


Restaging World Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism/Neocolonialism

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**Shaobo Xie,**

**"Restaging World Literature in the Age of  
Neoliberalism/Neocolonialism"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "Restaging World Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism/Neocolonialism" Shaobo Xie argues that Goethe's notion of world literature spells a genuine universalism that contributes to resistance to neoliberal imperialism. In the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism all conduct, and all spheres of human life are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics and neoliberalism both as a governing rationality and as an economic policy is penetrating into every part of the world. The politics that is really heterogeneous or external to the rule of neoliberal capitalism in the neocolonial global present consists in thinking towards new possibilities of organizing our life in ways that are radically different than endorsed by the hegemonic global system itself. The Goethean world-literature mode of thinking, one can argue, richly nurtures such thoughts of the outside, for, while insisting on the universal as articulated in culture-specific forms, it always sees other ways of being human, other modes of making sense, and other possibilities of organizing social life.

## Shaobo XIE

### Restaging World Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism/Neocolonialism

To discuss world literature from a counter-colonialist perspective is to investigate in what senses it can take a postcolonial turn, to explore whether and how some of its central theses can be reworked or elaborated into serving a counter-colonialist political, critical agenda, despite its perceived ideological limitations, in the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism. Edward Said persuasively notes in *Culture and Imperialism*, Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur* "waffle[s] between the notion of 'great books' and a vague synthesis of all the world's literatures," its "practical meaning and operating ideology" being that "so far as literature and culture were concerned, Europe led the way and was the main subject of interest" (45). This is how in comparative literary studies significantly informed by the Goethean paradigm of world literature, particularly in its earlier phases in the twentieth century, the interaction of national literatures was investigated in such a way that they were hierarchically organized with the West and its Latin Christian literatures placed at the center and top (45). In discussing Auerbach's conception of *Weltliteratur*, Said detects a similar Eurocentrism to what he finds in Goethe's discourse on world literature, for what *Mimesis* largely reveals is "the notion of Western literature that lies at the very core of comparative study" which "centrally highlights, dramatizes, and celebrates a certain idea of history" (47). This "certain idea of history" Said also terms Hegelian historicism elsewhere, which in his view is responsible for Eurocentric grand narratives in which the West and the Rest are engaged in a relationship of subject and object, center and periphery, reason and unreason. It is difficult not to agree with Said about the Eurocentric aesthetics or historicism that he sees in Goethe's inaugural notion of world literature later developed by Auerbach and scholars of comparative literature; however, to stop with this discovery and move no further in addressing the Goethean concept would be to regrettably miss out on much of the sense in which it can be taken as anticipating some of the major concerns in postcolonial studies.

It is true that when Goethe euphorically acclaims that "a universal world literature is in the process of being constituted" (*Collected Works* 225), which means that the time has arrived for "all nations to learn their relationships each to the other" and to find in one another "something attractive" and "something worthy of emulation" (qtd. In Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* 351), he primarily refers to European nations, particularly Germany, France, and Britain, and their literatures. While speaking highly of the Chinese novel and praising the Chinese for having thousands of outstanding novels when "our forefathers were still living in the woods," he nonetheless insists that when "we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it as a model. We must not give this value to the Chinese, or the Serbian, or Calderon, or the *Nibelungen*; but, if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented" (Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 12). As David Damrosch notes, "Goethe is no multiculturalist, however: Western Europe remains the privileged modern world of reference for him, and Greece and Rome provide the crucial antiquity to which he always returns" (12). But to speak to Goethe's privileging of European literatures over non-European is not to ignore the rich complexity

of the Goethean notion of world literature, which in a sense can be read as coinciding with some of the postcolonial thinking. Homi Bhabha, for example, avers that Goethe's notion of the cultural life of the nation and the individual as lived unconsciously carries the implications that "world literature could be an emergent, prefigurative category that is concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity," and that the "study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'" (*The Location of Culture* 12). In Bhabha's view world literature as conceived by Goethe can be refocused on "transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees" instead of the mere "the transmission of national traditions" (12).

On various occasions, Goethe acclaims what he sees as the epochal event that a universal world literature is emerging, thanks to the ever-quickening speed of intercourse (Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* 351) or to communication among nations and cultures. World literature in his definition is national literature read, understood and appreciated beyond its national or linguistic borders. He enthusiastically greets the epoch of world literature because it enhances exchange, understanding, and respect among different nations, affording each national literature chances to enrich, renew, and rejuvenate itself. What is written in one language is understood differently in another, hence the new meanings of the work brought about by translation. Translation brings new life to the translated, for every national literature sees itself "reborn in translation" (Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* 22). World literature does not cancel differences. Translation foregrounds universality and idiosyncrasy at the same time. Goethe expects a piece of German literature, when translated into English, to be taken as English by the English, because it is part of the commonwealth of humankind and because the English and the German both partake of the universal despite their respective linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies. When the original and the translation become connected in this way, the "relationship of nation to nation" is established. World literature is born when a national literature becomes read and appropriated by the world at large, or when it is read and understood across national and linguistic borders. More importantly, world literature is when and where different nations read one another to increase mutual understanding, appreciation and respect. In this sense, it is arguable that world literature is an attitude, a readiness or willingness, a sensitivity to the foreign, the other, the unknown, or, as Damrosch claims, "a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is as applicable to individual works as to bodies of material, available for reading established classics and new discoveries alike" (Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 5).

