



NEW COMPARISONS IN WORLD LITERATURE

# Economic Informality and World Literature



Josh Jewell

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# New Comparisons in World Literature

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## Introduction

*Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come; and it is there that our souls are crystallized and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light.*

—Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture”<sup>1</sup>

A bewildering and contradictory set of data, experiences, and critical positions attend the contemporary debate about labour. Despite the orthodox claim that capitalism “eliminat[es] peasantries” and “push[es people] out of agriculture” and into industry as proletarians (Endnotes n.p.), ‘long downturn’ theorists note “a chronic under-demand for labour” (Benanav 117). Yet formal employment in the deindustrialised United States is reported to be relatively high (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2), leading those such as Aaron Benanav to suggest that the problem is not “mass *un*employment” but “continuously rising *under*-employment” (118). As a literary critic my own readings across world-literature tell a particular story about the experience of work, one concerned not so much with proletarianisation and unemployment, but more with constant shifts between the drastically different kinds of work people have to do in order to secure minimal social reproduction.

<sup>1</sup>From Fanon, Frantz. “On National Culture.” *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington. Grove Press, 1963, pp. 227.

The result of what is often called the moving contradiction of capital is that more and more workers are drawn into a system of production that increasingly renders them redundant through greater ‘efficiencies’ of the process. This creates a vast ‘reserve army of labour’ which, when left unaided by income from wage or welfare, often has to struggle for the means to reproduce itself through ad hoc work, communal pooling of resources, or eliciting the favour of patrons. Amid this to-ing and fro-ing, the work that Maya Gonzalez and Jeanne Neton call “abject reproduction”—namely the work “no one else is willing to do”—will “in the end mainly be foisted upon women” or, we might add, groups whose labour is systematically devalued (171). But compare this—or Melinda Cooper’s work on the deferral of reproductive labour to the family amid the neoliberal attack on the welfare state—with Harold Wolpe’s research on the political economy of apartheid:

When the migrant worker has access to means of subsistence, outside the capitalist sector, as he [*sic*] does in South Africa, then the relationship between wages and the cost of the production and reproduction of labour power is changed. That is to say capital is able to pay the worker *below* the cost of his reproduction. (434)

Or John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman’s work on Kenya:

Elders who had organized the local circuits of reciprocity could convert them into funds of accumulation; services once rewarded with the means of production – women, livestock or land – might now be paid off with the means of subsistence only, food or cash, and thus become a source of surplus value. The potential for distortions of property rights, marital rights, parental or filial obligations, were endless, as indigenous modes of production yielded up produce or labour to merchant or landed capital. (78–9)

A consistent feature of labour across the world-system, then, is the informal and improvisatory nature of people’s working patterns necessitated by the *articulation* of modes of production. This is the crucial import of Schwarz’s work on Brazilian fiction which features prominently the figure of the *agregado*: “neither proprietor nor proletarian” who must shift restlessly between the opposed realms of a society that was simultaneously slaveowning and bourgeois in search of work or patronage (“Misplaced Ideas” 22). As diverse groups with different gender divisions of labour, racialised histories of labour, and so on are unevenly integrated into the

capitalist world-system, literature has registered this erratic form of work at the level of both content and form.

Taking my lead from the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz, for whom cultural forms are shaped by objective conditions, in this book I analyse the impact of economic informality on the novel across the world-system. I am interested here in fiction which registers the experience of having to move between what Gonzalez and Neton call the “indirectly market-mediated sphere” and the directly market mediated sphere, or wage labour (153), which has led me to investigations into the literature of Brazil—which, for much of the nineteenth century, maintained an articulated slaveowning and bourgeois economy; the Caribbean—a region with a large population of informal workers long excluded from the high concentrations of capital in the hands of settlers and their descendants; South Africa—which, under apartheid, maintained ‘Bantustans’ where labour was reproduced at no cost to capital or the state; Kenya—a settler colony which saw a variation of the South African model, not however legally codified as was apartheid; and the United Kingdom and the United States—where the dismantling of the welfare state has seen the cost of the reproduction of labour itself shifted back onto families and communities. By analysing *Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant* (1854), *Dom Casmurro* (1899), *Heading South* (2006), *The Pickup* (2001), *The Reactive* (2014), *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), and *Temporary* (2020), I argue that narratives of precarious workers in casual or informal employment in different parts of the world-system are shaped by uneven and combined development. While the concept of the ‘informal economy’—Keith Hart’s term for the non-wage labour sector in Ghana—has been used primarily by scholars of African society and culture, I argue that by looking at work on economies of favour, unofficial or extra-legal forms of governance or resource distribution, and non-wage sectors, from various locations across the world-system, we will see that social and economic informality is a common thread of global capitalist modernity.<sup>2</sup> Looking at criticism and fiction

