implies that despite all contestation and change, interpretation also lends a certain coherence and definitiveness to the idea of modernity. A particular society, at a particular time, understands modernity in a particular way, and it does so because that particular view of modernity, in the here and now, seems ‘right’. This aspect of ‘meaning-making’ is rarely stressed, but it is just as important.

But modernity is not only about its meanings; a motivation to be or become modern is what drives societies to make interpretations of modernity in the first place. Even though meanings of modernity are particular to time and space, the motivation of modernity is universal. Modernity, thus, is also an ideology, or ‘a form of thought-behaviour that penetrates all [social and] political practice’ (Freeden, 2003: 71–72). And if the collectives that make meanings of modernity – be they nations or sub- or supranational – are themselves ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 2006; Appadurai, 1995), their ideology must also be a social construct, rather than a ‘natural’ impetus. This ideology constitutes the *metanarrative* of modernity.

Modernity thus lies at the intersection of the narrative and the metanarrative. Social collectives, such as nations, spin their own narratives of modernity that are particular to time and space. But their motivation to engage in narrativization, as well as the narratives themselves, is driven by a universal metanarrative of modernity. This metanarrative, being of the first order, necessarily informs and inflects the second-order narratives. But they are both social constructs, and mass media form a vital mechanism through which they are constructed.

Modernization theory's view of the media as vehicles to transfer ideas and attitudes from the West to the East cohered with what Carey (2009) called the *transmission* view of communication, in which communication is seen simply as movement through space by other means. Mass media are not important per se, but only for what they contain and carry. In this approach, '[o]ne may liken the communication function to the circulation of the blood. It is not the blood but what it contains that nourishes the system' (Almond, 1960: 47). In contrast, Carey's (2009) *ritual* view of communication suggests that 'the original or highest manifestation of communication [lies] not in the transmission of intelligent information but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that can serve as a control and container for human action' (p. 15). This approach focuses on mass media qua mass media and the social practice of *mediation*. Viewed in terms of Almond's analogy, it privileges the blood over what it contains.

The mediation of modernity coheres with this view of the media. While the media do 'transmit' global values, this transmission is hardly objective. Rather, these values are interpreted and indigenized in consonance with local beliefs, customs and aspirations before being disseminated across local populations. The process is still more complex: even local values and beliefs are reinterpreted in this churn. Both local and global values are thus constantly renegotiated and reinterpreted, leading to the emergence of novel narratives of modernity. At the same time, the fact that the media in various societies engage in this particularized churning of modernities implies that they are, together, imbricated in the larger metanarrative. This metanarrative serves, in Carey's terms, as a control and container for media action and, through them, is replicated and reproduced in local society.

Methodology

This article explores the narratives and the metanarrative of modernity in India's *HT* and Pakistan's *Dawn* newspapers over a 60-year period since the two nations gained freedom from British colonialism (1947–2007). India and Pakistan shared a past dating back thousands of years, but they have followed very different post-independence trajectories. While India is widely perceived as an emerging power on the global stage today, Pakistan has lagged behind and is viewed by some to be a 'failed state' (Schofield, 2011). Perhaps more importantly, India has viewed Pakistan as its Other, constructing its Self in contrast, and Pakistan has done the same vis-à-vis India (Commuri, 2009; Tikekar, 2005). Their political and cultural histories thus not only provide common ground on which to make meaningful comparisons but also enough divergence to make such comparisons substantive.

In line with research on anniversary journalism (Kitch, 2002; Robinson, 2009), this article explores the interpretation of modernity in the two publications' Independence Day coverage. Pakistan became independent on 14 August 1947 and India on 15 August 1947. The sample of text to be analysed was defined as all Independence Day-related coverage in the two newspapers every year from 12 August to 16 August. For purposes of sampling, modernity was defined as 'an expression of a society's sculpting of a 'good life' through methods, techniques and processes that the society sees as appropriate for the betterment of itself and the development of its population' (Shome,

2012: 202). A total of 211 articles from *Dawn* and 127 articles from *HT* were analysed, including news reports, news analyses, editorials and signed commentaries. Visual elements, such as photographs and cartoons, were not a part of the sample.

