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To cite this article: Esther Kim Lee, Glenn Odom & Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker (2023) A conversation about new directions in studies of modernity and theatre, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 43:1, 108-119, DOI: [10.1080/14682761.2022.2145679](https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2022.2145679)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682761.2022.2145679>



Published online: 13 Dec 2022.



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A conversation about new directions in studies of modernity and theatre

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ARTICLE HISTORY Received 13 September 2022; Accepted 2 November 2022

Glenn Odom: Thank you for making time to be here today. The format of this conversation is imagined as one type of book review in the journal. Traditional reviews often tend to be very much a monologue, and the inability to respond to book reviews has always felt like a power imbalance. *STP* is really interested in thinking about ways of restructuring at a systemic level how academic discourse happens; one of our methods for that is experimenting with different forms.

One goal today is to highlight what each of your books offers – a task made more challenging by some of the terminology that we will shortly be discussing. This is a moment for publicity, but also a moment to engage in conversation, and perhaps debate, over some of the key concepts.

I was very excited about both of your books while reading them, and I think they speak to a lot of issues in the field right now. I think there's enough commonality and enough difference between the books to make this a productive space for conversation. What I'm going to do now is be quiet and let you each individually introduce your own book, to orient us, and then we can go from there.

Esther Kim Lee: I was approached by an editor at Bloomsbury Methuen to collect essays that were published previously but in a multi-volume output that highlights these works in a 'world' framework: this became *Modern and Contemporary World Drama: Critical and Primary Sources* (2022). My contribution to this project has been to provide a new framework to think about modern and contemporary world drama.

The anthology attempts to counter Eurocentric views of modern drama in which, as I have taught it for twenty years, modern drama begins with Ibsen, Strindberg, and others who are considered the 'fathers' of modern drama. Then towards the end of the semester, we would include multicultural drama. This is the pedagogical model that I inherited, but when this project was proposed to me, I had a chance to really re-think what modern drama is about. And I teach a separate class that includes intercultural theatre in which I look at the same time period and ask similar questions. I was struck by these separate but parallel ways that we are teaching and researching.

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Modern and Contemporary World Drama: Critical and Primary Sources. Ed. Esther Kim Lee. Bloomsbury, 2022.

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I wanted to have those two approaches in conversation with each other in order to re-examine what modern drama is from an intercultural, global perspective. In my introduction, I say that modern drama, to me, is inherently intercultural. That's the conclusion I came to: that even Ibsen, Strindberg, and Chekov were all influenced by those who were outside of what I'd describe as their provincial areas. If you look at the entirety of modern drama as intercultural drama, then what happens? I was interested in providing that framework. As you know, journals in our field are separated by region or time period. What happens if we just get rid of all of those categories? What if you get rid of those walls and barriers and juxtapose them to force a conversation?

'Traffic jam' is one of the metaphors that I conclude with in the collection. What happens when you create this traffic? What can be learned from it? That was the goal of the project.

Glenn Odom: Thank you Esther. Aparna?

Aparna Dharwadkar: The book that I'm talking about today is titled *A Poetics of Modernity: Indian Theatre Theory, 1850 to the Present*. It was published in 2019, and to explain how it is that I got to this project, I have to go back in time and start with the fact that I came to Indian and postcolonial and world theatre after fifteen years of training in canonical Anglo-American literature and theatre. My doctoral work was in late-seventeenth century British theatre, but right after I finished my PhD, the field of postcolonial studies opened up in the 1990s. I decided then that there was enough work to be done in postcolonial and Indian theatre, and I really needed to make a conscious transition.

Because of my training in the Western canon, and especially my training as a theatre scholar, what I had taken completely for granted was the simultaneity and coequality of theory, history, practice, and criticism – scholarly criticism, but also criticism of other kinds. We take for granted that these four activities exist together and develop together. When I started working in Indian theatre in particular, I discovered that the practice was spectacular. What has come out of India since the middle of the nineteenth century by way of drama and theatre and performance is very much on par with the rest of the world. There is also a significant amount of theoretical writing. Some of it is intended as theory, and a lot of it has potential theoretical value; but that value has to be discovered and then represented in a particular way. But the history of modern Indian theatre lags well behind the current methodologies of theatre history, and the criticism lags well behind the creative achievement.

