Global Circulation and Some Problems in Liberalism, Liberalization, and Neoliberalism

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WHEN MARK WOLLAEGER AND MATT EATOUGH edited their landmark collection *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (2012), Wollaeger asked whether “global” aligned too closely with “globalization.”¹ In a similar vein, we might ask, does “liberal,” in the sense of freedom, tolerance, and diversity, align too closely with “liberalization,” in the sense of the opening up of cultures, or, worse, with “neoliberalism,” the reduction of all values to those of the market? In *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (2000), I traced the turn from substantive political economy to the Marginal Revolution, or neoclassical economics, after the 1870s, which moved from the social relations of production (land, labor, and capital) to more individuated consumption models.² Under political economy, markets were intended to be just one stage in human progress, not ends in themselves; free trade was expected in the long run to facilitate world peace. Once production reached a certain level, the world could turn to more equal distribution, and once society had developed its productive forces, its members would be liberated to progress ethically and politically. Markets were modeled on trust and responsibility. Tastes and preferences were considered to be socially constructed, educable, and judged by their compatibility with some conception of a good life. In Adam Smith’s terms, governments existed to provide for the needs and desires of the people.

¹ Mark Wollaeger with Matt Eatough, *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3–5.

² Regenia Gagnier, *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Market Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a cultural history of European *individualism* at its height from Mill’s *On Liberty* to the First World War, see Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: On the Relationship of Part to Whole* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

After the Marginal Revolution and most intensely during the second half of the twentieth century, economic growth was increasingly seen as an end in itself, in ceaseless international competition, and social relations gave way to more psychological models of individuation. The maximizing of self-interest came to be accepted as human nature just as the conception of self-interest itself became narrower, that is, more closely allied to consumption. Henceforth, tastes were exogenous to economic models, and competitive individualism and aesthetic individuation through taste, choice, and preference became a matter of mathematical interest in the service of marketing. Oscar Wilde presciently described the modern cynic as “one who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing” (*Lady Windermere’s Fan*, 1893), and we have by now seen near-universal commodification and fungibility, from water to transport to education and health. This shift from a liberal, liberalizing culture in the nineteenth century to a neoliberal one in the last quarter of the twentieth, and to a near-global neoliberal one at the beginning of the twenty-first, is the subject of this essay.

We may begin with two examples of the current confusion of terms.³ On 13 February 2015 the *Guardian* published an article entitled “Second-Amendment Advocate Who Hated Religions Murders Three Muslim Students: Picture of ‘Gun-Toting Liberal’ Who Hated All Religions.”⁴ Here the “liberal,” who presumably hates the dogmatism of religion, wrenches freedom from dogmatism through murder. The militia “necessary to the security of a free State,” which in John Stuart Mill and the US Constitution was a domestic *defensive* force, is here an individual’s emotive weapon of aggression against others within his own state. In the second, more subtle case, that of Transableism, the main funding body for medical research in Britain, the Wellcome Trust, has been inquiring into cases of people with body integrity identity disorders (BIIDs), who suffer extreme pain and anxiety because of what would appear to be limbs, sight, or hearing with normal capacities, and who therefore opt for voluntary amputation, blindness, or deafness.⁵ While most psychologists agree that BIID, like gender dysphoria, is a real source of pain to the patient, medical practitioners are reluctant to perform surgery. The issue can be posed either from the perspective of the liberal individual who *chooses* amputation as a right to freedom over one’s own body or from that of social constituencies, such as family members, insurance firms, or health services, who are equally concerned about an individual’s impact on others. Is it liberal to resource transabled people, like transgender people, at their own choice and preference in line with liberal goals of tolerance and diversity? Or is it neoliberal for them to think that whether or not they have limbs is merely a matter of individual choice, like consumer choice, and whether they can pay medical and care costs? Such are the translation problems that arise with liberal and neoliberal choice and preference and with liberalized, market or welfare, forms of care.

This issue of *Occasion* has explored such translation problems historically: what did “liberal” or “liberalize” mean at any specific historical moment? Who deployed these terms and with what

³ For the differences between popular British and US American uses of “liberal,” see also Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁴ “Second-Amendment Advocate Who Hated Religions Murders Three Muslim Students,” *Guardian*, 13 February 2015, 26. The text of the Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads “A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed” (Bill of Rights, 1791).

⁵ Dan O’Connor, “Thinking with Transsexuality: Gender, Disability and the Ethics of Transableism,” Centre for Medical Humanities, University of Exeter, 2015. See Carl Elliott, *Better Than Well: American Medicine Meets the American Dream* (New York: Norton, 2003); Gregg M. Furth and Robert Smith, *Apotemnophilia: Information, Questions, Answers and Recommendations about Self-Demand Amputation* (New York: First Books, 2000).