Dawn is Pakistan's largest-circulated English newspaper (BBC News, 2013), while *HT* is India's second-largest newspaper (MRUC, 2012). English newspapers were selected for three reasons. First, the 'national' languages of Indian and Pakistan – Hindi and Urdu, respectively – are official rather than truly national, and both countries have a plethora of commonly spoken regional languages and dialects. English, on the other hand, has been a 'connective' language for their multilingual populaces. Second, English has also been the language of aspiration in both nations and the language that links them with the rest of the world. English newspapers are, therefore, more apt for a study of the ideology and interpretations of modernity. The third reason is methodological: looking at newspapers in the same language ensures better cross-national comparability.

Textual analysis follows Derrida's *general strategy of deconstruction* as interpreted by Kraidy (2002) for the study of news texts. For Derrida (1972: 41–42), all meaning is derived from opposition: words, symbols, ideas and objects can only be understood in contrast to what they are not. However, 'we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.) or has the upper hand'. The first phase of deconstruction, therefore, is to *overturn* this violent hierarchy by laying bare 'the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition'. But doing this is not enough as, in this phase, the analyst is still operating 'on the terrain of and from within' the hierarchical system. Deconstruction work must proceed with a second phase: 'the irruptive emergence of a new 'concept', a concept that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the previous regime'. Kraidy (2002) refers to these two phases as differentiating between the text's 'explicit statement' and its 'implicit gesture' (p. 325).

The analysis below identifies the *statement* of modernity by distinguishing the values that are deemed to constitute modernity in *HT* and *Dawn*'s Independence Day coverage, respectively. It then exposes the *gesture* by clarifying the interrelations among these values, thus overturning the 'violent hierarchy' of the regime of modernity as mediated by these newspapers. This uncovers the narrative of modernity, or how the idea of modernity is interpreted and retold. But these narratives themselves change over time. Derrida (1972) stresses 'the necessity of an interminable analysis' as 'the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself' (p. 42). Accordingly, the analysis tracks the changing statements and gestures of modernity in each newspaper over the 60-year period. Comparing what is common and different in the narratives of modernity within and between the two publications reveals the *metanarrative* of modernity.

Modernity in India

In the first 30 years of independent India (1947–1977), *HT* presented the idea of modernity as industrialization, advancement of science and technology and setting up institutions and policies that made such changes feasible (e.g. *HT*, 1948, 1955b, 1962, 1976). Year after year, Independence Day coverage provided progress reports on the number of

industrial units being set up in various sectors of the economy, whether their production was growing or declining and how they were contributing (or not) to national economic growth (e.g. *HT*, 1955c, 1971). Policymakers and captains of industry argued in newsprint over the aptness and efficacy of particular development policies and bureaucratic institutions set up to oversee their implementation, but they all agreed that policies and institutions were what ‘modern India’ needed (e.g. *HT*, 1955a).

This *statement* of modernity appeared to be in line with the modular view. However, progress did not mean that India had to forget its history or give up its ‘traditions’ – such as life in villages and an agricultural economy. Instead of championing rampant urbanization, *HT* called for mechanization of farming, use of fertilisers and seeding technology and the implementation of other modern techniques to bolster rural development (e.g. *HT*, 1950, 1962). Technology and tradition thus existed side-by-side in the newspaper’s statement of modernity. As one article noted,

India has had an ancient past of which anybody can be proud, but owing to circumstances she had to begin all over again and, therefore, she is a young nation so far as scientific development is concerned. We have sown certain seeds and planted certain institutions and the really important harvests will be reaped by us only in time. We have sufficient evidence, however, to show that they are the right seeds and they have been sown in the right soil and some results are already visible. (*HT*, 1948)

This passage at once reflected a continuity with and a break from the past, reinforced by the use of the agricultural metaphors of soil, seeds and harvests to talk about scientific development and institution-building. At the same time, this hybridity was not one of equals: the values of science and industry, institutionalization and economic growth sat on a higher pedestal. While modern India required both agriculture and industry, it was agriculture that was deemed to benefit from industrialization and not the other way around. This is still more evident in this passage:

A scheme for the establishment of a chain of rural science centres known as ‘Vijnan Mandirs’ [Science Temples] [has been] in operation since 1952. So far 41 Vijnan Mandirs have been set up all over the country. The purpose of the scheme is to educate the rural population in the methods of science and to make them familiar with the scientific principles involved in their day-to-day problems of agriculture, crop protection, village sanitation, health and hygiene, nutrition and balanced diet. (*HT*, 1962)

The label Vijnan Mandirs is a metaphorical hybridization of religion (represented in Mandirs) and science (Vijnan), traditional life and modern values – East and West. But the hybridity is clearly inflected: science is conceived as a force that *improves* traditional life by solving its ‘problems’, as a panacea for India’s ills. This hierarchy constituted the implicit *gesture* of this narrative.