In my first book on Indian theatre (*Theatres of Independence*, 2005), what I tried to do was redress the problem of the missing history and criticism by talking about twentieth-century India and focusing on the post-independence period. I basically tried to make sense of things in terms that were not reductive or limited to any one region or any one language or any one idea of the nation.

Then, while I was doing that work I discovered this fantastic multilingual archive of theory and theoretically significant material. I started to work on it and it's taken a while, as you can imagine, to cover about 170 years, but it reflects my belief in the value of theory – the value of making it visible and available to a wide readership. *Poetics of Modernity* is about establishing the theoretical foundations of modern Indian theatre, by which I also mean modern urban theatre. I don't really deal with non-urban forms.

I think Glenn observes in his introduction to *World Theories of Theatre* that there is really no theory without practice, and there is no practice without theory. So, however we estimate the relative balance between theory and practice in our own work, both things are equally important. Unlike Esther's magnificently global anthology, my book is an attempt on my part to really represent one tradition, which is, yes, geographically distinct and national. But it also has connections, because of the very nature of modernity, with a lot of things elsewhere in the world.

It is also an inherently multilingual tradition, so that complicates the task a lot. There are about sixteen theatrically active languages in India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. I've managed to cover eleven of them, and the main challenge was to retrieve the primary material from a very wide range of sources. About two-thirds of it was already available in English, either because it had been written originally in English or it had been translated acceptably into English. The other one third was translated for the first time specifically for inclusion in the volume. About 75% of the new translations were done from three languages by me and my husband, Vinay Dharwadker, who is also a scholar of modern India. So that is how we have managed to bring together material in English and in English translation from ten other languages – translations that are of uniform quality and acceptable by international standards. The material is arranged in a broadly chronological order so that it gives readers a sense of the positions as they appeared in a kind of temporal progression, but there is also a little bit of thematic clustering in some places. So my focus is on India, but then India is also very evidently connected with many different parts of the world.

Glenn Odom: Thank you, both. I want to get things rolling by pulling together some things you just said, after I give a quick gloss on my investment in this conversation and my standpoint. I've been working for many years with different notions of what we might broadly think of as comparative literature or comparative theatre – questions like what do Japanese scholars, for example, imagine they're doing and what do scholars from the US imagine they're doing when they're working nationally, comparatively or interculturally? What do these words mean in each of their local contexts, including the Anglophone West as a local context ('The West' being the UK and the US, primarily). My question actually stems from my interest in how quickly words like 'world', 'postcolonial', 'provincial', 'local', or something that you both reference in your work, the 'multi-dimensional global phenomenon of modernity' (Aparna's phrase, that Esther quotes) – how quickly these terms become problematic and weirdly hyper-local even though they refer to movement across boundaries.

Aparna, you said 'Indian, postcolonial and world theatre' and then at another point, 'global and multilingual', sort of as a set. Esther, you referred to provincial traditions, specifically in reference to Ibsen and Chekov and I'm interested in hearing what version of what I will call 'world' – but also 'global', 'modern', or whatever it is that circulates – emerged in both of your texts.

Esther Kim Lee: I use the plural version of, say, the titles of each volume. For example, I don't say 'beginning'; I say 'beginnings'. This kind of pluralizing is a key point of the project. We like neat things with a clear narrative with beginning, middle, and end and a singular protagonist. It's very difficult for our brain to grasp something that's more

complicated than that, so the project is a way to force me and others to think in the plural and to really be self-conscious about the limitations of terminologies.

Aparna, your introduction is amazing—it's like a mini-book, so congratulations. It is an incredible project. As you mention in your introduction, whenever we use key terms, there is an impulse to make them universal. There is an implied connotation that they could be applied to everything.

So how do we resist that? That's the question I'm really interested in. How do we resist universalizing these terms? When you say 'postcolonial', it depends on the context, and you know the specific situation in which that term has been used. At the same time, how do we make these terms function and operate in the specific and in the local while keeping an eye on their potential to be made universal? This tension is interesting to me. With my project, I hope to provide a more macro account – like a bird's eye-view-of looking at major patterns around the world. What you're doing, Aparna, is that you are focusing on one nation and going in depth. My work is more about the breadth.