Goethe's notion of world literature spells a genuine cosmopolitanism which "leave[s] untouched what is peculiar to each man or group" (Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* 14), instead of canceling culture-specific differences. Aware that no nations think alike, what he wishes to see happening in the epoch of world literature is that they "grow aware of one another, understand [. . . and] tolerate one another" (Strich 350). In Goethe's view, "Every nation has idiosyncrasies which differentiate it from others" and one should "learn to note the special characteristics of every nation and take them for granted, in order to meet each nation on its own ground." What is immensely important and intriguing is that in Goethe's eyes, it is cultural differences or idiosyncrasies that "facilitate intercourse and even make it possible" (Strich 14). That is, differences not only enhance cross-cultural communication or exchange, but

constitute their *raison d'être*. Goethe's ultimate purpose in advocating world literature is for "all nations to learn their relationships each to the other" (Strich 351), to build "more neighbourly relations," and to engage in "a freer system of intellectual give-and-take" (Strich 32). Foreign elements absorbed stimulate and inspire new intellectual needs and desires and literary innovations.

The Goethean notion of world literature as such, I venture to argue, both explicitly and implicitly anticipates a number of important theses prevalent in contemporary cultural and postcolonial studies: The study of literatures must focus on dialogue and exchange among different national literatures; national literatures are increasingly hybridized in the age of intercultural communication and translation; the foreign/Other decisively contributes to the reinvention and rejuvenation of the local or national; translation brings newness into the world. If these observations hold true, then it is well arguable that the Goethean paradigm of world literature is truer in our postmodern time than in his own, bearing a remarkable discursive affinity to postcolonial studies, particularly what is called cultural translation, and lending itself well to counter-colonialist modes of reading and thinking. Actually, the idea of cultural translation is already implied in the Goethean paradigm of world literature, though cultural translation as a counter-colonialist strategy of rearticulating the concept of universality in culture-specific terms to admit or include the excluded ethnic, cultural, and racial Others, comes to fore explicitly to us only through Walter Benjamin, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Judith Butler. It is predicated on the notion of the performativity of translation, the Benjaminian foreignness of languages which is untranslatable and irresolvable, catalyzes the birthing of newness, the concept of culture-specific universality, and the ethical moment of being for and respecting the Other. These counter-colonialist views and attitudes, one can argue, in no way sound distant and new to any Goethean world literature scholar. In what follows I will highlight some of the significant continuities between world literature and cultural translation, restaging the former as a counter-colonialist mode of reading in the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism.

In a conversation with a young Englishman, Goethe was recorded by Eckermann, his secretary and disciple, as saying: "It is part of the nature of the German to respect everything *foreign* for its own sake and to adapt himself to *foreign* idiosyncrasies. This and the great *suppleness* of our language make German translations particularly accurate and satisfying" (Strich 27; emphasis is mine). Goethe calls upon his fellow countrymen to "look *beyond* the narrow circle" of German literature and look about into "*foreign* nations" and "value what is *foreign*" (Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 12; emphasis mine). These remarks unmistakably recall what Benjamin notes in his seminal piece "The Task of the Translator": "Our translations, even the best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works...The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the *foreign* tongue...He must expand and deepen his language by means of the *foreign* language" (80-81; emphasis mine).

For Benjamin to have a reverence for "the spirit of the foreign works" is for Goethe to "respect everything and to adapt [oneself] to foreign idiosyncrasies"; the Benjaminian call to allow one's own language "to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue" is synonymous with the Goethean insistence on reading foreign literatures to be "refreshed by the interest and contributions of a *foreign* one" (Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 7; emphasis mine). It is noteworthy that Goethe's assertion that "it is part of the nature of the German to respect everything foreign for its own sake," if taken together with his similar remarks in other contexts, does not really point to an achieved disposition or attitude; rather, it expresses a desire, a wish and "it is" can be taken as equivalent to "it should be," for Goethe is acutely aware that cultural idiosyncrasies are often the "reason why we tend to respect a nation less than it deserves," and the true character of a nation is seldom recognized or understood on this account (Goethe, "Collected Works" 225). Obviously, Goethe's desired "suppleness" of German which enables German translations to accurately and satisfactorily capture the peculiar flavor of the foreign language is a result of the Benjaminian translator's effort to "expand and deepen his own language" by means of the foreign tongue.