The narrative changed in the years following Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s 2-year Emergency Rule, during which she suspended Parliament and other appendages of democracy and ruled by decree. Its end in 1977 brought about a sudden realization that India’s democratic polity, long taken for granted, needed to be protected and bolstered if India was to be counted among modern nations (e.g. *HT*, 1979, 1984, 1988). For instance,

an article by Madhu Dandavate, a prominent opposition politician, rued the apparent threat to India's parliamentary democracy by the presidential form:

[T]he democratic structure is sagging under the weight of authoritarianism ... prominent supporters of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi have publicly aired the opinion that ... it was desirable to change the present parliamentary system into a presidential form. At a time when Mrs. Gandhi's electoral support is shaken ... there is every likelihood that contrary to the assurances given by the Prime Minister, steps will be initiated to change the parliamentary system. (*HT*, 1982)

While the debate was explicitly about India's 'political structure', it was implicitly only about the nation's 'democratic structure', oscillating between its parliamentary and presidential forms – the two most prominent political models in the West. It was virtually unthinkable for anyone to suggest that India could look beyond democracy itself, even though it became obvious following Emergency Rule that democracy was not a fool-proof system and could be subverted by the very people expected to uphold it. Articles on scientific and technological progress continued to feature in this period, but modernity as democracy remained *HT*'s dominant narrative until the early 1990s.

India instituted liberal reforms following the Cold War and opened its economy to Western multinational corporations. This coincided with yet another change in *HT*'s narrative of modernity. From the mid-1990s, modernity was represented primarily as the adoption of Western cultural trends in music, food and fashion and infusing them with an Indian sensibility. An article on how to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Indian independence in the southern city of Bangalore (now Bengaluru) suggested,

[T]ake a peek at the freedom jam festival which will be on from Aug. 14 to 16. Organized by a local music event company, Gigs Live Action, teeny-boppers and the college-going crowd could make a beeline to watch their favourite MTV groups in action inside the Koramangala indoor stadium. As the organiser Srinidhi says, the show will exhibit the 'music of free India' – Indipop, rock rap, reggae, disco bhangra and what have you. (*HT*, 1997)

'Free India' now became an India freed of those cultural and institutional strictures that had been keeping MTV, Coca-Cola and Levi's Jeans at bay. Consumerism became a virtue, so much so that it consumed *HT*'s Independence Day coverage itself. Since 1947, *HT* had regularly printed a special 'Independence Day supplement' with commentaries and analyses, in addition to the main paper. But by the turn of the century, lifestyle-related supplements had become a daily feature as the newspaper needed more space to run the soaring number of advertisements, mostly from the consumer goods industry. It now stopped carrying the extra Independence Day supplement and relegated the coverage of the event to its regular supplements. The coverage, in turn, took on the tone of these supplements. It was almost entirely commodified, focusing on informing readers about what to wear, where to eat, which movies to watch and where to go for an extended weekend getaway (e.g. *HT*, 2002, 2004).

The consumption thus encouraged invariably had an Indian twist to it – the recommendations included 'nationalist' Bollywood movies, apparel splashed with the colours

of the national flag and so on. This modernity was, therefore, explicitly hybrid. But consumption itself was promoted as an 'imported' virtue, esteemed because it was imported from the West. The hybridity of 'MTV India' and 'McSpicy Paneer' – a McDonald's burger using Indian cottage cheese and spices – was thus hierarchical in its *gesture*, with the local subordinated to the global.