Aparna Dharwadker: I'll say two broad things initially. The first one has to do specifically with the nature of Indian culture and its forms. I have always found that I have to think on at least four levels: there is the local; there is the regional, because even politically, India's post-independence states are defined as linguistic regions; then the national, because there is a tremendous amount of transregional activity at any given time. And then from the national you go to the transnational or the global, so that there is movement outwards in all these directions.

Second, when it comes to questions of universality and universalism, I feel that there is a prescriptive view of universality, which is something that we have complained about now for a long time – whatever was Western or European was axiomatically taken to be universal. We've actually been fighting the battle against that prescriptive notion for two hundred years. And then there is the descriptive notion of the *universalisable* – what can be universalised *now*. What I have found in my work with Indian and postcolonial cultural forms is that there is a great deal of depth in these cultures. It doesn't matter if these are not well-known facts or well-known circumstances or well-known productions or products. The quality of *universalizability* is there because of the quality of the work itself.

Let me take two major examples – the examples of Wole Soyinka and Derek Walcott, which one does not need to justify in terms of quality. We know what their standing is in the world, not just as playwrights but also as authors who practice multiple genres. But major Indian playwrights even today are not very well known at all, and yet about ten of them could stand absolutely beside major figures in world theatre if they became better known. I will mention Mohan Rakesh, whom Glenn refers to in his anthology of world theatre theory. Also Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Badal Sircar, who writes in Bengali – I think Sircar may be better known outside India than any of the others. As a scholar and critic, after my experience with Western texts, there was a compulsion I felt when I started to work in this new field. The compulsion was to inform an audience – first work out an interpretive apparatus that could actually do justice to the kind of work that these playwrights were doing, and then communicate what they were doing to whoever around the world was interested in reading about them. In this respect, it has been very encouraging for me right from the beginning of my work in these fields that

journals in Europe, North America and India have been equally receptive to whatever it was that I offered in terms of articles. And then the books got published here but also got co-published in India, and so on. So that is the case with unknown authors who can be made known, and then their universalisability can be understood by others.

Then there is the question of how one defines the world. I define the concept of the world in several different ways, especially when it comes to theatre – and again, the notion of world literature is much older than the notion of world theatre. Theatre – the whole field of theatre – has been lagging behind quite a bit, but I think we are catching up, and Esther's work is a huge leap forward in that sense. For me, one definition of world theatre is significant theatre that is being presented right now in various parts of the world, regardless of who is aware of it. As I said earlier in the case of Indian theatre, the significance and the quality of 'world-ness' is already there. But it is something for the rest of us to discover and then present again to readers, audiences, and fellow scholars. Let me give you the example of Tawfiq al-Hakim who's an Egyptian playwright I began to include in my advanced undergraduate class in Contemporary World Theatre. I had not heard of him earlier. None of my students had heard of him – they hadn't even heard of Soyinka or Walcott! But once Tawfiq al-Hakim is included in that line-up of significant 20th- century and early-21st century playwrights, he is fully on par with everyone else. So that's one kind of definition of the world. Then there are definitions that are more common, involving works that circulate outside their cultures of origin. This is David Damrosch's definition, and my only caveat here is that circulation can't be taken for granted – it's not happening on its own, somebody is making it happen. So long as that is happening, good, but sometimes you just have to take something and *put it* into circulation, and that is your responsibility, in a sense, as someone who's aware of the world in his or her role as a theatre scholar and critic. Then there is the notion of the world as existing outside the boundaries of the nation, and that is, again, a self-evident definition that we see a lot.

One of the interesting things I found with the use of the word 'world': in a lot of recent work, including Glenn's and to some extent Esther's, there is a consciously political, strategic act to exclude the West. So we have the world without the West. To be truly inclusive, we would have everybody, but I completely agree with the political and strategic decisions that lead to the focus on the non-Euro-American traditions, when we are trying to talk about the world.

Glenn Odom: If I get to do a second edition of my anthology, I will definitely treat the West in the same way as everywhere else. Currently, the West is in there throughout because the West is a part of the world, but yes, I think your comment on the treatment of the West is correct, particularly when thinking about what Susan Stanford Friedman and others have called the planetary.