intended and unintended consequences? This final essay will show how a global, transcultural perspective helps us understand the fraught nature of the relations between “liberal,” “liberalize,” and “neoliberalism” in a world of combined and uneven development. It will look first at some transcultural transvaluations of actants and ideas associated with classic nineteenth-century liberalisms and then conclude with some specific problems of neoliberalism today. Nineteenth-century liberalism appeared as liberal individualism as well as liberal forms of collectivism, such as cosmopolitanism (the opening up to other cultures) and socialist internationalism. There were specific movements to liberalize cultures, such as the May Fourth and New Culture movements in China, the Meiji Restoration in Japan, and the Turkish Tanzimat, which programmatically replaced ancient traditions with modern and modernizing norms. Esperanto was proposed to open up and modernize parochial languages in order to further international exchange.⁶ Theosophy was developed to syncretize global religions and to modernize them with science and scientific methods. The geopolitical institutions of liberal governments, liberal trade, and liberal education circulated globally, through both liberal (free and voluntary) channels and through the forms of domination and exploitation familiar to postcolonial studies. I turn to some examples of liberalism as ideology, liberalization as the material processes of modernization transforming traditional cultures into modern ones, and neoliberalism, in which market ideology takes precedence over other values. Section I discusses the translation of Millian liberalism in China; section II deals with liberalization in India; section III deals with neoliberalism in Latin America and Islam.

I. LIBERALISM

The Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, with formal submission in 1912. The reforming literati, often associated with the May Fourth and New Culture movements, experimented widely with Western and other models that they might use in reforming China. In Lu Xun’s term (拿来主义, *nalai zhuyi*) they translated, “grabbed,” or borrowed what they needed from Western works and rejected what they could not use. They translated and intensely debated Darwin’s theory of evolution via Thomas Huxley’s “Evolution and Ethics” (translated 1898), Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (translated 1902), Mill’s *On Liberty* (translated 1903), and Spencer’s *Study of Sociology* (translated 1903). As they were concerned about China’s relation to expanding and emerging British, American, and Japanese empires, they emphasized Spencer’s social Darwinism rather more than Darwinian evolutionary theory. Freud was translated in 1907, and by 1900 the term *geren* (个人, individual), meaning something like the Western sense of individualism, entered Chinese.⁷ Today among sinologists this period of experimentation with external models primarily from Britain is often termed “the history of modern critical consciousness.”⁸ While the reforming literati were often critical of Western materialism and domination over other cultures, they were interested in forms of liberal individualism as developed by Mill, as well as the challenges to Millian progressivism launched by Freud and Nietzsche in the forms of unconscious motivation

⁶ Jiande Lu and Regenia Gagnier, “China in the 21st Century: On Borrowing, Translation, and Mixed Economies,” in “Chinoiserie,” Global Circulation Project special issue, *Literature Compass* 12 (2015): 428–38.

⁷ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995); Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁸ Max Ko-wu Huang, *The Meaning of Freedom: Yan Fu and the Origins of Chinese Liberalism* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2008).

and the critical transvaluation of liberal values. They were also interested in Darwinism as a critique of human exceptionalism (which resonated with Daoism),⁹ Malthusianism as competition for scarce natural resources, and, as mentioned, social Darwinism, the survival of the fittest, as competition between nations. Above all, they were interested in models of scientific and technological progress and its effects on human subjectivity, rather as Marx and Engels had been in their understanding of human freedom as beginning with labor and technology and unfreedom with their alienation.

Specialists in transculturation frequently emphasize the two-way, or even triangular, nature of exchanges when cultures come in contact. When we turn to cultural translation of specific works, we are no longer engaged in literary appreciation, which focuses on the ontology of the masterpiece, the way the masterpiece unfolds creatively and fits together as a whole or gestalt. Rather, we are looking at the phenomenology of a work's circulation, including the structure of the field of international cultural exchanges and any political or economic constraints that influence the exchanges, the agents or actants of intermediation, and the processes of export and import.¹⁰ We think less in terms of genius and originality than in terms of circulation, appropriation, use, transtextuality, revoicing, reaccentuation, indigenization, and mediation.

In the case of J. S. Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) in China, as translated by the polymath Yan Fu 严复, who had been trained as a naval engineer at Greenwich, we can see the processes of transculturation at work. Mill's work is the locus classicus of the Western liberal tradition. Written to protect the individual not only against a strong state but especially against a growing "marketplace of ideas" within an increasingly powerful commercial press, Mill emphasized tolerance of individual diversity in the face of mass society; absolute liberty of thought and discussion; and critique of dogmatism, authoritarianism, and intolerance at all costs except injury to others. Mill emphasized critique, debate, and tolerance because, for him, seeking out the truth amid the many competing interests of modern society was difficult, and only by the widest possible attention to different perspectives might one be able to discern the best path for the many. This was the closest we could come to the pursuit of truth as the Utilitarians understood it.