Modernity in Pakistan

In a number of ways, the narrative of modernity mediated by *Dawn* in the first three decades of independent Pakistan mirrored that of *HT* in India. This was the narrative of modular modernity, in which industrialization and progress based on science and technology were deemed to be the natural historical trajectory (e.g. *Dawn*, 1952, 1963, 1970). The challenge was simply how well the nation could follow the script and stay the course. As one article observed,

Scientific achievement and industrial development of a country are in the very nature of things: a matter of gradual, stage-wise progress. With the implementation of Pakistan's Six-Year Development Plan, covering developments in agriculture, transport, fuel and power, industry and mining and social capital at an estimated cost of Rs 260 crores, it may be reasonably hoped that the pace of progress will be accelerated and distinct improvements in the economy and standard of people's living achieved. (*Dawn*, 1952)

Modernity also meant open admiration of the 'American model' and delight over close ties with the United States. Congratulatory Independence Day messages from American leaders, in which they were quoted as hailing Pakistan's progress, were covered prominently (e.g. *Dawn*, 1953b, 1953c, 1957a). America was said to 'share our goal' (*Dawn*, 1971).

But there were departures too from the modular script. Building an 'Islamic' society was a cornerstone of Pakistani identity, the *raison d'être* of its carving out of British India as an independent nation, and religion was tied into the narrative of modernity. This led to a vision of Pakistan as an 'Islamic democracy', often articulated by national leaders (e.g. *Dawn*, 1953a, 1961) as well as commentators (e.g. *Dawn*, 1957b, 1966). Religion and science, desire for self-sufficiency and aspiration for US approval of its path of progress thus synthesized into a uniquely Pakistani narrative of modernity in this period. But these values only formed the explicit *statement* of this narrative. As in the Indian case, 'imported' values had the upper hand in its *gesture*. The Quran was valuable because it was scientific; Pakistan's 'goal' was worthwhile because Americans shared and supported it. Following the path of the West, especially the United States, was assumed to be the normal, natural thing for a nation to do, even though Pakistan would do so while remaining true to its Islamic ethos.

Although the same modern values continued to be touted for nearly another decade – the late 1970s to the mid-1980s – there was a dramatic shift in their interrelations. During this period, which coincided with the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, the armed forces became the vehicles of modernity in Pakistan. It has been argued that Zia's 'Islamization drive' – a government programme to bring Pakistani society, politics and

economy in line with an extremely strict interpretation of Islam – threw Pakistan off the course of modernization (Pal, 1999). But the meanings of modernity in this period, at least as mediated by *Dawn*, did not alter so much. Scientific development, industrialization and economic growth remained the idioms of progress and betterment of society: the armed forces were, however, now presented as the institution most able to bring this about. One article observed,

[T]he Armed Forces ... have continued through years to make effective contribution toward economic development of the country. The development projects in which the Armed Forces have actively participated over the years cover such diverse fields of activity as the building of roads, construction of small dams, afforestations, installation of tube-wells for irrigation, survey and building of new ports, oceanography, development of civil aviation, aeronautical engineering, industries, sports and education. (*Dawn*, 1977)

The military regime was credited with ‘infus[ing] the economy with a new spirit of hope’ (*Dawn*, 1982a) and making ‘remarkable progress’ (*Dawn*, 1983). The United States continued to be viewed as the model of modernity and close ties with it were highly valued. For instance, one report headlined ‘Aug 14 declared Pakistan-America Day’ reported,

The Pakistani community living in the United States has won recognition from New York state Governor, J.E.M. Mario M. Cuomo, who has proclaimed Aug. 14, 1985, as the Pakistan-America Day in New York state ... ‘New York state’, he said, ‘has a large Pakistani community who serve with devotion in many areas of endeavour, some of which include technical, educational, medical, business, industrial and engineering fields. It is fitting that we join with our fellow citizens of Pakistani descent in marking this special day and commend them for their many contributions to the growth of our state and nation’. (*Dawn*, 1985a)

But Islam assumed a much higher status within this narrative than before. The newspaper lamented the ‘failure’ of ‘secular solutions’ (*Dawn*, 1980) and backed the General’s Islamization drive (*Dawn*, 1982b, 1985b). Islam was no longer seen as something Pakistan already had; instead, it became what Pakistan needed more of.⁴ Thus, even though the key elements of the narrative of modernity remained the same as before, the narrative itself became more complex. It may still be argued that this hybridity was hierarchical and that the ‘West’ – reflected in the values of infrastructural and economic progress and the aspiration of close ties with the United States – retained an upper hand. But the ‘East’ – represented by Pakistan’s Islamic ethos – was no longer an immanent value; rather, it became an aspiration too, undermining the hierarchy.