Aparna Dharwadkar: As I said, I completely support the political and strategic thinking because it's necessary. There is so much that has remained unknown and invisible that it is necessary for us to focus on that first. And then at some point in the future, hopefully, there can be the kind of parity where we are able to include more. That was one thing I admired very much about Esther's selection in her four volumes – that Europe and

North America are not excluded, and the major settler colonies are not excluded. But the focus in these locations is on the cultural forms and the communities and groups that have been marginalized. So African-American and native American work in the United States appears alongside aboriginal work in Australia and New Zealand, and so on.

Esther Kim Lee: To me, this conversation is welcome and necessary because I think we assume we all know what we're talking about when you say world theatre. But, obviously we all have different definitions, and that's fine. That's what a rich discourse is all about, and I think we need more of it. We need more of these varying, different kinds of perspectives on what world theatre means.

With my project on modern and contemporary drama, I wanted to include European and North American – the so-called Eurocentric canon – because to excluded them would not be the world. I begin the collection with Joseph Roach's essay on Ibsen, and I did that intentionally to say, 'Okay let's make Ibsen the beginning of modern drama in a different way – by de-centring him.'

I was deliberate in starting with Roach and Tom Postlewait and then Aparna's essay. It was a way to say, let's look at European theatre but let's decentre it at the same time. What happens when European theatre is just one of many different forms of world theatre?

I'd say this is more of an eclectic way of collecting essays, rather than saying there is a central beginning, middle and end. There is not one origin but multiple origins and multiple beginnings.

That's my wish for the field, which is to think about world theatre in the most expansive way possible.

And we should also have studies like what you're doing, Aparna, with Indian theatre in which we see in-depth case studies that allow detailed explorations of nations, groupings, or time periods.

As I mention in my introduction, I had to limit my project to essays written in English. But the ideal anthology of world drama would not be only in English. It would be a multi-lingual study.

Glenn Odom: When I came to the UK, there was a whole set of scholarship that I was suddenly exposed to: all the brilliant people that somehow just don't cross over the Atlantic much, like Osita Okagbue who argues that 'world' is something scholars do to theatre as a discipline; it is what we do to theatre and not some inherent quality of the theatre. This resonates with some of Damrosch's ideas of world literature: circulation is something that happens to literature that makes it 'world,' but for Osita it's scholarship that makes the literature, or the theatre 'worldly.'

On a different note, Esther, your idea of this is a festival of world theatre with everything coming together. As I was reading your anthology I kept wondering if the flow of theorisation and analysis is outward from the Anglo center – most of the scholars in your anthologies are based in the US or the UK. Of course, they are also writing in English, so it's sort of a self-fulfilling loop, but in part of your vision of the expanded anthology, would you imagine there being a substantial difference if you started bringing in theorists and critics from, say, Nigeria or from elsewhere?

Esther Kim Lee: Yes, most definitely. While I learned a lot while editing the collection, it was also a frustrating process because I initially began with almost double the number of articles. Then I had to cut many of them, because of space, expense, and editorial reasons. There are ones that I had to cut that really broke my heart. So it's really not the ideal version I had in mind. For instance, one of the areas of world theatre I wanted to include and I didn't is Korean theatre.

Aparna Dharwadker: I was wondering about the absence of Korea, yes.

Esther Kim Lee: I found that most of the essays about Korean theatre available in English are usually about adaptations or productions of Western plays in Korea. They are literary studies written by Korean scholars studying Anglophone drama. Shakespeare in Korea was another big area that I could have included, but I didn't think they describe Korean modern drama. I know there are essays in Korean that I could have included, but I couldn't just translate one essay and not do that for the rest of the world: that was a really tough choice I had to make.

I didn't want to misrepresent modern Korean theatre by centering Shakespeare or Ibsen. It's a tough choice to make. It's a question about what types of scholarship from outside of the US and UK are privileged by editors and what gets to be chosen. Not only the publishing/journal editing side but also scholars in those countries who need to get tenured and promoted.

They need to produce works on say Shakespeare to be made legible, so there is a complicated push and pull in the profession that we're in.

Yes, if I could include works in the original language or get them translated, I think it would be fundamentally different as a project.