<sup>2</sup>The term world-system comes from Wallerstein, for whom modern global capitalism is not a politically centralised entity like an empire (15) but an economic world-system in which a “core” region and its institutions exercise effective hegemony. “[I]nternational capitalism is a system that is simultaneously *one*, and *unequal*; with a core, and a periphery (and a semi-periphery) that are bound together in a relationship of growing inequality” (Moretti, “Conjectures” 149). This book focuses largely on cultural production from semi-peripheral zones, “in which ‘local’ and ‘global’ forces come together in conflictual and unsteady flux” (WReC 67).

from Brazil, Haiti, South Africa, Kenya, and the United Kingdom I explore the aesthetic features that arise from and grapple with this crucial yet undertheorised experience of global capitalist modernity.

Research on economic informality has largely taken place within African studies, with many scholars citing Keith Hart's 1973 essay on the non-wage labour sector in Ghana as the earliest sociological work on the 'informal economy'. Ato Quayson, Sarah Nuttall, and Achille Mbembe have produced the most influential studies on topics such as the aesthetics of superfluity (Mbembe 37), the cultural economy of free time (Quayson 199), and the idea of the African metropolis or 'Afropolis' (Nuttall and Mbembe 1–36), where these flexible, improvisatory, and informal itineraries and cultural forms manifest. Despite acknowledging that many of these urban and cultural phenomena are shaped by "[t]he vast expansion in urban populations along with the dramatic dislocations in urban life since the oil crises of the 1970s", work on economic informality has rarely looked beyond Africa to other locations that are vulnerable to the shocks of globalisation (Quayson 201). Indeed work on the regional impacts of global modernisation has often sought to single out Africa as an exceptional case—hence Nuttall and Mbembe's idea of the *Afropolis*. But if we put into dialogue research on different regions' extra-legal resource distribution networks, non-wage sectors, and economies of favour, we begin to see that economic informality is one of the unifying themes of global capitalist modernity. For Chabal and Daloz, for example, "[t]he state in sub-Saharan Africa has not been institutionalized – in that it has not become structurally differentiated from society – so that its formal structure ill-manages to conceal the patrimonial and particularistic nature of power" (1–2). Jobs, business contracts, and resources are distributed through networks based on kinship and prestige rather than simply citizenship or merit. In postcolonial Africa, then, the liberal capitalist institutions of the state or parliamentary democracy are mediated by social ethics which contradict their ideal-typical function. Now consider Roberto Schwarz's argument that, due to the coexistence of slavery and liberal capitalism in nineteenth-century Brazil, the "access to social life" of "the free man" who was neither slave, nor "proprietor, nor proletarian", "depended, in one way or another, on the favour of a man of wealth and power" (22). "Favour" for Schwarz, "was present everywhere, combining itself [...] to administration, politics,

industry, commerce, the life of the city, the court, and so on” (22). This ostensibly paradoxical economy of favour, born of the contradictory pressures of slavery and liberalism, produces—for Schwarz—the novels of Machado de Assis in which beleaguered freemen like José Dias struggle for agency whilst still trying to flatter capricious patrons like Bento Santiago or Brás Cubas. The arbitrariness of the liberal values held by the *latifundia* in such an environment is dramatised, for Schwarz, in Machado de Assis’s *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* [*The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*] (1881) in which the eponymous narrator lays bare the caprice of a slaveowning elite that nevertheless draped itself in the mantle of a European high culture which included the anti-slavery of Voltaire and Diderot. The almost hilarious cruelty and the bizarre and unreal behaviours of this unaccountable elite which marshals a paradoxical world of Liberalism and slavery are some of the strange aesthetics of the nineteenth-century Brazilian novel as it engages with the nation’s heterodox and articulated economy. Meanwhile Antônio Cândido reads Almeida’s novel *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* [*Memoirs of a Militia Sargent*] (first published serially between 1852–3, and as a novel in two volumes in 1854 and 1855) as a text shaped by the erratic social movements of the freemen or *agregados* who are dependent on favour. Freemen often lived in poverty but had to move amongst the elite on whom they were dependent for favour. For Cândido the constant oscillation between the worlds of order and disorder represented in the novel grasps the basic social dynamic of nineteenth-century Brazil, a country veering between divergent ideologies and political economies.