Zia died in a plane crash in 1988. But by then, *Dawn*’s narrative had started to change already. The newspaper, while mildly rebuking the General for never keeping his promise of holding elections and returning Pakistan to democratic rule (*Dawn*, 1986a), rued that the main problem with its polity was the absence of a stable constitution (*Dawn*, 1986b). Three constitutions had until then been promulgated – in 1956, 1962 and 1973. One article lamented,

Two hundred years ago within a brief span, America had framed its constitution and organized its political life on a pattern that has lasted to this day in unbroken continuity. Our experience

has been quite the opposite. We have thrown one constitution after another out of the window as an outlandish fitting in a native household. (*Dawn*, 1987)

Over the next two decades, *Dawn's* Independence Day coverage became replete with articles on the necessity of constitutionalism for Pakistani politics and society. Zia's death was followed by a return to parliamentary democracy for a decade, which was upstaged yet again by a military coup and the ascension of General Pervez Musharraf as President. But despite – or, perhaps, because of – these twists and turns of politics, the narrative of modernity remained focused on constitutionalism, with economic development acting as a secondary motif and itself deemed dependent on a steady and viable constitution. Year after year, articles discussed the need for an established set of laws to guide Pakistani politics and society (*Dawn*, 1989), the constitutional vision of Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah (*Dawn*, 1995a, 1997), and the merits and demerits of the various constitutions that had come and gone (*Dawn*, 1995b). Just like science and industry in the early decades, constitutionalism was now viewed as the panacea for all the ills the country was suffering from. One author suggested,

[Pakistan's] cavalier approach to the Constitution should be understood in light of our native experience We followed custom more willingly than we followed laws made by the government. The British introduced us to the idea of the rule of law and we showed it a measure of respect. But a decade or so after they had departed from our soil, we began to return to our nativity. (*Dawn*, 2005)

To be modern in this narrative was thus to have a constitution, and to have a constitution was to be less like the native Pakistani and more like the British and the American. Thus, not just the implicit *gesture*, but even the explicit *statement* of modernity in this narrative was distinctly hierarchical, privileging the West over the East.

Media, nationhood and modernity

Some post-colonial scholars celebrate the agency that former colonies-turned-nations exhibit in constructing their own modernities (Appadurai, 1995; Bhabha, 1994; Joseph, 1999). Others call such agency an illusion that helps legitimize the oppression of Western capital and cultural forms (Appiah, 1991; Chow, 1993; Spivak, 1999), but they often take an instrumentalist view that negates post-colonial agency altogether in the construction of modernity. To resolve these tensions, this article draws a distinction between the *narratives* of modernity, interpretations that are particular to space and time and thus reflect post-colonial agency, and the *metanarrative* of modernity, an ideology of becoming modern that former colonies-turned-nations tend to share.

Juxtaposing Indian and Pakistani media coverage of their respective independence days shows how the metanarrative inflects the narrative in a manner that privileges West-centric interpretations of modernity in post-colonial societies. Both Indian and Pakistani media wove the same narrative of modernity as scientific and technological development in the first three decades – in line with the neo-colonialist vision of modernity as the adoption of the 'Western' model of development. But these interpretations began to vary

in the 1970s - mostly on account of domestic and regional changes. In India, being modern now meant being democratic. Pakistani media made Islamization the touchstone of the nation's progress, but this too was justified as a means of achieving Western-style development. Since the 1990s, Indian media have unabashedly interpreted modernity as subscribing to Western social values and cultural tropes, while Western-style constitutionalism became a vaunted goal in Pakistan.

Thus, even as these societies exhibit post-colonial agency in constructing dialectical narratives of modernity which evolve over time, the metanarrative of modernity as change legitimated in the West traps them into a neo-colonial hierarchy and obliges them to play catch-up with the West forever. This hierarchy is built into the epistemology of modernity as an aspiration for 'something else', a state of *becoming* rather than *being*. Such an epistemology is inclined to favour values that the Self – in this case, the nation – desires, but does not already possess over the ones it does possess.