Aparna Dharwadker: Well, I actually have a very quick follow-up comment on this subject, and that is the role of the Euro-American academy in facilitating scholarship on other parts of the world. Very simply, I could not have done in India any of the work I've been able to do in my forty-plus years in the US. One of the reasons I left India at the age of twenty-four was the realization that if I was really interested in a scholarly career, it would not be possible there. I was teaching at Delhi University, which is in some ways the premier university in the country, and it felt like a dead-end.

The Euro-American academy is now full of scholars from other parts of the world, and I think it's something like a process of natural selection that we are more aware of their work than we are of the work of colleagues working in their cultures of origin. In a pragmatic sense, this is something we – or at least I – have to accept: that the academic set-up in both Europe and North America has been vital in facilitating our work.

I also have a quick comment on something you had said at the beginning of your last comment, Glenn, which is that the 'world is something that scholars do to theatre.' I would register a disagreement with that. First of all, theatre is the most easily transportable cultural form and circulates more extensively than anything else.

And it is a performative form, so it also circulates in such a way that it has to be recreated in the image of its immediate audience wherever it goes. I mean, you can do Western theatre in Western languages in the non-Western world, but for the most part the non-Western world wants to do something to the works that it is borrowing and then

representing, so that it makes sense to the audience. I would say that the sense of theatre belonging to the world is not something that is primarily created by scholars and critics, but it is what happens to theatre in motion, especially in the modern period.

Just a very quick footnote to this: I spent a total of twelve months in Berlin at the International Research Centre that was directed by Erika Fische-Lichte, and the title of that Centre was 'Interweaving Performance Cultures.' The notion of 'interweaving' was deliberately selected as something that went beyond the 'intercultural,' with all its problems, and also the agonistic nature of postcolonial studies. So they didn't want to deal with either the hegemonic nature of interculturalism or all the fear and trembling that goes with postcolonial studies. Now they are finishing up a Handbook of Performance-Related Concepts which will be published by Routledge, and will include concepts in seven major non-European languages. This will be another great addition to what we are talking about.

Glenn Odom: We were just discussing the need for new pedagogical guides for 'Intro to Performance Studies' modules because Schechner's book is quite old now and that's still the seminal performance studies book.

Aparna Dharwadker: Yes, the Handbook is a fantastic project and I think will probably be published next year.

Esther Kim Lee: I contributed to one of the keywords and attended the Korean theatre workshop. I appreciate how they insisted on writing them in the original language, whenever possible. I liked the emphasis on embracing words that cannot be translated into European languages.

Aparna Dharwadker: There was also the criterion that the concepts should not be antiquated but should be terms that are in current use. I thought that was an equally valuable criterion for what they wanted to include. I'm looking forward very much to the appearance of this volume.

Glenn Odom: So you brought up Korean theatre, and this relates to a phrase in Aparna's introduction as well: a part of it says that there is a small and growing group of women practitioners and theorists that she highlights in a section of her anthology – one of their pen names, I believe, actually even translates literally to 'a woman.' A lot of the contemporary work that I've seen coming out of Korea and seen people write about is actually specifically gendered in focus, and there seem to be a number of fairly successful female writers in Korea now. Often in the discussions of 'world', not a lot of women come up, and I think the practice just isn't there yet or isn't known or isn't treated in the same way. As a question, and not speaking from knowledge, I just wanted to ask – (it's a strange way of phrasing it) what is the place of women within the concept of world theatre and/or feminism and/or gender activism of any sort?

Esther Kim Lee: It's not just women, but also gender, race, sexuality. The new generation of our students are embracing non-binary, non-normative ways of defining themselves as humans. In the Korean context, the country is historically patriarchal, and this is one of the reasons why there's a tendency to privilege the guru-type of male directors. They are charismatic and big names. Recently, Korea went through its version of the 'Me Too'

movement and one of the directors got in trouble. There's a kind of reckoning with gender imbalance in theatre right now; so maybe we are at the beginning of a new movement in Korea toward a more egalitarian way of creating theatre.

Aparna Dharwadker: Well, I think, theatre in general has had a problem with gender, even in the Anglophone cultures of the West before the 20th century, though since then countries like Britain and the US have consistently produced major women playwrights. In India, the crisis of female authorship has been intense, though ironically, paradoxically, women began to dominate the realm of performance as film actresses and then later as stage and TV actresses. They have always been very visible as dancers, and singers in both the classical and popular traditions. So women were very prominent in the 20th century in all these respects – they were just absent as authors in the conventional sense of 'female authorship'.