When Yan Fu translated *On Liberty* into *wenyan* 文言文, or classical Chinese—a script accessible only to well-educated peers—his interest was less in epistemology and the rights of the individual and more in the relation of the individual's responsibilities to the collective, a basic problem that exercised the Chinese reformers. Translated as *The Boundary between Self and Group* (群己权界论) (1903), Yan's work, unlike Mill's, maintained objective social norms that in most cases derived from long-established Confucian teachings, including clear boundaries between self and group and a clear moral and social order. In Yan's translation, Mill's epistemological pessimism was de-emphasized. Yan Fu writes:

If people formed a group in which everyone was free to do as one liked without restriction, it would be mired in conflict, and the world would be dominated by might. Therefore, even if

⁹ See Haiyan Yang, "Knowledge across Borders: The Early Communication of Evolution in China," in *The Circulation of Knowledge between Britain, India and China: The Early-Modern World to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Bernard Lightman, Gordon McOuat, and Larry Stewart (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Bruno Latour, "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications," *CSI-Paris* (1997), <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-67%20ACTOR-NETWORK.pdf>; Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

one has freedom, its limit must arise out of the right others equally have to freedom. This is the principle of xieju (谐剧) from the Great Learning, with which scholar-officials are able to pacify the world. The purpose of Mill's book is to distinguish between the extent to which one may be free and that to which one should be unfree.¹¹

Max Ko-wu Huang has studied the translation and dissemination of *On Liberty* in detail. At one point, in the turmoil of early Republican China, Yan lost the manuscript, an occurrence that recalls the incident of Mill's maid allegedly burning Mill's copy of Carlyle's *French Revolution*. When the lost manuscript of the translation was returned to Yan, he wrote, "The future of my 400,000,000 compatriots truly relies on it. . . . Heaven was unable to bear the sorrow of its loss."¹² When Yan was dying of opium addiction—opium being arguably a transcultural actant between British trade policy and a Chinese government too weak to resist it—his last words were on the boundary between the self and the group. While he credited Mill's significance, his emphasis was no longer Mill's. Yan instructed his son in his will (1921) to respect tradition as well as change and not to put the individual before the group:

Keep in mind that China will not perish and that ancient principles can be reformed, but must not be abandoned. Keep in mind that, to lead an enjoyable life, staying healthy is the most important condition. Keep in mind that one has to work hard, and understand that time passes and will never return. Keep in mind that one must constantly reflect and think about things in a systematic way. Keep in mind that one must forever learn and absorb new kinds of knowledge, but understand that the perfect achievement of a goal in one's moral and intellectual pursuits is never easy. *As for the relations between self and group, remember that the group is of greater importance than the self.*¹³

Yan was concerned that individual freedom in Western philosophy was not sufficiently balanced with a moral order and social justice. His Confucian ideals of "depending on the self," "completing the development of the self," "seeking value within oneself," Daoism's "freedom," and Yang Zhu's "acting to benefit oneself" made him appreciate Mill's belief in the individual as a distinct moral subject endowed with freedom, but this was within a balanced relationship between self and group, not the Faustian-Promethean individualism of much Western literature.¹⁴ Yet Mill's *On Liberty* had an afterlife well beyond Yan Fu. In 1961 the scientist Mao Zishu wrote, "Since the creation of writing, Mill's book stands out as one of the most precious works ever written" for its positive freedom, correlating freedom with a moral concern for others.¹⁵ And in 1989 echoes of Mill, now much closer to the original, were among the voices of the protestors in Tiananmen Square, who aimed "to wrench from the state its monopoly on truth and the moral way and to open up a space for the individual subject."¹⁶

¹¹ Huang, *Meaning of Freedom*, 92.

¹² Ibid., 94–95.

¹³ Ibid., emphasis added.

¹⁴ See also David Kelley and Anthony Reid, eds., *Asian Freedoms: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David S. Nivison, "Communist Ethics and Chinese Tradition," in *China: Enduring Scholarship Selected from the "Far Eastern Quarterly—the Journal of Asian Studies," 1941–1971*, ed. John A. Harrison (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), 207–30.

¹⁵ Huang, *Meaning of Freedom*, 94–95.

¹⁶ Cited in *ibid.*, 106.

Another example of the far-reaching afterlife of Millian liberalism is the great modernist Lao She's (1899–1966) thought experiment on the suitability of Western individualism in China's modernization *Rickshaw Boy* (Luòtuo Xiángzi [Camel Lucky Lad] 骆驼祥子, 1936–37), a modern classic attributed with establishing the vernacular and common people in Chinese literature. The novel has been translated into thirty languages and has sold seventy million copies in Russian alone; the numbers in sinophone languages have yet to be calculated.¹⁷ The plot concerns an orphaned peasant who comes to Beijing (then Beiping, or “northern peace,” the name used during the Republican era) from the countryside to make his way in the world. He is the model of a competitively fit specimen of humanity in a situation of self-reliant autonomy: “[Xiangzi] did not smoke, he did not drink, and he did not gamble. With no bad habits and no family burdens, there was nothing to keep him from his goal as long as he persevered.”¹⁸ He is healthy, strong, intelligent, capable, and willing to work for self-advancement, and he arrives with the goal of buying a rickshaw to make his living:

Xiangzi's hands trembled more than ever as he tucked the warranty away and pulled the rickshaw out, nearly in tears. He took it to a remote spot to look it over, his very own rickshaw. He could see his face in the lacquer finish. . . . It occurred to him that he was twenty-two years old. Since his parents had died when he was very young, he had forgotten the day of his birth and had not celebrated a birthday since coming to the city. All right, he said to himself, I bought a new rickshaw today, so this will count as a birthday, mine and the rickshaw's. There was nothing to stop him from considering man and rickshaw as one. (12)

Initially he identifies with and through his rickshaw (“He could see his face in the lacquer finish”), according to both traditional labor theory of value and liberal conceptions of possessive individualism. He physically works as one with it, each an extension of the power of the other:

Xiangzi did not notice [the cold], for his resolve pointed to a bright future. . . . Sometimes a strong headwind made it hard to breathe, but he lowered his head, clenched his teeth, and forged ahead, like a fish swimming upstream. Strong winds stiffened his resistance, as if he were locked in a fight to the death. . . . When he laid down the shafts, he straightened up, exhaled grandly, and wiped the dust from the corner of his mouth, feeling invincible. (94)

Xiangzi sees the desperate condition of the old rickshaw men but pursues his individual goal heartened by his own capacities.