Another illuminating coincidence between Goethe and Benjamin concerns the irresolvable "foreignness" of languages. In Benjamin's estimate, "...all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the *foreignness* of languages. An instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution of this *foreignness* remains out of the reach of mankind. . . . The transfer can never be total, but what reaches this region is that element in a translation which goes beyond transmittal of subject matter. This nucleus is best defined as *the element that does not lend itself to translation*" ("The Task of the Translator" 75; emphasis mine).

What is foregrounded here is the foreignness of and between languages which can never be domesticated or transmitted, and which is, paradoxically, nonetheless the reason for cross-cultural communication or translation. Such undomesticable foreignness of languages and the ethical need to preserve it, one can argue, are part of the implications of the following passage from Goethe: "One must learn to note the *special characteristics* of every nation and take them for granted, in order to meet each nation on its own ground. For the characteristics of a nation are like its language or its coinage, they facilitate intercourse and even make it possible. The sure way to achieve universal tolerance is to *leave untouched* what is *peculiar* to each man or group..." (qtd. in Strich, *Goethe and World Literature* 13-14).

Given that "Every nation has idiosyncrasies which differentiate it from others and make it feel isolated from, attracted to or repelled by them" (Goethe, *Collected Works* 225), Goethe calls upon his contemporaries to respect and leave untouched or unravished the special or peculiar characteristics of other nations or languages, in order to meet or understand them on their own grounds. What is worth noting here is that the Benjaminian foreignness that does not lend itself to translation is synonymous with the Goethean special or peculiar characteristics that must be taken for granted and left untouched. In Benjamin, the untranslatable foreignness of languages is out of the translator's reach because it does not lend itself to translation, whereas in Goethe, the recalcitrant foreignness of languages has to be taken for granted because it is untouchable. One can derive three key points from the above quotation

and position: a) taking untranslatable foreignness of other nations for granted or leaving them untouched is the prerequisite for meeting or understanding those nations on own terms; b) divesting those nations of their idiosyncrasies or foreignness means taking away their ontological substance; c) respecting the peculiar and untranslatable foreignness to be expanded and deepened or refreshed and enriched by it.

It is in these senses that a comparison can be made between Goethe's insistence on respecting and respecting the idiosyncrasies of the foreign and Spivak's call to turn translation into "an "ethical" moment of "being for the Other" (Spivak, "Translation as Culture" 21). What she means is to "relat[e] to the other as the source of one's utterance" (Ibid.) or to surrender one's own prejudices and will to power in translating the Other's text, hence to avoid the logic of translation as violation, which unfortunately "describes certain tendencies within Third-Worldist literary pedagogy" (*A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* 164). According to Spivak, "as the text guards its secret, [translation] is impossible. The ethical task is never quite performed" ("Translation as Culture" 21). Such failure can be avoided by "listening with care and patience" which is "the founding task of translation" (22). She draws a line of demarcation between singularity and generality, idiom and semiosis, and subalternity and hegemony, valorizing the singularity of meaning, value, or experience, of a certain subaltern or indigenous or native community whose idiomaticities have to be listened to and which get annulled or deleted in the standard language or the semiotic system. Submitting and listening to the translated other with care and patience and relating to the other's text as the source of one's utterance, Spivak's translator merges with the Goethean scholar of world literature in their shared efforts to protect the cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies from being domesticated and violated so as to meet the other on its own ground. Indeed, Goethe never neglects to emphasize national idiosyncrasies while celebrating the advent of a universal world literature. Rather, he always underscores the dialectic of the universal and singular and in this sense the Goethean notion of world literature echoes Judith Butler's call to articulate the universal in culture-specific terms. In Butler's view any full enacting or articulation of universality "must undergo a set of translations into the various rhetorical and cultural contexts in which the meaning and force of universal claims are made" ("Restaging the Universal" 35). There is no transcultural formulation of universality and expressions of the universal are always culturally varied. Cultural translation is the strategy of articulating culture-specific versions of universality, and as such it exposes the violence of representational or epistemological imperialism. Over the past few hundred years of colonialism, "universality has been used to extend certain colonialist and racist understandings of civilized 'man', to exclude certain populations from the domain of the human" (Butler, "Restaging the Universal" 35). The West has dominated the concepts of modernity, democracy, rationality, and agency by way of excluding the racial and social Others. The task of cultural translation is to restore or readmit the excluded. If cultural translation as defined by Butler restages the universal as culturally different, hence readmitting the excluded cultural specificities to the domain of universality, then it is not difficult to see a certain parallel between Butler's definition of cultural translation and Goethe's concept of world literature.