There was this very strong connection with print culture that the male playwrights began to establish from the middle of the 19th century onwards. I've actually written about this, and what has happened in relation to women is the transition from the notion of author to that of auteur. That is the role in which women have basically been emerging now for about forty years in Indian urban theatre practice – as major directors and major developers of collaborative texts for performance. Feminist performance art is also something that has gathered a lot of momentum. It is by stepping outside the conventional roles of author and director that women have begun to acquire prominence in urban theatre, and have begun catching up with all of the other areas of activity in which they were already prominent by the middle of the 20th century.

Glenn Odom: Are there things that you wanted to say that you haven't yet been able to say as we wrap up?

Aparna Dharwadker: Glenn, you had identified the notion of modernity as something that needs thinking about, and Esther, since you are the editor of *Modern and Contemporary World Drama*, do you want to go first and talk about how you approach the notion of the modern?

Esther Kim Lee: Yes, that's a central piece in the project, although mine also goes into contemporary theatre. In using the term 'modern' as a theoretical conceptualization, I echo what you state in your introduction. First, it is the idea of the new or the need to create something that didn't exist before, the constant need to innovate. All around the world, playwrights thought about expressing something new with drama.

The second is existential anxiety connected to trauma caused by war, militarism, imperialism, and colonialism, all of which are inherent to modernity.

Third is the questions of realism: we often think of modern drama as synonymous with realistic theatres, like, say, socialist realism. The term 'real' is tricky because it's a paradoxical word in our field. There is also an awareness of the paradox and thinking about the form of drama. What does one need to do as a playwright to make something 'authentic', or is it possible to do that? These are the top three patterns I was able to observe in studies from around the world.

The questioning of the dramatic form can be seen in Brecht's experimental 'borrowing' from Chinese theatre, for example, or Artuad being inspired by Balinese dance.

My project is less concerned with theory-for-theory's sake. Rather, I wanted to look at modern and contemporary theatre pragmatically and dramaturgically. What are some of the specific choices made by playwrights in shaping audience perspectives? I wanted to ground these questions in what was actually happening.

Aparna Dharwadkar: India is a very complicated place to think about in relation to modernity because it's an ancient culture which was also a major British colony from the middle of the 18th century onwards. One of the things that's happened in Indian scholarship in the last thirty years is thinking about pre-colonial forms of modernity. The dynastic state in classical India is a very modern formation, as are the Indo-Islamic state and the Mughal period. First of all, we have to delink the notion of modernity from just Westernized modernity, which is something that arrives only with colonialism.

In the theatre, of course, there is a 2000-year tradition before the arrival of colonialism and the emergence of modern urban theatre because of European and local influences. It is intrinsic to this phase of Indian modernity from the 19th century onwards that it reconciles what had existed before with what is new. So to go back to my definition that you had cited earlier, a workable definition of modernity was to identify the conditions and processes and phenomena that had never existed on the subcontinent before the 19th century, but which then became institutionalized in urban theatre and continue, in a sense, to exist. In the introduction to *Poetics of Modernity*, I have specified six or seven of these conditions and processes which are still very relevant to contemporary practice, but none of them had existed earlier. For example, authorship and print culture in the form in which they emerged in the 19th century had never been seen before. Or the huge scale of translation in all directions: from Sanskrit to the European languages, from European to Indian languages, from one Indian language to another. Again, this is something that had not happened earlier, but then began to happen and is such an entrenched and intrinsic part of theatre practice today.

So one way of thinking about Indian modernity is to accept its inherently syncretic nature. There is no Indian modernity that can be described as 'authentically' Indian, and any attempt to do that is really a retrograde expression of a particular kind of cultural politics, which is increasingly damaging in India at this point. It's just very interesting to see how that assimilation of the past and tradition and the new has taken place over more than 150 years. I would agree with Glenn that the notion of 'alternative modernity' is not viable because in all forms of contemporary modernity, in places like India or even in places that were not colonized, the West is so central to that notion of modernity. First of all because of conquest, and then because of technological superiority. Even where there was no actual conquest, the superiority of western technology and commerce really affected every part of the world.