Bringing together the work of Schwarz and Cândido we see how a range of aesthetics in the nineteenth-century Brazilian novel are shaped by—and capture—the combination of and continuities between parts of society that are institutionalised and non-institutionalised, official and unofficial, licit and illicit, visible and invisible. Using specialist studies on the hybrid, weakly institutionalised aspects of Caribbean and African societies, I attempt to show how Haitian, South African, and Kenyan fiction have also captured the oscillation of precarious workers between client networks and the state, between wage and non-wage labour. The form of this fiction oscillates in a corresponding fashion, between regional and global perspectives, between different linguistic and literary registers, and between different representational schemas and ideologies.

## NEOLIBERALISM AND WORLD-LITERATURE

Research into informal labour will inevitably analyse how the novel form has responded to neoliberalism's attack on collective and socially useful labour practices across the world-system. The global turn towards what David Harvey calls "flexible accumulation"—where capital establishes a much more noncommittal and casual relationship with labour than under Fordism—that was gradually consolidated throughout the twentieth century has produced a section of the labour force without the protections afforded by formal employment, which often bears the brunt of the neoliberal stripping-away of the social safety net (264). In literary studies that look at responses to global capitalist modernity, a huge amount of attention is paid to cultural registrations of proletarianisation, the exploitation of labour, the appropriation of human labour power as one of nature's 'free gifts', and so on. Michael Taussig's work on the proletarianisation of neophyte Bolivians in *The Devil in Commodity Fetishism in South America*; Kerstin Oloff's work on the 'zombification' of labour in Haiti in her essay 'Zombies, Gender, and World-Ecology'; Roberto Schwarz's work on how the coexistence of liberal capitalism and slavery underpins the strange aesthetics of Machado de Assis in *Master on the Periphery of Capitalism*; and Richard Godden's work on how William Faulkner's novels register a similar set of conditions in *Fictions of Labour* are a few examples of studies that show how the capitalist appropriation of labour is a condition with cultural registrations across the modern world-system. A recurrent theme in texts as geographically (and ideologically) disparate as James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), to Oonya Kempadoo's *Tide Running* (2001), to Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* (2006), to Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* (2009) is the sense of boredom, frustration, and conflict of interest inherent in work in the (semi-)periphery of the world-system—a zone where there is a large reserve workforce whose labours are being wasted, or oriented towards the market (through meaningless exchange-value production) and away from work on the nations' materially underdeveloped civic infrastructures.

What do we mean by 'neoliberalism', and how can this help us understand culture? As Huehls and Greenwald Smith say in the introduction to their collection *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, the term can seem "[p]rotean, polymorphous, and frequently perverse"—a

shibboleth for “certain left-leaning academics” inclined towards simply “imagining that so-called neoliberalism systematically opposes all things public, collective, and regulatory” (1). In their call for neoliberalism to be more rigorously instrumentalised as a critical tool, Huehls and Greenwald Smith argue for its proper periodisation, contending that “neoliberalism has advanced historically through four different phases or modes: the economic, the political-ideological, the socio-cultural, and the ontological” (3). Huehls and Greenwald Smith go on to argue persuasively for understanding different cultural practices as broadly attempting to manage or mediate the contradictions of these different phases, yet their examples are drawn overwhelmingly from Anglophone core capitalist nations. Whilst their periodisation of neoliberalism effectively challenges the received notion that neoliberalism is a purely ‘Western’ economic project that began with Thatcher’s and Reagan’s privatisations and attacks on organised labour in the 1970s, it tells us very little about the subjective experiences of a loss of, or lack of access to, the “deep, horizontal comradeship”—to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase—of a workforce in the postcolonial world, where collective labour was (and is) such a crucial part of progressive anti-colonialist discourses and identities (7).