West-centrism also emerges as an integral aspect of these national narratives of modernity because nationhood is itself a product of modernity, intricately woven into its rationalist-bureaucratic mode of thinking that privileges the ontology of clear-cut boundaries, systems of administration and self-help – all aspects of the modern Weberian 'nation-state'. Anderson (2006) defined the nation as 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (p. 6). While 'imagined' refers to the phenomenology of nationhood as a social fact, 'limited' and 'sovereign' indicate its modernist features of territorial boundedness and self-governance. Modernity, thus, is also a metanarrative of nationhood, a 'self-fulfilling and self-justifying' ideology (Appadurai, 1995: 1). While different nations understand modernity differently, and differ within over what modernity means, they all strive to be modern. Becoming modern is as essential to a nation as nationhood itself. The metanarrative of modernity is thus constant and universal, providing the normative impetus that drives the particularized meaning-making processes within each nation.

Theories of nationhood (Anderson, 2006; Gellner, 1983) as well as theories of modernity (Appadurai, 1995; Lerner, 1958) accord a pivotal role to the media. This article reveals how these roles intertwine – how the media have played a crucial role in 'what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community' (Chakrabarty, 1992: 19). The media help construct and maintain nations as human collectives fused by the belief that they have a common history and destiny. One way in which this happens is technological: the media are a modern institution, equipped with the technology that allows them to reach far and wide and physically bind these places into a common space of deliberation and action (Habermas, 1989). But there is another way in which the media bring this about, and that is ideational – explained by Carey (2009) as 'the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world that serves as a control and container for human action' (p. 15; see also Dewey, 1927; Park, 1938).

As part of a nation's *comprador* intelligentsia (Appiah, 1991), the media 'mediate' the post-colonial encounter. Modernity itself – both as a narrative and a metanarrative – becomes the cultural symbol around which nationhood is constructed and maintained. For a society to become modern, it must first of all become a nation. Particularized

meanings of progress and social change, meanings that necessarily implicate the entire nation while differentiating it from 'other' nations, help bind these imagined communities. At the same time, they give ontological validity to nationhood – the idea that the world is made up of entities called 'nations' that have particular characteristics (Billig, 1995) – by perpetuating the normativity of becoming modern as an essential characteristic of nationhood.

This article has thus developed a theoretical framework to (1) resolve the tensions between ontology and axiology that have riven post-colonial studies of modernity and (2) critically examine the role of news media in producing the meanings and the motivation of modernity in post-colonial societies. Change over time is a vital aspect of this framework and empirical analysis has, therefore, looked at a span of 60 years in two nations, India and Pakistan. More empirical evidence from these and other post-colonial societies is, however, needed to bolster the framework and make it more nuanced. That can be a fruitful agenda of future research. Also, while this article has argued that nations are particularly meaningful 'units of analysis' for studying modernity and its relationship with the media, this does not preclude the mediation of modernity at other levels – both sub- and supranational – as worthwhile sites of inquiry. Indeed, as Pieterse (1995) has argued, 'what globalization means in structural terms ... is the *increase in the available modes of organization*: transnational, international, macro-regional, national, micro-regional, municipal, local' (p. 50, emphasis in original). The anecdote of the 'Dalit Goddess English', recounted at the beginning of this study, also underlined how modernity can enable these alternative sodalities. Understanding the *narratives* of modernity being constructed at emerging sites of collective imagination and, indeed, how the *metanarrative* of modernity is contributing to the ontological validation of one or more of these 'modes of organization' can also be a theoretically and empirically productive area of research.

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Notes

1. Some scholars do not regard Huntington as a modernization theorist. While he differed with and criticized some modernization theorists of this era over how modernization proceeds, he, too, used the language of modernization and ontologically privileged the West. He is therefore counted among modernization theorists in this article.
2. But modernization theory, which had been weakened in the 1970s and 1980s, also got a fresh lease of life after the Cold War in the works of neo-conservatives and neo-liberals such as Fukuyama (1992). See Gilman (2003: 241–276) for an extended discussion.
3. Despite sharing an anti-modular approach, these authors differ sharply in how they conceptualize modernity. See Bonnett (2005) for a review.
4. The same American-centric, Islam-infused, military-cheering hybridity was evident in the critical role Zia-led Pakistan played in creating an army of *mujahideen* (Islamic warriors) in neighbouring Afghanistan to wage a proxy war for America against the Soviet Union (see Cooley, 2002).

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