Indian modernity is not an alternative modernity. It's just a different manifestation of the assimilative power of culture, which then produces the forms of modernity that become particular to it.

Glenn Odom: I have been reading a bunch of scholarship from the '70s and '80s from urban centers of China and the discussions of Shakespeare as inherently modern – Shakespeare and Ibsen are said in one breath as part of modern theatre in China. I'm fascinated by this argument. The same thing happens with the notions of realism: Shakespeare's realism, Brecht's realism and Ibsen's realism all become modern realism.

Framing what counts as modern and what doesn't becomes dependent on where you're standing and what the pressing need for change is.

Aparna, you mention 'historically unprecedented cultural transformations' going on in modernity: what is the axis of change, what is the lever that's being used?

To turn to the question of audience: While both of your books are very specific and scholarly, I can imagine teaching them both in an undergraduate module, particularly the introductions to them both. This would give students a chance to engage with debates about what constitutes drama, what constitutes modernity, what constitutes authorship, and indeed (as Esther says several times) what constitutes the human, what is the I.

I think it is important to think about teaching: often scholarship that deals with the 'world' only gets taught in a class on Indian theatre or a class on world theatre. I actually would teach these in a performance studies class, or sort of intro to theatre more generally to challenge this: maybe not to first-year, but to second-year or third-year students.

Anything you want to say to people thinking about incorporating these two books in modules?

Esther Kim Lee: I teach a class called 'Globalization and Theatre' that covers some of these topics that we've been talking about, and it includes intercultural theatre. I prefer 'Globalization and Theatre' because it allows me to work around issues of power imbalance caused by Eurocentrism. We haven't talked about the word 'drama', but how do we talk about indigenous cultures that don't have written plays, for example?

In teaching, I like to juxtapose different examples together.

Putting one playwright into conversation with another—that's a pedagogical approach I remind myself to use because I think that gets away from, again, privileging or centering one set of cultures or playwrights.

I'm interested in how these different examples mirror each other. I think that's where really interesting conversations can emerge.

Aparna Dharwadkar: At Wisconsin I've had the good fortune of being able to teach whatever I want, and so I've taught courses in postcolonial theatre at the advanced undergraduate and graduate levels, and I teach undergraduate and advanced graduate courses in modern Indian theatre. There were also two courses in contemporary world theatre, one of which included plays in translation and the other was world theatre in English, which is something I've offered to our English majors. It's been a wonderful course to teach and in all of these, my primary objective is to bring new knowledge – up-to-date knowledge about what is going on around the world – into the classroom, because that knowledge simply does not exist even today, as I said.

As I mentioned earlier, theatre majors in my Contemporary World Theatre class had never heard of Soyinka or Walcott. That kind of gap can become almost a kind of crusade in itself. Theatre was exploding around the world, but American theatre was becoming more insular. I think the American theatre tradition is one of the most parochial, maybe because it is driven so much by commerce. Just expanding people's knowledge and understanding of what has been happening in theatre around the world, especially since the middle of the 20th century, which I think one really can see as the beginning of an explosive period in theatre around the world – that, for

me, is a pedagogic objective. Everything that comes out via the technology of publishing, everything that becomes available, adds to that goal, and that is something good. Obviously, one has to be very selective – there's only so much you can do in a semester, but everything helps, I think. And there is no question but that global thinking, thinking on the global scale, is something that has come to every discipline, and it has come to the discipline of theatre as well.

Glenn Odom: Thank you, both, very much for your time today.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar is Professor of English and Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she teaches courses in postcolonial, Indian, and world theatre, South Asian diasporic cultural forms, and world literature. She is a two-time winner of the Joe Callaway prize, awarded biannually to the best book in theatre studies—for *A Poetics of Modernity: Indian Theatre Theory, 1850 to the Present* in 2020, and for *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory, and Urban Performance in India Since 1947* in 2006. Aparna has held fellowships from the NEH, the American Institute of Indian Studies, and the International Research Centre in Berlin, among others, and has published widely in scholarly journals and collections in North America, Britain, and India. Her current work includes books in progress on comparative modernisms in the theatre, and the constitutive features of Indian theatrical modernity.

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