Yet with repeated setbacks and misfortunes, Xiangzi begins to adjust to the daily life of struggle, less and less ambitious. He becomes alienated from his labor, and his rickshaw becomes merely a commodity instrumental to his consumption of necessities: “A rickshaw was nothing to be pampered. No longer did he fancy buying one of his own, nor did he care about those owned by others. They were just rickshaws. When he pulled one, he ate and paid the rent; when he didn't, he paid no rent. . . . That was the relationship—the only relationship—between man and rickshaw” (259). He takes some consolation from others and begins to feel solidarity. Yet with more misfortune, he turns to crime and violence and descends into apathy and anomie. He quits feeling

¹⁷ Yi Shu, “Interview with Lao She's Son Shu Yi,” 22 March 2011, accessed 22 March 2011, www.ruiwen.com/news/55072.htm.

¹⁸ Lao She, *Rickshaw Boy*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (London: HarperCollins, 2010), 9. All subsequent references to *Rickshaw Boy* will be to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

and talking and becomes more and more alienated and isolated. The last chapter describes a brilliant Beijing in summer, full of life and color but also of cruelty, betrayal, and sadism, a people entertained by state killings. Lao She said that the moral was that individualism cannot be of use in a corrupt society.¹⁹ The development of each and the development of all are interdependent. The last lines of the novel are:

Respectable, ambitious, idealistic, self-serving, individualist, robust, and mighty, Xiangzi took part in untold numbers of burial processions but could not predict when he would bury himself, when he would lay this degenerate, selfish, hapless product of a sick society, this miserable ghost of individualism, to rest. (300)

Liberal modernizers like Lao She transformed the genre of the novel by introducing common people and vernacular speech, as well as gesturing toward more communal forms of liberalism. We may also consider the liberalizing niche in which the story takes place. In the case of *Rickshaw Boy*, we can trace the liberalization of the rickshaw itself as actant. The English name derives from Japanese *jinrikisha* (人力車, literally “human-powered vehicle”). Rickshaws appeared in Tokyo in 1868. By 1874, 300 had been imported to Shanghai. By 1879, there were 2,500 in Shanghai, and by the 1920s, one-sixth of all males in Beijing were pullers. By the time of the novel the rickshaw had become rural immigrants’ path to independence. In 1949 hand-pulled rickshaws were abandoned by the PRC as undignified labor. In the 1990s cycle rickshaws, no longer pulled by hand, had become a tourist attraction, and in Dhaka, Bangladesh, hand-decorated “expressive rickshaws” advertised their owners as individual performers as well as transporters. In 2006 the Communist mayor of Kolkata declared that “we cannot imagine one man sweating to pull another.”²⁰ And in the latest—green—revolution, the cycle rickshaw in New York City, now called a pedicab, has become the choice for sustainable transport, with owners being commuters and consumers rather than laborers.

II. LIBERALISM AND LIBERALIZATION

If we turn to India in the nineteenth century after the Napoleonic invasions, we find global liberals participating in transregional or global spheres of liberal discourse. Rammohan Roy (from the 1820s), Romesh Chunder Dutt (1870s), Dadabhai Naoroji (1880s), G. K. Gokhale (1900s), to B. R. Ambedkar (from the 1920s) criticized the Raj from within, and the liberal and democratic socialist writings of Tagore, Gandhi, Nehru and novelists Bankim Chatterjee and Mulk Raj Anand continued the debates up to and through independence.²¹ They sympathized with Chartists, Mazzini’s republican radicalism, American and Irish struggles against Britain, and others who had experienced slavery and racial prejudice. They deployed arguments from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Byron, Mill, Dickens, and Ruskin. Even when they were ignored by their intended European interlocutors, they were raising consciousness among home audiences of liberalism even under conditions of exploitation and humiliation. (Mulk Raj Anand would later say that humiliation was the cause of nationalism in India.) Indian liberals developed a sophisticated mathematical

¹⁹ From Howard Goldblatt’s introduction.

²⁰ Lisa Banu, “The Rickshaw: Transport of Oppression or Expression?,” *South Asian Arts: An Online Journal of Cultural Expressions in South Asia*, no. 1 (November 2011); David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City, People, and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

²¹ C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

rhetoric of statistics that they deployed against the metrics of the Raj.²² They referred to indigenous traditions of Vedantic continuity (i.e., revelation stressing self-realization, as a nation as well as individuals), and over time multicultural India revealed relations of individual rights to group beliefs that problematized liberalism to its core.

