

| *Global Liberalisms*¹

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| (2391 including footnotes)

| Introduction

Under the auspices of the transnational, the international and the global, intellectual history has new impetus.² The four essays on the history of liberalism gathered here look beyond Britain, northern Europe and the North Atlantic seaboard of the United States and beyond intellectuals formed by and operating within the high culture of those regions. They find liberalism in places and among peoples that are not usually noticed in the history of liberalism. Their 'global' character is a product of their individual contributions to the sum of what we know about the appearance of liberal ideas beyond their trans-Atlantic intellectual streams. There are echoes in these essays of Gänger and Lewis' recent reminder that 'modern intellectual cultures in the non-European world emerged ... within an expansive, global field of ideas in which intellectuals in Asia, the eastern Mediterranean, and Latin America took part.'³ Taken together, they interrogate a cultural geography entrenched in the history of political thought, and offer challenging readings of the texts and contexts that count in intellectual history.

In what sense is this geographical extension of inquiry an exercise in 'global intellectual history'? Moyns and Sartori have recently distinguished three approaches to 'global intellectual history'. In the first, 'the global' is 'a meta-analytical category of the historian' and this includes versions of universal history

¹ These essays were first presented and discussed at a workshop organized by Glenda Sluga in response to the publication of Chris Bayly's *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), in the International History program at the University of Sydney, July 2012, with generous financial assistance from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

² See Sam Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds., *Global Intellectual History* (New York, 2013); Darrin M. McMahon and Sam Moyn, eds., *Rethinking European Intellectual History* (New York, 2013); M. Isabella, 'Nationality before liberty? Risorgimento Political Thought in Transnational Context', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17:5, 507-515.

³ Stefanie Gänger and Su Lin Lewis, Introduction, 'Forum: A World of Ideas: New Pathways in Global Intellectual History, c. 1880-1930', *Modern Intellectual History* 10,2 (2013):347-351, 350.

(in the wake of Hegel), the cosmopolitan critique of universal history, and the comparison of regions.⁴ In the second, the historian establishes empirically the networks of persons and the translations of concepts that send ideas from one region of the world to be received in another – often, but not necessarily, in the context of colonisation. In the third, the ‘global’ is an actor’s category: actors’ ideas about human universality and interconnection are the focus of the historian’s attention. We see the four essays published here as ‘global intellectual history’ in the second and third senses.

To illustrate: In 'The ends of liberalism and the political thought of Nehru’s India', Chris Bayly is doing global history in the second sense by considering Nehru and several politically engaged Indian intellectuals of his generation as selective mediators of certain currents of liberal thought of British and North American provenance. While ‘old-style liberal individualism and constitutionalism’ were weak among the intellectual congeners of Nehru, Bayly argues, the ‘liberal, democratic and socialist ideologies... appropriated from the West were blended with both conservative and modernist Hindu themes.’ Ian Coller’s 'African Liberalism in the Global Moment,' which draws attention to the London and Paris milieux of Tripoli-born Hassuna D’Ghies and his friendship with Jeremy Bentham, is a good example of the ways that global intellectual history is effected by propinquity and affection. When Tim Rowse in 'The Indigenous redemption of liberal universalism' draws attention to the terms used by the Sioux Charles Eastman and the Yorta Yorta man William Cooper to name the ‘universal’, he is practising the third kind of global intellectual history. So does Maurizio Isabella's description in 'Citizens or Faithful?' of the themes of liberal texts from southern Europe in the 1820s inspired by the promise of the Spanish constitution of 1812. Arguing that 'the political and constitutional culture of liberalism created new common ground across the Atlantic and between different continents', Isabella is pointing not only to thematic continuities between texts, but also (in the second and third sense of global intellectual history) to the subjective identities of liberals who saw themselves as members of a regional movement connected with a wider North Atlantic constitutional project. However useful to historiography it may be to classify these

⁴ Moyns and Sartori, Introduction, *Global Intellectual History*, 5.

papers as instances of the project 'global intellectual history', their substantive significance is that they further our understanding of liberalism as a global phenomenon. Here we note some features of their themes and methods.