In this book I broaden the scope of Huehls and Greenwald Smith’s study of neoliberalism: to look at literary registrations of work and its routines outside of the core capitalist nations, in places that have never had the broad, horizontal Fordist schemes of employment or labour organisation that Thatcherism attacked. Put another way, what do neoliberal SAPs or ‘structural adjustment programs’, which orient labour away from the public sector, look and feel like in places like Haiti, South Africa, and Kenya, which have never enjoyed strong welfare states. I draw on the work of scholars such as Frederick Cooper, whose research reveals that elements of what we now recognise as the neoliberal ‘casualisation’ of labour were already evident across colonial Africa, to explore the idea that contemporary world-systemic aesthetics of informality, precarity, and boredom have been globally and historically dispersed and are brought into the world-novel today through what the Warwick Research Collective call “the long waves of the capitalisation of the world” (51).

But how exactly can this be instrumentalised as an interpretative heuristic for literature? A recurrent character across contemporary world-literature is the atomised individual labourer, struggling for a foothold in



the chaotic global metropolis; driven to panicked ‘stream of consciousness’ outbursts; attempting to assimilate to a hostile society through hard graft; hoping to redeem the promise of self-sufficiency and/or entry into the officially sanctioned national workforce, a promise that propels the novel forward in search of narrative closure. Here I am thinking of, amongst literally dozens of examples, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), James Kelman’s *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), Tao Lin’s *Taipei* (2013), Masande Ntshanga’s *The Reactive* (2014), Su Tong’s *Rice* (1995), Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North* (2009), Chris Abani’s *Graceland* (2004), Oonya Kempadoo’s *Tide Running* (2001), Yu Miri’s *Tokyo Ueno Station* (2019), Paulo Lins’s *City of God* (1997), Teju Cole’s *Every Day Is for the Thief*, Anya Ulinich’s *Petropolis* (2007), and Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008). The fact that these novels reveal the economic hardship of life in places as disparate and diverse as Kenya, Johannesburg, Glasgow, Rio de Janeiro, Bangalore, Lagos, London, Tobago, Taipei, and New York suggests that the neoliberal paring back of the state, privatisations and asset stripping, economic shock therapy, and the ‘casualisation’ of labour is not merely a ‘Western’ phenomenon but rather a globally disbursed logic.

Yet very similar themes and formal structures appear in parts of the world-system as early as the 1860s in works such as Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866), Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* (1883), Zola’s *Germinal* (1885), Joseph Conrad’s ‘Youth’, Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger* (1890), Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), and Lao She’s *Rickshaw* (1937). The fact that scholars such as Cooper note that elements of neoliberalism appear as early as the 1930s—over forty years before the inauguration of neoliberalism as a purely economic project in the core capitalist nations—raises the question of the periodisation of ‘neoliberalism’. Is it even meaningful to speak of ‘neoliberalism’ (a term generally associated with the more recent developments in global capitalism through which we are all currently living and working) if its elements appear much further back in the history of capitalism? When used in this way, does ‘neoliberalism’ not simply mean ‘late capitalism’ or ‘post-modernism’—terms that many critics have used to show how the present economic moment is a rationalised version of previous phases of accumulation, distinct from, but clearly continuous with, the *longue durée*? In this