At the same time as Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) also took up the problem of the individual, now in relation to caste, beginning with the untouchable's labor in the latrines. Just as Lao She frequently acknowledged his debt to Charles Dickens, Anand was taken as the social novelist "Dickens of India," and the novel was legendarily edited by Gandhi as part of his assault on caste. Like Xiangzi, the young male protagonist Bakha is a model of an individual, entirely capable, self-reliant, and confident:

[Bakha] worked away earnestly, quickly, without loss of effort. Brisk, yet steady, his capacity for active application to the task he had in hand seemed to flow like constant water from a natural spring. Each muscle of his body, hard as a rock when it came into play, seemed to shine forth like glass. He must have had immense pent-up resources lying deep, deep in his body, for as he rushed along with considerable skill and alacrity from one door-less latrine to another, cleaning, brushing, pouring phenol, he seemed as easy as a wave sailing away on a deep-bedded river. . . . Though his job was dirty he remained clean. He didn't even soil his sleeves, handling the commodes, sweeping and scrubbing them. . . . It was perhaps his absorption in his task that gave him the look of distinction.²³

Whereas Xiangzi's nemesis is social corruption, Bakha's, and the climax of the novel, is the catastrophic touching (47–48), when Bakha accidentally brushes against an upper-caste merchant and causes a scandal on the streets:

His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, far away from the torment. But then he realized that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him if he pushed through would defile a great many more of these men. (47–48)

After this epiphanic moment, Bakha's less conscious life begins to unravel into consciousness. The final scenes of the novel find him reflecting on the defilement he has unwittingly caused, when he comes upon Gandhi, who is addressing the multitude. Listening to the Mahatma, those nearest Bakha begin to debate the possible solutions to the problem of caste and untouchability.

The first possibility is that of Christianity and its premise of the sacredness of each individual soul. This is appealing for its egalitarianism, but Christianity cannot be communicated by the missionary in the novel, who is arrogant and smug in his promotion of the Bible over the Gita. Then there are Gandhi's own solutions of *swaraj* ("freedom," "self-rule," what in emerging

²² For example, Naoroji and Dutt's "Drain Theory" built up a detailed economic critique of British imperialism in India. By the twentieth century, the *mutual* transculturation of liberalism and democratic socialism between India and Britain was evident. Naoroji sat as a Liberal MP for Finsbury within the United Kingdom, and while the British government in India often failed to respond to these intellectuals, some within the British Labour Party, such as H. N. Brailsford, Barbara Castle, Stafford Cripps, and political theorist Harold Laski, listened. I am grateful to my colleague Dr. Florian Stadler for conversations on these transnational contacts.

²³ Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (1935; London: Penguin, 1940), 15. All subsequent references will be to the 1940 edition of *Untouchable* and given in parentheses in the text.

African nations of the time was known as *uhuru*, “independence”) and the conservative *swadeshi* (economic self-sufficiency). The last solution proposed is that of liberalizing technology: flush toilets and sanitation systems, which in the novel are associated with the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar, editor of *New Era*, and historically, of course, with Jawaharlal Nehru.

Mulk Raj Anand had studied and worked with London liberals and democratic socialists E. M. Forster and George Orwell at the offices of the *Criterion*, University College London, Bloomsbury, and Cambridge. In July 1974 he contributed a lecture and essay, “The Search for National Identity in India,” to UNESCO’s (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) International Progress Organization conference “The Cultural Self-Comprehension of Nations” at Innsbruck, Austria. In his essay, Anand traces a history of multicultural and modernizing India through key figures: in the sixteenth century Akbar (“The Great”) wanted to unite Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Aborigines. His grandson Aurangzeb wanted one religion, Islam, so the great dream of one Hindustan ended. Cultural self-comprehension came to the fore only at the end of the nineteenth century under British political unification—what Anand calls “humiliation as the cause of nationalism.” Raja Ram Mohan Roy was just one of the intellectuals who thought that the West and India could combine to benefit both, and he welcomed English for arts and sciences. The elite Rabindranath Tagore, mindful of the peasants, also looked to the present, modern world rather than transcendent time and emphasized individual freedom in both Western and Brahmanic senses of autonomy. His advocacy of nationalism with respect to one’s own country as part of one harmonious world, like his famous proposal of “world literature,” Bengali *vishwa sahitya*, partook of global hopes for internationalism. His friend Gandhi sought to unite India in political freedom, *purna swaraj* (complete political freedom), through nonviolence (noncooperation) and *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency in, e.g., cotton manufacture). Nehru furthered modern economic India, combining practical science and technology with Gandhian vision. Seeing historical unity in the diversity of India’s history, Nehru developed parliamentary democracy and discarded East/West polarities altogether. He accepted Muslim theocracy in Pakistan but not the two-nation theory. *Untouchable* ends with Gandhi’s liberal invocation of inclusivity and Nehru’s liberalizing science and technology.