In a conversation with Eckermann on the Chinese novel, Goethe notes that the Chinese "think, act, and feel *almost exactly like us*; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them, except that all they

do is *more clear, pure, and decorous*, than with us" and that "With them all is *orderly, citizen-like, without great passion or poetic flight*" (qtd. in Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 11; emphasis mine). Even when he senses a pronounced kinship with classical Chinese writers, "Goethe acutely perceives a range of distinctive features of Chinese literary practice" (11). In discussing Chinese literature, as Damrosch has insightfully pointed out, Goethe rightly captures some of the literary idiosyncrasies: Legends "are constantly alluded to, forming a running commentary on the action; nature is not realistically presented but is symbolic of human character" and "[e]ven furniture serves to illustrate character" (11). With these observations, as noted by Damrosch, Goethe "is partly responding to *cultural difference* (the weight given to exemplary legends), partly projecting his own values outward (he takes the cane chairs to signify what *he* would have used them to mean), and partly finding in the foreign text a middle quality, a distinctive novelty that is *like-but-unlike* practice at home (the intimate connection of character and landscape had been a staple of intensely subjective Romantic poetry, but Goethe sees the connection in the Chinese novel as showing a more *restrained and ordered* universe of correspondences)" (Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 11; emphasis mine).

Goethe's remarks on the Chinese novel and Damrosch's explicatory comments can be taken as saying that in Goethe's view the "universal quality" behind the national and what is peculiar to a nation go hand in hand and that, since the relation of universality to its cultural articulation is insuperable," to borrow terms from Butler, the universal is always "stained by the cultural norms it purports to transcend" (Butler, "Restaging the Universal" 24). When Goethe asserts that the Chinese "think, act and feel almost exactly like us," the idiosyncrasies of Chinese imaginative art introduced by the preposition "except" are too important to be overlooked. Actually, it is in relation to such specificities that literatures of different spaces and times stand distinct from one another. To anyone familiar with classical Chinese narrative literature, it is obvious that Goethe's phrase "almost exactly like us" points to his appreciative recognition of the Chinese as civilized, rational, creatively imaginative, and aesthetically sophisticated as the Germans or the Europeans whereas the differences named in contrast refer to cultural idiosyncrasies. In underlining the bond of universality between the Chinese and the European, Goethe puts himself in sharp contrast with his contemporaries like Hegel in whose eyes, "The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our [European] ideas—the category of Universality" (Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* 93).

When Goethe foregrounds both commonality and idiosyncrasy or universality and particularity among different nations and their literatures, his views give rise to the implications that the universal whose expression varies from culture to culture is encountered everywhere in the world. Unlike the Hegelian historicism which refuses Africans the category of universality, the Goethean cosmopolitanism, recognizing commonalities between the Chinese and the German or between the European and the non-European Other, fully admits the Chinese to the domain of humanity except that they have different ways of worlding, different customs, and different styles of representation. While embracing the idea of a universal world literature or universal humanity, Goethe never loses sight of constitutive differences between different nations or cultures. Actually, when he is celebrating the emergence of a world



literature, that is, the arrival of the time when national literatures are read beyond their places of origin and are interacting with each other, when he emphatically asserts that national literatures can be refreshed and rejuvenated only by drawing upon foreign literatures, and that they find themselves reborn in translation, and when he points out that contact with foreign cultures inspires new intellectual needs and desires, Goethe can be taken as offering a politically energizing perspective on cultural Otherness or alterity. It is here that Goethe's notion of world literature and its role in promoting appreciation of difference and exchange between cultures meet or merge with the counter-colonialist project of cultural translation as championed by Butler as well as Bhabha and Spivak, for cultural translation, like world literature as conceived by Goethe, "compels an understanding of culture [or literature] as a relation of exchange and a task of translation" (Butler, "Restaging the Universal" 24-25). Both Goethean world literature and postcolonial cultural translation maintain, implicitly or explicitly, that articulations of the universal are culture-specific and both increase our awareness that different peoples share more commonalities than we have known and that there are more irreducible differences among them than we have been willing to admit. It is in these senses that it is necessary and urgent to restage world literature as a counter-colonialist mode of thinking to readmit the previously excluded to the domain of the human in a world dominated by neocolonialism/neoliberalism.