book I test one way of meaningfully utilising neoliberalism as a critical tool by following the work of the Warwick Research Collective, namely their urge to think of capitalism as bringing different regimes of accumulation—‘primitive accumulation’ or accumulation by dispossession, liberal bourgeois capitalism, ‘flexible accumulation’—together into uneven combination with one another. The same ‘flexible accumulation’ sanctioned by Thatcher and Reagan, which had the result of ‘casualising’ labour in the core capitalist countries, has been particularly visible across the Caribbean virtually since the Haitian Revolution. Since the structural adjustments of the Caribbean Basin Initiative in 1982, the ‘casualisation’ of labour has manifested as an orientation of labour away from infrastructural development and towards the cultivation of service economy monocultures in places such as Haiti, Saint Lucia, and Tobago, yet the labour of hotel workers on ‘flexible hours’ is often underpinned by large amounts of unpaid domestic labour still overwhelmingly performed by women, which foots the bill of the reproduction of the labour for the service economy. This combination of novel flexible labour in the service economy and (ostensibly!) arcane forms of unpaid labour is what really characterises the neoliberal moment across the Caribbean. Throughout the book I explore the extent to which cultural productions from across the international division of labour help to illuminate the social logic of neoliberalism, with its claim to afford labourers ‘flexibility’, whilst in practice merely appropriating pre-existing forms of free labour. I therefore read informal economies as sites of residue or revival of pre- or non-capitalist forms of sociality, such as non-wage labour, resource distribution through large and complex kinship structures, and so on, combined with capitalist imperatives of individual development or profit, and certain kinds of prestige. The informal is thus a paradigmatic site of uneven and combined development. If we see neoliberalism, not as “a radical rupture in the history of capitalism, but [as] rather a sort of outgrowth of familiar capitalist concerns” (Smith 20–1), we can begin to meaningfully draw comparisons between nineteenth-century Brazilian novels like Antonio de Almedia’s *Memórias de um sargento de milícias* and Machado de Assis’s *Dom Casmurro* (1899), and contemporary Caribbean and African fiction like *Heading South* and *Wizard of the Crow* because we will understand them each to be responding to similar points in a world-systemic cycle.

## METHOD

Looking at conflicts between divergent ideologies or modes of production across various regions calls for a methodology that considers the relationship between national and international histories. Despite helping us to understand the epistemological impact of colonisation, including the tendency of (post)colonial literary cultures to ‘write back’ to the imperial core and the ongoing crisis of former colonisers’ self-perception, postcolonial studies as a theory of transnational cultural production has had little to say about the world-systemic material unevenness that imperialism consolidated. In “East Isn’t East” Edward Said points out that, while early anticolonial criticism by authors such as C.L.R. James was “based on studies of domination and control made from the standpoint of either a completed political independence or an incomplete liberationist project” in the “Third World”, contemporary postcolonialism “stresses the disappearance of the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment” (5). Neil Lazarus has shown how postcolonial studies ‘exist[s] in a relationship of supplementarity to “post-” theory’, while its leading commentators “condemn as naïve or, worse, tacitly authoritarian, any commitment to universalism, metanarrative, social emancipation, revolution” (*Nationalism* 10, 9). Notwithstanding its illuminating work on cultural forms arising from or responding to the corrosive colonialist episteme, postcolonialism has been unable (or unwilling) to formulate an immanent critique of colonialism as a phase of world-systemic capitalist modernisation. For Homi Bhabha, the “hybrid location of cultural value” is the site from which “the postcolonial intellectual attempts to elaborate a historical and literary project” (48). But the frictionless image of cultural hybridity Bhabha valorises conceals the violent processes through which capitalist imperatives have been “graft[ed] on” to other cultures (Knei-Paz 91). In light of the ‘Sewell Report’s’ celebration of “a new story about the Caribbean experience which speaks to the slave period not only being about profit and suffering but how culturally African people transformed themselves into a remodelled African/Britain” (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities 8), any critical formation which simply “exalt[s ...] migrancy, liminality, hybridity, and multiculturality” assents to the current reactionary climate and will be unable to grasp the systematic violence and dispossession of modernity (Lazarus, *Postcolonial* 21).