Today, Kancha Ilaiah, a spokesperson for the Dalitbahujans—not only untouchables, Dalits (Marathi for “broken,” divided or split, oppressed), but now also tribals, women, and the so-called OBCs (other backward communities)—claims that the persistence of caste is attributable to the fact that the Indian Liberals, with the notable exception of Ambedkar (himself born into a low caste), were abstract liberals, constructing nationalism within their own Brahmanic (caste) image and thus not removing caste from the national (Hindu) religion.²⁴ Referring to the image from the Vedas—“His mouth became the Brahman [the priest or intellectual caste]; his arms were made into the warrior [*kshatriya*], his thighs the people [*vaishya*, or merchants/tradespeople], and from his feet the servants [*shudra*] were born”²⁵ —Ilaiah claims that “the brahmanical

²⁴ The importance of Bhimrao Ambedkar’s critique of the ancien régime of Hindu caste in framing the Indian Constitution is widely appreciated, not only by Ilaiah; Ambedkar is something of a household god in many Dalit and Shudra homes. See Sunil Khilnani, “41: Ambedkar; Building Palaces on Dung Heaps, 1891–1956,” in *Incarnations: A History of India in 50 Lives* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), 468–81.

²⁵ Kancha Ilaiah, *The Weapon of the Other: Dalitbahujan Writings and the Remaking of Indian Nationalist Thought* (Delhi: Pearson, 2010), e-book, loc. 545–47. See also Sathianathan Clarke and Manchala Deenabandhu, eds., *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

interaction with nature is anti-production as the brahmanical forces interact with the forces of nature only to consume or destroy them.”²⁶ He argues that Brahmanic book knowledge is “idealist” and must be counterpoised with the techno-economic knowledge of the Dalitbahujans, whom he describes as more empirically oriented, like applied scientists and engineers, within their own specific niches or environments:

While confronting nature, the Dalitbahujans show enormous courage and confidence but while confronting people [of higher caste] who look different and claim to be superior, they suffer from historical diffidence. This diffidence is constructed over a period of centuries. They study very carefully what is available in nature. They are very comfortable in dealing with animals, birds and their human essence has been consistently expressed in feeding animals and in training many of them to be human friendly. They have more of an investigative psychology than an imaginative ability like the Brahmins have. For example, most of the Dalitbahujans know the whole range of mineral wealth underground and overground. They have an ability to grasp the smells of soil, animals and they know how to test metals, stones, trees, plants, leaves and so on.²⁷

Ilaiah concludes: “the Dalitbahujans call their hands *matti chetulu* (meant for soil) whereas the brahmanical forces call their hands *pooja chetulu* (meant for worship)” and “The Dalitbahujans... evolved a culture of ‘labour as life’ as against the brahmanical method of ‘eat and worship,’ which in effect means a life of leisure.”²⁸

Ilaiah traces Hindu caste back to the Vedas and contrasts it with Western philosophy: “European thinkers... went back to nature and productive social forces, but not to the Bible as the Indian nationalists have gone back to the Vedas.”²⁹ Such internal debates in India highlight the extent of communitarianism underlying any individualisms. “Will someone in the social sciences write a dissertation on how the rise of individualism in Bengal (in contrast to the West) destroyed rather than energized entrepreneurship? How, in India, caste and community drive capital and the free market?” writes Amit Chaudhuri in *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (2013), his reflection on the intense transformations of the city of his birth.³⁰ And the historian of *India after Gandhi*, Ramachandra Guha, writes about the difference between Indian individualism and British, a difference entrenched by the British:

Within England the growth of liberal values placed a premium on the sovereignty of the individual; but in the colonies the individual was always seen as subordinate to the community. This was evident in government employment, where care was taken to balance numbers of Muslim and Hindu staff, and in politics, where the British introduced communal electorates, such that Muslims voted exclusively for other Muslims. Most British officials were predisposed to prefer Muslims, for, compared with Hindus, their forms of worship and ways of life were less alien. Overall, colonial policy deepened religious divisions, which helped consolidate the white man’s rule.³¹

²⁶ Ilaiah, *Weapon of the Other*, loc. 503–4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 438–46.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 544–45, 3452–54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 380.

³⁰ Amit Chaudhuri, *Calcutta: Two Years in the City* (London: Union Books, 2013), 118.

³¹ Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2007), e-book, loc. 804–9.

Today, caste continues to play a role in Indian democracy, less “one person, one vote” than communitarian politics.

Ilaiah was critiquing the idealism of India’s great liberals—Gandhi, Nehru, Tagore—yet making a case for liberal modernization against the Sanskrit Vedas. Drawing on the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Gita, the Hindu religion absorbed caste prejudice. Idealists “failed in constructing a powerful theory of socio-spiritual and political equality that the world has recognized in the nationalist theoretical discourses of Rousseau, Hegel and Marx”:

Though by all means the Bible was/is the greatest spiritual democratic text that the world religions have ever produced, no great thinker went back to it again and again in order to construct nationalism out of it. Hobbes went back to the “state of nature” and made a study of the psychology of his contemporary people. Locke, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx searched for their philosophical foundations by studying nature.... The study of nature becomes meaningful if a thinker locates himself or herself in the given productive social forces. All human thought became creative and constructive while studying the struggle of a given people with nature. Since people work directly with natural resources, they comprehend their peculiar utilities and applications.... This relationship between human beings and nature is time and space specific.³²

If Ilaiah is right, the case of independent India reveals a liberal state that operated ideally, leaving unequal communities to battle through the processes of modernization. From the abstract liberalisms of the colonial and postcolonial contexts to the caste and identity politics of the present, the case of liberal and liberalizing India is one of combined and uneven developments, political as well as economic. Liberal ideas of freedom and autonomy, and community identities based in labor, develop alongside modernizing technologies of statistics, sanitation systems, and specialized knowledges of people living close to nature. After the socialist framers of independence, and then the 1990s market liberalizations, today the Hindu Right and the Bharatiya Janata Party have combined economic liberalization with exclusionary forms of nationalism.³³ I now turn to some of the theorists who, with Ilaiah, expose the complexity, and often costs, of liberal attitudes and liberalizing practice within distinct contexts of neoliberalism.