If, as has been discussed, the double emphasis of the Goethean paradigm of world literature on the "universal quality" "behind what is national" and "special characteristics of every nation," which should be left untouched and taken for granted, implicitly anticipates the postcolonial thesis elaborated by critics like Butler and Spivak that the articulation of universality is culturally different, then the critical methodology implied and enabled by the paradigm lends itself really well to postcolonial readings of world literature. Let's take a look at Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, one of the most discussed African novels, focusing on what has been so far neglected or under-discussed to see how the Goethe's world-literature critical approach can help rehabilitate the hitherto ignored or overlooked culture-specific forms of universality. Achebe's novel attracts critical attention as a contestatory response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad's Eurocentric narrative, Western man incarnated by Marlow is confronted with an uncanny, disturbing, impenetrable, prehistoric, primitive, evil Other whom he has no terms for comprehending and categorizing. Such disconcerting Otherness causes an existential fear of the unknown. In the Western history of thought, culture or civilization has always been opposed to nature or primitivity. The parameters of culture include reason, norm, order, whereas nature refers to whatever is unwholesome, irrational, coarse, chaotic and uncultivated. "This culture/nature opposition was redeployed in the confrontation between European metropolis and non-European peripheral countries in the nineteenth century, the latter being assigned to the side of underdeveloped, demonic nature. Just as culture is to conquer nature, so Enlightenment Reason is to conquer barbarity. This is how Western modernity justifies its supremacy over indigenes in the world" (Xie, "Rethinking the Identity of Cultural Otherness" 5). Achebe's post-Eurocentric counter-narrative aims to "translate the realities and verities of precolonial African cultural and social life into universal understanding—or into common humanistic sense" (Korang, "Making a Post-Eurocentric Humanity" 1). It refutes the Eurocentric denial of Africans' normative share in humanity (Ibid. 14). The Umuofians as represented in the novel have been living where they were

found for centuries with their own customs, language, cultural and social traditions, philosophies, institutions, religions, social constraints, existential problems and predicaments, which, according to Kwawku Larbi Korang, eloquently rejects Hegel's assertion that Africans are incomprehensible and beyond the scope of humanity. The Umuofians' culture-specific expressions of humanity are "evident in the workings of its impressive civil, ritual, and religious orders; in a social-democratic imaginary at work in the forms of its governance and jurisprudence" (Korang 16).

One of the most illustrative instances in the Achebe novel is the *egwugwu*, the Umuofian version of our contemporary court making juridical decisions on matters of dispute. As a well-established institution, it operates according to a set of rules and regulations agreed upon by the Umuofian society at large. When there are a certain amount of accumulated cases the Umuofian community decides to call upon the *egwugwu* to conduct trials. This is how Umuofians settle legal issues and make juridical decisions. What is particularly relevant and manifests a culture-specific articulation of universality is that the *egwugwu* are masked spirits and those who are chosen to act or enact the rule of the *egwugwu* are not only the highly respected members of the Umuofian society, but more importantly, they have to lose themselves, their own private identities, their own personalities, to act as an *egwugwu* member: they each must act, deliberate, speak, and make decisions as the spirit embodied by them, impartially, disinterestedly, and justly. This kind of social/personal/ or public/private split obviously recalls the court scene of our Western society where judges have to wear gowns and have to swear their impartiality and loyalty before the court proceeding begins. Both *egwugwu* masks and the gowns of the judges perform the same function: they both separate the public role and responsibility from the private sphere of life and both indicate a split identity or personality. However, to locate the meaning of the *egwugwu* in a more intriguing perspective, I would like to discuss how it relates to the division of the private and public use of reason drawn by Emmanuel Kant. According to Kant, one makes a private use of reason when one is "a cog in a machine," that is, when he is soldier, a civil servant, a pastor or a professor, someone who "has a role to play in society" (Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* 36). The use of reason becomes free and public when "one is reasoning as a member of reasonable humanity," that is, when one is speaking, thinking or writing about matters concerning society at large (35). Apparently, the kind of separation Kant makes between public and private spheres of life, surprising even to the Western commonsense as noted by Foucault, in no way coincides with what is revealed by the *egwugwu* institution. What brings them together is the differentiation of domains of life and uses of reason or of spheres of human activity and responsibility. If such differentiation is what Kant's conception of public and private uses of reason is all about, then it is exactly what the *egwugwu* institution manifests in Umuofian society. Differentiation of spheres of role and responsibility finds culture-specific expressions in different places or communities and for this reason it is an ethical must to accept the universal meaning of the *egwugwu*. To locate a concept of universality reincarnated in different cultures is to perform counter-colonialist cultural translation or the Goethean reading of world literatures, for both proffer a peculiar insight into commonalities and irreducible differences among nations and cultures.