The four essays collected here self-consciously depart from a well-established understanding of the geographical and biographical boundaries of the topic 'liberalism'. Alan Ryan's recent, and in its own way, admirable book *On Politics: a history of political thought from Herodotus to the present*, displays these boundaries. The index entry 'liberalism' leads the reader to discussions of the texts and contexts of Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, de Tocqueville, Dewey, Mill (James and John Stuart), Bentham, some Fascist thinkers, Schumpeter and Rawls. While Ryan includes Franz Fanon and Sayyad Qutb under the heading 'radical anti-imperialism', as external to liberalism, he does not consider that some colonised peoples found the resources of their critical response from within liberalism and that they might thus contribute to the global elaboration of liberalism.⁵ We agree with Gänger and Lewis that these intellectuals' engagement should not be accounted as 'a binary, reactionary dialogue between colonizer and colonized.'⁶ The authors of the essays that follow investigate intellectuals who responded to European power and thought as phenomena exotic, challenging, appealing and historically necessary.

The four papers also demonstrate that to write the global history of liberalism *requires* methodological reflection. Bayly, while admitting that 'biographies may be out of favour with political theorists', insists that 'in the Indian case, it is essential to begin to construct them, not least because the key protagonists were mostly working politicians or lawyers who did not produce canonical ideological statements as such. A more general intellectual history can only emerge as this type of work proceeds.' Collier uses biography to answer the question, was there

⁵ Ryan, *On Politics: a history of political thought from Herodotus to the present* (London, 2012), 872.

⁶ Gänger and Lewis, 351. For alternative readings of liberalism in this vein of intellectual history, see for example, Jennifer Pitts, "[Liberalism and empire in a nineteenth-century Algerian mirror](#)," *Modern Intellectual History* 6, No. 2 (2009): 287-313, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, "Liberalism and Empire in Nineteenth-Century International Law", *American Historical Review*, 117(1): 122-140.

'African' thought in the liberal Age? By tracking the life and thought of Hassuna through the multilingual evidence of his extant writings and documents, his answer is 'yes', particularly since Hassuna himself invoked an African context for the application of liberal political principles. The result of following a particular intellectual is the recovery of a lost genealogy of responses to the age of liberalism that were self-consciously, and problematically named 'African'. Collier is careful to parse the changing contexts, meanings and significance of this idea of an African liberalism—whether as part of 'the global moment of constitutional liberalism', or rethought as an Islamic liberalism, or a Tripoli or North African-specific struggle for liberty. Rowse's biographical case studies explore the changing historical contexts in which indigenous intellectuals from North America and Australia, and including a woman, manoeuvred the language of liberal universalism in combination with the stadism of the Enlightenment, and the Christian promise of salvation to claim for themselves and others of their community the right to participate in the liberal project as a 'project of intellectual resistance to prolonged tutelage'. Rowse suggests that indigenous liberalism may be rooted in autobiographical understanding. As he argues, 'What makes their work part of the global history of liberalism is that they sustained an idea that was fundamental to liberalism as an imperial, civilizing project of government: the presumption or hope that all humans have the capacity for improvement.' When liberals began to doubt that certain native peoples were amenable to the civilising project, they were unlikely to be joined in that view by indigenous intellectuals sensible of their own considerable and successful efforts of self-improvement—as Christians, as literate persons, as farmers.

In contrast to Bayly, Collier and Rowse, Isabella's study of the revolutionary moment of the 1820s turns to alternative textual sources, particularly constitutional texts, as they grew out of, and wrought their influence on, political events in Portugal, Spain, Turin, Naples and Greece. Through an examination of sermons, draft pamphlets, constitutions, he pieces together a dense discourse of liberal engagement in a region of competing empires neglected by historians of liberalism, he argues, because of cultural stereotypes. Isabella's chosen texts reveal the constitutional debates and the wider political and religious cultures of southern Europe; he compares the positions that such texts presented on issues characteristic

of liberal constitutional design: the relationship of church and state, the scope of individual liberty, the freedom of the press. In the communitarian inflection of that southern European liberalism, he argues, we can see the shaping relevance of religion to the articulation and defense of liberal principles. '[R]ather than rejecting religion', he concludes 'liberals strove to find an accommodation between their values and revealed truth'.