As the emphases of postcolonial studies appear now to cut dangerously close to reactionary establishment dogma, a dissenting method for

thinking about imperialism and globalisation transnationally has emerged in the field of International Relations (IR) with the revival of Leon Trotsky's concept of uneven and combined development. "Despite the decisive importance of U&CD in Trotsky's writings", claimed Allinson and Anievas in 2009, "the idea has, until recently, received little attention" (49). We can recognise Lazarus's critique of the postmodern tenor of postcolonialism in Allinson and Anievas's critique of IR:

Continually dissatisfied with the ahistorical and asocial premises of mainstream theories of international relations (IR), scholars in the field have turned to the analytical tools of historical sociology. Marxism, traditionally the most critical and historically oriented tradition of social theory, has consequently held a renewed appeal for the discipline. (47)

Allinson and Anievas first confront the epistemological issue of historical critique. While Bhabha speaks from a "presumptive universalism", taking hybridity, heteroglossia, and in-betweenness as transcendental categories of being and experience (Lazarus, *Postcolonial* 32), Allinson and Anievas start by confronting the problem: "How can *any* social theory endogenously explain the causal efficacy of the inter-societal in the constitution of social orders? How can the 'internal' (sociological) and 'external' (geopolitical) factors in social development be united into a single, coherent explanatory apparatus?" (48). While Bhabha and others uncritically adopt a historical perspective and set of values which *celebrate* the transitory, the unstable, the nomadic—ignoring how amenable this is to capital—Allinson and Anievas step back and ask how we might immanently critique historical change. The pair propose uneven and combined development as a "general abstraction' through which social theory can capture, as theoretically anterior, the 'lateral field of causality' arising from inter-societal relations" (49). This is to read 'inter-societal relations'—colonisation, structural adjustment, trade war—not as a cross-pollination of cultures or values, but as part of a basic historical process that we can recognise not as a struggle between strong and weak powers (much less superior and inferior cultures), but simply as a series of unequal material exchanges *within* and *between* societies. This historical process "is expressed in myriad ways throughout pre-modern history, as well as across differing dimensions and planes of internal differentiation within the ontological, though not yet causally integrated, whole of world-societal development" (50). "In other

words”, they say in summary, “the ‘unevenness of historical development’, according to Trotsky, ‘*is in itself uneven*’ ” (50).

While the theory of uneven and combined development has appeared periodically in Anglo-American literary studies—being taken up as early as the 1980s by Jameson (see *Political Unconscious* 128, and 205–26), and the 1990s by Lazarus (see *Nationalism and Cultural Practice* 16, 24–5, 49–51, 79, 176)—Franco Moretti and the Warwick Research Collective are the first scholars to fully elaborate uneven and combined development as an interpretative heuristic. For Moretti the novel is the paradigmatic form of industrial capitalist northwest Europe (*Distant Reading* 18–19). As imperialism imposes the cultural forms of capitalism on peripheral societies, “a culture starts moving towards the modern novel”, resulting in “a compromise between foreign form and local materials” (“Conjectures” 60). In *Modern Epic* Moretti gives the example of *Cien años de soledad* (1967):

Grasped as ‘another story of accelerated modernization and of combined development (239–40) and read through the Blochian lens of the ‘heterogeneity of historical time’, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* displays for Moretti ‘another version of non-contemporaneity’ in a novel that, like *Faust* [...] ‘tells the story of “incorporation”’: of an isolated community that is caught up in the modern world-system, which subjects it to an unexpected, extremely violent acceleration. It is the novel of uneven and combined development’ (243). Evidenced in various technical devices conventionally associated with modernism – digressions, restlessly shifting viewpoints, subversions of conventional causality, chronological disjunction, recursiveness – the form of the novel gestures to the uneven results of forced integration to the modern world-system, exemplifying ‘Macondo’s role in the international division of labour’ (244). The ‘compromise’ represented by the novel’s form registers not the liberally consensual process implied by cultural hybridisation, but, on the contrary, ‘enslavement to monoculture’. It embodies the violence of capitalism, the uneven advance of modernity[.] (qtd. in WReC 54)

The seemingly magical acceleration of time which characterises *Cien años* describes a rapid and painful kind of social development within a form that tends to describe *individual* development. Similarly, European modernist tropes are refashioned to describe not inner turmoil as Lukács has it (Eagleton 18), but social shock in a periphery of capitalism. The Colombian experience since European invasion in the late fifteenth century has been