Another register of culturally differential universality seen through lens of the Goethean world-literature mode of reading is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. One central concern of the novel

is its protagonist Waiyaki, whose heroic mission as a black Messiah has been predicted by the prophets. With unity and political freedom of his people as his vision, Waiyaki prioritizes education and learning as the vehicle of fulfilling the goal. What I would like to foreground as a moment of culture-specific universality is Waiyaki's emphasis on education and his idea of strategic westernization: "To Waiyaki the white man's education was an instrument of enlightenment and advance if only it would be used well. He still remembers his father's words...: 'Learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices'" (Ngugi, *The River Between* 119). Using the white man's education and learning as an instrument of enlightenment to ultimately rival and defeat him is a strategy universally shared among many of the erstwhile third world peoples. China at the turn of the twentieth century underwent a general debate on how to approach western learning. There were two polarized positions: one champions the *ti-yong* strategy, the other advocates strategic westernization, and in spite of their radical differences, they were bonded together by the shared position that western learning could be used as an instrument of their national rejuvenation. The imperial Qing-Dynasty China and the Gikuyu people of Kenya at the end of the nineteenth century were pronouncedly different in many aspects, but they partake of the same anguished anxiety about how to deal with western learning, hence, hence their respective articulations of such universal anxiety.

The culture-specific articulations of universality that we have discussed following the Goethean world-literature paradigm unmistakably attest to its relevance and usefulness in the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism. The Goethean concept of world-literature, despite its perceived Eurocentric impulse, emphasizes and celebrates intercultural interaction and translation as the catalyzer of new desires, new ideas, new styles, and new meanings in the world, respecting cultural idiosyncrasies while acknowledging universality. Its explicitly or implicitly expressed infinite respect for cultural and conceptual others offers or promises a genuine universalism. In his 2009 article "What Is the Postcolonial?" Robert Young notes, "Postcolonialism offers a language of and for those who have no place, who seem not to belong, of those whose knowledges and histories are not allowed to count. It is above all this preoccupation with the oppressed, with the subaltern classes, with minorities in any society, with the concerns of those who live or come from elsewhere, that constitutes the basis of postcolonial politics and remains the core that generates its continuing power" (Young, "What Is the Postcolonial?" 14). The Goethean appreciation of and respect for cultural and literary Otherness can be read as gesturing towards respecting the cultural practices and legacies of those who have been marginalized or excluded from the domain of the human, towards recognizing, to borrow terms from Jacques Rancière, the part of those with no part or "the rights of those who have no rights" (Ranciere, *Dissensus* 55) in the fields of aesthetics, politics, academic pursuits, and social and intellectual life. But, still, it remains unclear what is the relevance and usefulness of the Goethean model of world literature in the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism, and how it contributes to resistance to neoliberal imperialism.

To attend to these questions, let's first take a look at the neocolonial/neoliberal global present. In his 2005 book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey notes, "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized

by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2). Since the 1970s, almost all states in the world including old-style social democracies and welfare states, previously colonized countries, and erstwhile socialist regimes, have embraced a certain version of neoliberal theory, pursuing neoliberal policies and practices, with China standing out as a citadel of neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics. They "rushed to facilitate neoliberal policies by removing exchange controls and other barriers to international investment, willingly renouncing much of their former autonomy as sovereign states. Globalization had arrived in the modern era, with the whole world transitioning to a single economic system, from which there was no escape" (Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* 119-120). Since the inauguration of neoliberalism there has been a global feeling that capitalism is the only itinerary of development and the triumph of modern capitalism was complete (Young, *Empire* 119-120). According to Slavoj Žižek's observations, even "90% of [the world's] leftists are effectively Fukuyamaists" and believe that history is reaching its end ("Neoliberalism Is in Crisis" n. p.). The global neoliberal system of economy, while having "lifted large sections of the world's population out of poverty, [have] also created a new degree of imbalance between the extremely wealthy and ordinary people. More and more countries, western and non-western alike, were becoming 'plutonomies,' that is countries with a wide discrepancy between the rich and the poor" (Young, *Empire, Colony, Postcolony* 121-122). Social inequality in these societies quickly transforms itself "into disparities in income among different classes, social strata, and regions, leading rapidly to social polarization" (Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* 143).

The crisis-laden neoliberal global present is best described by Slavoj Žižek in his 2009 *New Left Review* article, "How to Begin from the Beginning," in terms of four major antagonisms: Eco-environmental crisis, challenge to the established parameters of intellectual property, the unethical potential of biogenetic technology, and "new forms of social apartheid—new walls and slums" (53). Of all the crises, the included/excluded antagonism looms on the horizon as the "crucial one," for without it "all the others lose their subversive edge" (54). In his view, it is this crucial antagonism that generates and justifies the need for a radical social change. The global social excluded have no place "in the 'private' order of social hierarchy" and therefore constitute "what Jacques Rancière calls the 'part of no part' of the social body" (54). These four antagonisms, which are threatening to destroy the world as a livable habitat, are all consequences of capitalist globalization or modernization. Žižek's thesis on the four antagonisms can be easily corroborated by a few blunt facts: The total number of the unemployed in the world passed two-hundred million in 2017. A report published by *The Guardian* in 2016 points out that four billion people face severe water scarcity in the world ("Four Billion People" n.p.). An investigation of food shortages publicized in 2009 says that there are about one billion people across the world harassed by scarcity of food, and every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes—one child every five seconds. One out of seven people in the world today is malnourished, and one fifth of the world's population lives on less than one dollar per day. The world's population living below the international poverty line stands at 1.5 billion today. This situation is further exacerbated by global warming, atmospheric pollution, water and air pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, and grassland degeneration. Although our planet's ecological environment had begun to deteriorate in