In each case—the Indian, African, southern European, settler society indigenous—religion is crucial as a framework that has to be taken on board for the purposes of legitimacy, or stability, or rhetorical strategy. Bayly characterises Nehru as a 'Harrow-and Cambridge-educated Theosophist' and remarks that even the statistically-oriented Mahalanobis stood 'on that intriguing Indian cusp between pantheism and what might be called "pan-atheism".' Radakrishnan wove a philosophical critique of both Christianity and western materialism from concepts both Hegelian and Vedantic. The indigenous intellectuals that Rowse deals with were all, in various ways, Christian, and their linked convictions that the civilising project must not exempt any branch of humanity and that all branches of humanity could be judged by universal standards of civilisation drew on the essential Christian idea that all souls are amenable to God's grace and are accountable to His judgment. In Coller's account of Hassuna, the imprint of his Muslim education, while overlaid by his engagement with liberalism, is evident not only in his describing 'personal liberty' as 'the first gift of heaven' but also in the confidence with which he distanced himself from Christian European abolitionism, in order to plead the case of African 'adjustment' to a post-slavery world. What Coller calls Hassuna's 'African liberal critique of European humanitarian universalism' is readable in terms of continuing differences in the religious formation of the regional political cultures in which slavery and its abolition were issues of importance.

The essays presented here not only enlarge the geographical (and transnational) reach of liberal ideas, they proceed from a certain understanding of the relationship between political thought and political action which, borrowing from Pocock,

'may be viewed, simultaneously, as an act of political persuasion and as an incident in the pursuit of understanding; the arguments and concepts are repeated, after very short intervals, for purposes more theoretical, or more practical, than those for which they were just now employed. A philosophy reappears as an ideology; a party slogan as a heuristic device of high scientific value.'⁷

Whether colonised by Europe (Bayly, Rowse) or negotiating the terms of their own and others colonial power (Coller, Isabella) the thinkers who feature in these four essays participated in liberalism as something useful to them, exploring its possibilities and elaborating its pertinence to their problems of governance. Thus the essays do not treat liberalism as 'a heritage of abstract thought about human nature, agency, freedom, and value, and their bearing on the functions and origins of political and legal institutions.'⁸ Rather they attend to the applied contexts which have given oxygen to that heritage. Bayly's essay picks up the Indian story after independence, and focuses on 'working politicians or lawyers who did not produce canonical ideological statements as such'. Like Coller, Isabella and Rowse, he reminds us that liberal texts were as contextualized in a pragmatic concern for the applied relevance of ideas (what the American pragmatists thought of as the ultimate manner of intellectual engagement and purpose). In Bayly's study of Indian political circles, these applied contexts are specifically political and policy oriented. Coller too refers to 'African pragmatic constitutionalism', while Isabella describes the southern European liberals who preferred 'to steer clear of excessively abstract principles that paid little or no heed to concrete social and historical contexts'. The four essays abundantly illustrate that liberalism was an intellectual resource for grappling with immediate problems of policy and institutional design—for example, whether Hindu-Muslim relations should be institutionalised as Indian confederacy (Bayly), how African polities could reconstruct their economies after the political triumph of European abolitionism (Coller), whether Maori should be exempt from military conscription (Rowse),

⁷ J.G.A.Pocock, *Political Thought and History: essays on theory and method* (Cambridge, 2009), 5.

⁸ J.Waldron, 'Liberalism' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (ed.E.Craig) volume5, 1998, 598-9.

what role should ecclesiastical authority play in the regulation of individual liberties (Isabella).

In the Francophone world, as Frederic Cooper has pointed out, subjects of colonial rule explored the anti-colonial potential in political concepts of colonial provenance.⁹ Narrated as a series of discursive conjunctures, or in Bayly's terms an "'amalgam of historically contingent' fragments of different ideologies"¹⁰ a history of liberalism can identify a changing configuration of concepts and values, found in specifiable times and places, enunciated by particular individuals as visions of the problems and possibilities of peoples who are colonizing, colonized or dealing with powerful alien influences. This multiple, historicised understanding of 'liberalism' underpins the complicities of liberalism with the British Imperial project.¹¹ The authors here show however that liberalism has been porous to the intellectual traditions and material interests of the many different peoples who have found it useful, from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth. By acknowledging (and indeed exploiting) the multi-faceted character of liberalism, the authors demonstrate that there can be a global history of liberalism or liberalisms.

⁹ Frederic Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005).

¹⁰ C. Bayly, *Recovering liberties*, 2.

¹¹ See B. Parekh, 'Liberalism and colonialism: a critique of Locke and Mill,' in J. N. Pieterse and B. Parekh, (eds) *The decolonization of the imagination* (London, 1995), 81-98, 82.