characterised by violence, disease, slavery, genocide, resource extraction, and the conversion of the region into an ecological monoculture primed to export cheap raw materials to core capitalist countries. This process involved the imposition of industrial machinery on a variety of agrarian, pastoral, and non-capitalist urban civilisations, thereby “skipping a ‘whole series of intermediate stages’ of development” (Trotsky qtd. in Allinson and Anievas 52). This kind of development characterised by the simultaneity of non-simultaneous phenomena—industrial mining technology amidst a livestock-driven transport infrastructure—finds a correlative cultural registration of uneven combination in texts such as *Cien años* where an advanced capitalist form like the novel mediates a pre- or partially capitalist local reality. By reading novels from exploited regions of the capitalist world as shaped by and descriptive of unequal material exchanges and the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, Moretti deploys a method which grasps fiction as uniquely responsive to long, fraught, and uneven inter-societal histories. By thinking comparatively about fiction from across the world in terms of struggle and inequality, rather than in terms of unilateral cultural imperialism or the facile terms of ‘hybridity’, Moretti provides a useful corrective to the pitfalls of some postcolonial criticism.

One group of scholars who have engaged deeply with Moretti’s work is the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), whose 2015 book *Combined and Uneven Development* attempts to develop his idea of the novel as a world-form. While much of Moretti’s work is successful in challenging the Liberal and postmodern epistemes of comparativist methods, WReC critique his tendency to overlook the shades of grey in the global distribution of wealth and power. WReC challenge Moretti’s characterisation of “literary forms moving uni-directionally from cores to peripheries” (55–6), and his “overstat[ing] the ‘homogeneity’ of conditions in the core territories and regions” (55). While Moretti focuses substantially on ‘major writers’—many of them European, plus a few exemplars from peripheral societies such as García Márquez—WReC attend to a far greater range of writers, such as the Spanish author Pio Baroja and Slovakian author Peter Pišťanek, who show the heterogeneity of conditions in the core capitalist region of Europe. WReC also depart from the ‘uni-directional’ movement of forms from core to periphery, demonstrating how Dostoevsky, Machado de Assis, and Multatuli develop, from conditions of backwardness, forms which prefigure the ‘innovations’ of high European modernism. I find WReC’s to be a more nuanced and flexible approach than Moretti’s, but by pushing their critique of Moretti further I think we can do better still.

For while Moretti polarises the core and periphery of the world-system thereby overlooking nuances of cultural production in semi-peripheral zones such as Brazil, South Africa, and India, WREC limit their correction of this tendency to an exploration of the *European* literary periphery on the one hand and Sudan on the other (the chapter on South African author Ivan Vladislavic is a crucial exception). Similarly, in showing how forms and ideas travel from (semi-)periphery to core, for example, WREC rely on Lukács's work on Dostoevsky and Schwarz's work on Machado. Here I attend to the nuances of cultural and critical production in (semi-)peripheral regions by looking in more detail at the writers' and critics' consciousness of uneven conditions and to one specific way in which capitalist relations have been lived across the world-system. In Chap. 2, for example, I suggest that Brazilian critic Antônio Cândido's work on Brazilian fiction contains a world-literary reading model which predates the work of Schwarz and prefigures the Anglo-American turn to uneven and combined development.

### CASE STUDIES

In this book I hone in on one structural analogue of several regional histories: economic informality. Cândido, Carvalho Franco, and Schwarz have all shown how the coexistence of slavery and bourgeois capitalism in Brazil produced a large surplus labour force of free people who became dependent on forms of non-wage work. This uneven and combined development was brought about by the colonisation of the area today known as Brazil by Portugal, which had emerged from early modern European power struggles with naval supremacy (Burns 20). The 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas 'gave' the eastern seaboard of South America to Portugal, and thereafter Atlantic trade financed the nation's shift from a heavily agrarian to a mercantile economy (Burns 22–3). As British naval supremacy eclipsed Portugal's in a subsequent accumulation cycle of the world-system (Arrighi 220), Britain became guarantors of the Portuguese Empire. With enslaved peoples brought from Portuguese Angola, Brazil became a sugar monoculture (Burns 42–3). When the European crisis of the Napoleonic wars threatened Portugal, the court of Dom João moved to Rio de Janeiro under British naval protection (Bethell 57), meaning that Portugal was able to exploit royal prestige to resist British calls for abolition, which would have harmed sugar profits (Bethell 59). Brazil won independence in 1822, and the politically powerful *latifundia* of the untethered nation