the premodern age, capitalist globalization has been the root cause of massive ecological degeneration. As David Harvey notes in *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*, capitalist development appropriates, uses, bends, and reshapes physical, ecological and social material processes to expedite capital accumulation (78). In his view, all the "problematics posed by environmentalism" loom large in any critique of capitalism and it is a compelling task for social and cultural critics to investigate how "capital accumulation works through the physical, chemical and biological processes that surround us" (89). Harvey's remarks on how capital accumulation alters and violates ecosystems and his emphasis on the centrality of ecological critique of capitalism in cultural studies highlight the connection between capitalism and eco-environmental deterioration. The above-discussed depictions of the wretched world recall what Derrida has written in a different context, "never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity" and never before "have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth" (*Specters of Marx* 85).

What is shockingly dismaying and ironic is that, despite all those looming disastrous consequences of various forms of neoliberal capitalism with or without democracy, neoliberalism both as a governing rationality and as an economic policy and practice is penetrating into every space of global social life. In her recently published book *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Wendy Brown points out, neoliberalism as a new form of governing rationality "transmogrifies every human domain and endeavor, along with humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic. All conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetized. In neoliberal reason and in domains governed by it, we are only and everywhere *homo oeconomicus*..." (10). When neoliberalism transforms human beings into market actors, submitting all spheres of life to the rule of the market and producing human subjects in the image of the market, humankind seems to be risking being changed into a different species, hence the death of man in a sense displaced from what Michel Foucault meant when he announced the death of man in his 1966 book *The Order of Things* (373).

What is particularly worth noting is that the neoliberal transformation of humanity and social life is happening on a global scale, and what was invented by capitalist think-tanks and pushed by Reagan and Thatcher in the metropolitan West in the early 1980s is being thoroughly globalized. This is how neoliberalism perfectly coincides with neocolonialism, and how the global present registers the double triumph of neoliberalism and neocolonialism. There seems to be a natural affinity between the two terms, which, as Robert Young has pointed out, are mediated by the concept of "development": since the initiation of the neo-imperial system of economic and political domination, "there have been all sorts of varieties of theorizations of this power relation and how to resist or transform it: from the left, neocolonialism, dependency theory, world systems theory, or, from the capitalist side, Keynesianism, monetarism, neoliberalism. The concept that functioned as a form of mediation between them was that of 'development'" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 44). Coined in 1961 and first introduced Kwame Nkrumah in his 1965 book *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, the term "neocolonialism" denotes a continuing economic hegemony the former colonial powers continue to exercise over the formerly

colonized states (Young, *Postcolonialism* 45). For Nkrumah neocolonialism means a continuation of Western capitalist powers' colonial rule by economic means. In Young's view, "the term 'neocolonialism' remains useful in that it insists on a primarily economic account of the postcolonial system from a broadly Marxist perspective" (48). As Gayatri Spivak succinctly notes, "Colonialism had a civilizing mission of settlement. Neocolonialism had a modernizing mission of development" (*An Aesthetic Education* 98). One of the world's most devastating ironies today consists in that the former colonies or semi-colonies are hardly decolonized when they become neocolonized and are hijacked onto the West-centered and West-dominated train of neoliberal development. In this sense, neoliberalism and neocolonialism are two faces or facets of the same process of capitalist globalization.

As recently pointed out by Jean Nanga, the decolonization that occurred since the 1940s has been "essentially a passage towards neocolonialism, a mutation of the former colonies, a reconfiguration of the mechanisms of domination and exploitation by both the former colonial powers and other capitalists of the centre" (n. p.). Africa, dominated by neocolonialism and neoliberalized capitalism, continues to be exploited as "a field of economic competition for the old and new powers of economic globalization, neoliberal globalization" (n. p.). Multinationals and their various partnerships with African countries are mostly intended as "Trojan horses in Africa" (Nanga n. p.). Emerged and emerging imperial powers, while "having a certain influence on the national policies of African countries," force these societies "into the neoliberal phase of capitalist civilization," reducing African countries to the status of suppliers of raw materials and consumers of goods manufactured in neocolonial centers. Today neocolonial/neoliberal imperialism is penetrating deeper into Africa through its economic, political, cultural, ideological, and military presence than in the day of colonial imperialism. However, "the African peoples, exploited and oppressed," Nanga writes, "are not, in spite of everything, resigned to subjugation," as evidenced by their struggles "against exploitation of human beings and ecocide by oil and mining transnationals" and "against the expropriation of common land and the imposition of enslaving seeds" as well as "the injustices and inequalities reproduced by alternating cliques of thieving rulers, actors of African capitalism" (n. p.).