III. LIBERALIZATION AND NEOLIBERALISM

In *Liberalism at Its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text* (2009), Ileana Rodríguez cites the Guatemalan activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberto Menchú’s description of indigenous peoples in ways that compare with Ilaiah’s description of Dalitbahujans. Indigenous peoples have developed a communal relation to the material conditions of their environment and an

elaboration of a thought system with respect to the earth. An ancient civilization constructs its thought in relation to the universe: the earth, the sea, the sky, the cosmos. It needs a community in order to exist and the community guarantees the continuity of transmission of its thinking throughout different generations.... The possibility of equilibrated coexistence on the earth has been undermined. According to our ancestors’ testimonies, the ancient civilizations

³² Ilaiah, *Weapon of the Other*, loc. 370–92.

³³ See also Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture, and Identity* (London: Allen Lane, 2005).

and the first nations possessed these values. In all aspects of life, this equilibrium should exist, and one of the most important sources of equilibrium is community.³⁴

It was this traditional sense of community that made the indigenous peoples of Guatemala and Peru appear threatening to North American “development” interests. Rodríguez and then Jean Franco in *Cruel Modernity* (2013) chronicle how U.S. anticommunist policies targeted the indigenous to pave the way for development.³⁵ They show how the Mayas of Guatemala and Mexico and the Quechua of Peru have suffered a history of racism since the Conquest, have been targeted since 1954 by the United States as “communists,” and then were finally impoverished by the collapse of their agrarian economies due to the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994.³⁶ NAFTA flooded Mexico’s market with cheap U.S. corn, creating a pool of unemployed boys and men who had little alternative but the drug cartels and of poor mestiza girls and women who worked for the maquiladoras. As the drug and other trafficking became increasingly imbricated with corrupt governments, a literature grew up of *Sante Muerte* (Holy Death, traditionally a holy figure, now co-opted by cartels), necropolitics, *feminicidio* (murders of women), and an entire Southern Californian film industry, from *Savages* (2012) to *True Detective* (2015), of violence at the borders, in which various forms of expressive violence act out and advertise the killers’ power and impunity. This is liberalization, the opening up of cultures, turning into neoliberalization, in which global economic policy has unintended, violent, and cruel consequences locally. In retrospect we can see that its modern form began with the Cold War and the perceived threat of communism.

Joseph Massad’s *Islam in Liberalism* (2015) shows a similar targeting of Islamic cultures, again beginning as early as the Crusades but developing fully with the anticommunist policies of the mid-twentieth century. More detailed and current than Edward Said’s classic *Orientalism* (1978), Massad’s book traces the Western ideological construction of Islam as a religion of tyranny and repression counterposed to a Christianity identified with liberal democracy. He chronicles the European creation of Pan-Islamism out of diverse peoples and cultures in order to justify the occupation of Ottoman territories, the portrayal of Islam and Muslim society as “satanic alliances with communism,” and he repeatedly reveals the Western ideological insistence that liberal individualism and private property protected by the state separate a Western Us from an Islamic Them. The liberal rhetoric hides material histories of domination and exploitation that now fuel religious wars to match the Cold War that gave them birth. The detailed work of Massad, Ilan Pappé, and others shows the liberalizing and modernizing of Islamic cultures until the Cold War and the economic neoliberalism that has provoked modern organized resistance.³⁷

The state can be a force to end prejudice and discrimination; but if it is in the service of profit-making institutions, its liberalism will be narrow, neoliberal. As global neoliberal policies

³⁴ Ileana Rodríguez, *Liberalism at Its Limits: Crime and Terror in the Latin American Cultural Text* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), e-book, loc. 753–56.

³⁵ See *ibid.*; Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

³⁶ Arthur Scarritt, *Racial Spoils from Native Soils: How Neoliberalism Steals Indigenous Lands in Highland Peru* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

³⁷ Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine* (London: Oneworld, 2015); Ilan Pappé, *The Idea of Israel* (London: Verso, 2014); Ilan Pappé, *The Modern Middle East: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 2014).