Indeed, neoliberal capitalism, despite its global reach, does not reflect a genuinely universal will; rather, it is a false universalism in the double sense that it does not represent the full interest of all the populations, particularly of "the part who have not part" and that its universalism is predicated on the exclusion of the will of those who reject neoliberal capitalism. As Partha Chatterjee argues, "Ours is the modernity of the once-colonized. The same historical process that has taught us the value of modernity has also made us the victims of modernity. [. . .] [And] we need to have the courage at times to reject the modernities established by others" (20). Alongside hundreds of anti-capitalist and anti-globalization movements on various scales all over the world, there has emerged an explosion of critiques of neoliberal developmentalism from neocolonized nations and indigenous peoples. Indian scholars such as Rajni Kothari, Ashis Nandy, and Vandana Shiva, for instance, in challenging and repudiating Euromodernity, place human welfare and environmental health above economic development. Kothari insists on realizing alternative development by way of "transformation of 'lifestyles,' reorganization of space, and reworking the production system and its technologies" (qtd. in Dirlik, "Developmentalism"

42). North American Aboriginal critics, in advocating and safeguarding an "inalienable connection between community and land and between society and nature," critique and reject 'developmentalism of the societies that have victimized them in the name of economic and political progress' (Dirlik, "Developmentalism" 44, 45). These voices remind us of what Leslie Sklair describes as a "flowering of alternative non-capitalist forms of globalization" (1) the world has witnessed over the past two decades. Among such transnational spaces of non-capitalist globalization is People's Global Action (GPA), which, founded in Geneva in 1998, has since been functioning as a worldwide network of grassroots social movements and campaigns "united in their rejection of capitalism, imperialism, and cultural domination" (Engler 152). Championing social and environmental justice, the PGA global networking involves "groups as diverse as the indigenous Maori of New Zealand, the Gandhian State Farmers' Association of Karnataka, India, and the Canadian Postal Workers' Union" (Engler, "Defining the Anti-Globalization Movement" 152).

Such desires and voices have to be included and reflected in any genuine universalism be it the concept of democracy or the idea of development. Different cultural pasts and presents have to be turned to for socio-political resources and legacies in thinking towards alternative modernities. The unprecedented crisis of the age of neocolonialism/neoliberalism is not only that all conduct and all spheres of human life are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, but that neoliberalism both as a governing rationality and as an economic policy is being celebrated as the only game in town, penetrating into every part of the world. The Goethean world-literature mode of thinking, while insisting on the universal as articulated in culture-specific forms, always see other ways of being human, other modes of making sense, and other possibilities of organizing social life. As such the reworked Goethean concept of world literature can be deployed to deconstruct what are called white mythologies and, to borrow a word from Dipesh Chakrabarty, provincialize the West, democratically articulating the concept of universality across cultural boundaries, and resisting the homogenizing processes of globalization by way of foregrounding and celebrating cultural and lingual diversity. In turning to cultural, social, and political resources and legacies other than authored and authorized by the Western canon of culture and rationality, imagining towards alternatives to the crisis-laden global present, the Goethean world-literature critical mode of thinking can play a significant role in introducing all forms of cultural, intellectual and political otherness into the neoliberal/neocolonial global present. As Alain Badiou has taught us, it is all right to describe or theorize the functioning of "the world as global market, the undivided reign of great financial conglomerates, etc.," but the vital question, the one that is seldom asked, is: "What kind of politics is *really* heterogeneous to what capital demands?" (qtd. in Žižek, "Class Struggle" 90). The politics that is really heterogeneous or external to the rule of neoliberal capitalism in the neocolonial global present consists in thinking towards new possibilities of organizing our life in ways that are radically different than endorsed by the hegemonic global system itself. It is a goal that will take generations to fulfill. The first step towards the goal is to open the road to a "genuine universalism, based on contributions of everyone, Westerners as well as those whose historical course has been different" (Amin, *Eurocentrism* 152). A genuine universalism as such, which respects and reflects the desires, customs, and values of different cultures, is the guarantee of different populations and cultures

working together in peace and cooperation towards new possibilities of being human or being modern that promise truly universal equality, development, and happiness in a world ravished by neoliberalism /neocolonialism.

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