withdraw state support of economic and social services, reversing the liberal promise of developing and welfare states and leaving the global poor unprotected, Western liberals ignorant of indigenous Arab traditions of liberal values, communitarianisms, and sexual freedoms hawk rescue projects of Muslim women and LGBTQ+ communities. Massad points out that one of the reasons Shari'a was and is attractive is that it was always *above the state* in protecting the poor and dispossessed.³⁸ Evangelicals from the United States appear to feel the same, rejecting the liberal state for Christian fundamentalism.³⁹ And we know that in the West today and increasingly now under neoliberal regimes worldwide, the progressive state that can provide liberal protection against discrimination is coming to mean mere protection of the rich, the conflation of civil society and corporate rule, and the latter's encroachment on the procedural, impartial nature of state regulations. We need more detailed studies like Ilaiah's, Rodríguez's, Franco's, and Massad's that show the twists and turns of liberalism as toleration and respect for diversity, liberalization as the modernizing and opening of cultures, and neoliberalism as it affects people as well as the abstractions of "growth," "development," and GDP in conditions of combined and uneven global interdependence. What is striking in the aggregate of their detailed work is how much our current terrorized, securitized, neoliberal world owes to the global consequences of the Cold War or capitalist interests in conflict with any communities they consider suspicious.

In the meantime, we propose some concluding thought experiments for culturalists studying liberalism, liberalization, and neoliberalism:

- Don't assume separate epistemic, political, or theological communities.⁴⁰
- Don't oppose freedom to equality.
- Don't speak in universals but begin with local, then national, then international and global.
- Materialize tolerance, diversity, freedom; acknowledge emotions; address inequalities.
- Let the public sphere include counterpublics, social differences, a variety of styles of communication.
- Reject labels like "progress," "premodern," and "amodern."
- Recognize that everyone is modern and struggling with modernization in their own ways.

IV. LIBERATION

With these thought experiments, we may return to another cognate of liberalism, recently obscured by market ideology: liberation. Liberation philosophy includes the "Other" face of modernity that has paid with its immiseration throughout the growth of neoliberalism. The language of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) that is prominent in other essays in this special issue is now inflected in Rigoberta Menchú's *derecho de gentes*,⁴¹ but the demand is still unsatisfied.⁴² In the autobiographical *The Blue Touch Paper* (2015), the British playwright David Hare writes of what his generation thought was unthinkable:

³⁸ Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*. On gender in the Arab world, see also Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

³⁹ Hardt and Negri also understand fundamentalisms to be postmodern reconstructions deriving from resentment. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ For an excellent account of the complexity of intercultural processes, see Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860–1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

⁴¹ See Rodríguez, *Liberalism at Its Limits*, loc. 776.

⁴² "Teaching Human Rights: An International Student-Teacher Collaboratory," <http://www.teachinghumanrights.org/>.

Of all the things that might happen, we had least foreseen that capitalism might have the ability to renew itself from within, kicking up a gear by freeing up markets and tearing up workers' rights. It had been ingrained in every aspect and in all the evidence of my upbringing that the gains made in the 1940s towards free education, free health and decent standards of welfare were permanent gains, lasting standards of improvement, the majority of the people finally imposing themselves on the minority.... The idea of the country agreeing to hand itself back to the laissez-faire barbarism of the years before the war was unimaginable.⁴³

In the examples we have drawn on in this essay and this issue of *Occasion*, we have seen the emotions associated with liberalism: optimism, hope, freedom, courage, respect, and confidence. And when actions associated with liberal expectations are blocked by forces outside our control, we see the negative emotion—the characteristically modern emotion—of *ressentiment*, resentment. The emotions associated with neoliberalism also have both positive and negative aspects. John Maynard Keynes noted the healthy “animal spirits” of the entrepreneur, the energy and exuberance of innovation for its own sake—although the innovators, inventors, and investors he envisioned are rarely the accountants and bankers of globalization.⁴⁴ Neoliberalism's emotions are, for those at the top, bipolar, the bipolarity of gambling and risk, boom and depression. Yet for most of us incessant competition will feel more like continuous anxiety and insecurity, fear and vulnerability. Neoliberalism has even given rise to a word to define those who no longer have a safety net, the Precariat.⁴⁵ In 1892 a greatly talented but lower-middle-class writer whose life had been bedeviled by poverty and shame contemptuously described market society as “a scheme of commercial competition tempered by the police-code, which we are pleased to give the name of a social order.”⁴⁶ George Gissing called his essay “The Hope of Pessimism.”

The road to liberal toleration and decent standards of welfare is currently blocked by an ideology of neoliberalism and its material and institutional *state* apparatuses. The surprising victory of the socialist Jeremy Corbyn as leader of Britain's Labour Party is currently being severely tested by daily onslaughts of the media, including the BBC, which appears as a fully functioning ideological state apparatus. As educators and as students, we need to keep alive liberal traditions currently abused and erased and liberal emotions that might sustain a social order worthy of the name.⁴⁷ A

⁴³ David Hare, “Rebel, Rebel,” *Guardian*, 22 August 2015, 2–4.

⁴⁴ John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), 161–62.

⁴⁵ Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

⁴⁶ George Gissing, “The Hope of Pessimism,” in *Essays and Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 90.

⁴⁷ Thankfully, alternatives to neoliberalism are currently being creatively developed by both economists and social theorists. See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Thomas Piketty, *The Economics of Inequality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) MA: Harvard University Press, 2015; Yanis Varoufakis, *And the Weak Suffer What They Must? Europe, Austerity, and the Threat to Global Stability* (London: Vintage, 2016); Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism* (London: Penguin, 2015); Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2009); Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (London: Verso, 2015).