

Economies of Representation, 1790–2000

Colonialism and Commerce

Edited by

LEIGH DALE and HELEN GILBERT



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ASHGATE

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ECONOMIES OF REPRESENTATION, 1790–2000

Although postcolonialism has emerged as one of the most significant theoretical movements in literary and cultural studies, it has paid scant attention to the importance of trade and trade relations to debates about culture. Focusing on the past two centuries, this volume investigates the links among trade, colonialism, and forms of representation, posing the question, 'What is the historical or modern relationship between economic inequality and imperial patterns of representation and reading?'

Rather than dealing exclusively with a particular industry or type of industry, the contributors take up the issue of how various economies have been represented in Aboriginal art; in literature by North American, Caribbean, Portuguese, South African, First Nations, Australian, British, and Aboriginal authors; and in a diverse range of writings that includes travel diaries, missionary texts, the findings of the Leprosy Investigation Commission, early medical accounts and media representations of HIV/AIDS. Examining trade in commodities as various as illicit drugs, liquor, bananas, tourism, adventure fiction, and modern Aboriginal art, as well as cultural exchanges in politics, medicine, and literature, the essays reflect the widespread origins of the contributors themselves, who are based throughout the English-speaking world. Taken as a whole, this book contests the commonplace view promoted by some modern economists – that trade in and of itself has a leveling effect, equalising cultures, places, and peoples – demonstrating instead the ways in which commerce has created and exacerbated differences in power.

*For our former colleagues
at the University of Queensland Press
made redundant in December 2004*

Notes on Contributors

Claudia Brandenstein completed her MA, “‘To the stranger’s eye my world is a paradise’: Jamaica Kincaid’s Americas’ at the University of Queensland in 1997. She is the author of essays on Caribbean writing, including one published in the collection *In Transit: Travel, Text, Empire*, edited by Helen Gilbert and Anna Johnston. She is currently working on a Ph.D. dissertation, ‘Imperial positions in nineteenth-century West Indian travel writing’.

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Anne Collett teaches in the English Literatures program at the University of Wollongong. She has published widely on postcolonial women’s writing, most recently on poet Kate Llewellyn in *Australian Literary Studies* and Jamaica Kincaid in *Wasafiri*. Articles on Caribbean poet Olive Senior and another piece on Jamaica Kincaid are forthcoming in *Ariel* and *New Literatures Review* respectively. She is currently working on a comparative study of Australian poet, Judith Wright and Canadian painter, Emily Carr. Anne is editor of *Kunapipi*, a journal of postcolonial writing and culture (www.kunapipi.com).

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Leigh Dale teaches Australian and postcolonial literatures at the University of Queensland, and is the author of *The English Men: Professing Literature in Australian Universities*. She is the editor of the journal *Australian Literary Studies* and, with Chris Tiffin, author of the essay on Australia for the *Year’s Work in English Studies*. Her current research examines the advertising, reviewing and discussion of literature in regional and metropolitan newspapers in Australia between the wars; she is also writing a book on responses to self-harm in European and North American medical cultures.

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Guy Redden teaches media and cultural studies at the University of Lincoln in the United Kingdom. His research revolves around the moral dimensions of consumer culture. He has recently published work on the commodification of personal guidance (self-help and alternative spirituality), expressive gift economies on the Internet (activism and blogging), and makeover television. His essays have appeared in *Cultural Studies Review*, *Social Movement Studies*, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, and *Media International Australia*. He is a former editor of *M/C*, an online journal focusing on media and culture.

Jo Robertson has coordinated and carried out research on the International Leprosy Association's Global Project on the History of Leprosy. It is funded by the Nippon Foundation, and based at the Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine at Oxford University. This project is developing a database of locations at <<http://www.leprosyhistory.org>>, where leprosy archives can be found in order to facilitate historical research into the disease. Jo's research interests are leprosy and its representation in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial and post-colonial contexts, specifically the 'untainted' children of people affected by leprosy, the League of Nations Leprosy Commission, and the emergence of international leprosy organizations.

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Introduction

Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert

Whatever we might wish, or regard as enlightenment, the severalty of cultures abides and proliferates, even amidst, indeed in response to, the powerfully connecting forces of modern manufacture, finance, travel, and trade.¹

To consider the relationship between colonialism and commerce is almost necessarily to invoke the work of Immanuel Wallerstein on 'world-systems theory', an approach to history that gives particular emphasis to the global economy. Since the 1960s, Wallerstein has made a set of arguments foundational to debates about the relationship of colony to metropole, and the gaps between rich and poor. Wallerstein's analysis foregrounds 'the unceasing ascension of the ideology of national economic development'; indeed, he contends that national economic development has been 'the primordial collective task'.² At first glance, this contention might seem at odds with post-colonial scholars' customary focus on identificatory categories such as race, ethnicity, religion and gender, for culture and economics have often been approached as essentially separate domains in studies of colonialism and its aftermath, with the result that debates about each have proceeded in parallel rather than in dialogue. The chapters in this book argue for the interrelatedness of cultural and economic systems in specific colonial and post-colonial contexts.³

The project of historicizing connections between capitalism and colonialism seems particularly urgent in an age when globalization is widely seen as a new and omnipotent force shaping contemporary cultures and political economies. The demand for specificity in attention to local histories and geographies, local cultures and cultural values, and the articulation of this analysis to the global forces and exchanges that typify imperialism, has increased over the past decade. So, too, has interdisciplinarity, and indeed Robert Young describes postcolonial studies as 'a certain kind of interdisciplinary political, theoretical and historical academic work that sets out to serve as a transnational forum for studies grounded in the historical context of colonialism, as well as in the political context of contemporary problems of globalization'.⁴

One of the things which makes this task difficult is that there is little consensus about the nature of what is – or was – globalization. Those who interpret it as primarily

1 Clifford Geertz, qtd in Michael S. Billing, *Barons, Brokers and Buyers: The Institutions and Cultures of Philippine Sugar* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), p. 252.

2 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730–1840s* (San Diego: Academic Press/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 4.

3 We use the term 'post-colonial' much as Terry Eagleton does 'post-Romantic': to convey the 'sense of being ... product[s] of that epoch rather than confidently posterior to it.' See Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 18.

4 Robert Young, 'Ideologies of the Postcolonial', *Interventions*, 1:1 (1998–99), p. 4.

an economic phenomenon tend to highlight flows of capital, labor and commodities, and to understand those flows in terms of market and political forces; culturalist models, on the other hand, focus on flows of information, values, technology, images, artifacts and people (seen as social beings rather than merely part of a mobile workforce). Though their emphasis is different, both strands of theorizing acknowledge the penetration of culture by capital, and tend to represent this dynamic as largely benign, if profound, in its effects. Thus, globalization has been variously regarded as the end-stage in an inevitable trajectory of (post)national economic development; embraced as an engine of progress and increased prosperity; celebrated as a manifestation of postmodern modes of subjectivity and (dis)identification; and even vaunted as a mechanism for social and political democratization.⁵

What is muted in or by such theorizing is a critique of 'globalization' as an explanatory model that normalizes the asymmetries which characterize international relations. One of the ways to begin such a critique is to suggest that the coalition of government and industry in the proliferation of capital provokes comparisons with the *modus operandi* of colonialism – and, certainly, globalization seems to have deepened precisely those channels between rich and poor cut by European imperialism. Thus, in Wallerstein's view, the beginnings of the 'global system' must be located not in the technologies of the late twentieth century, but in those of the sixteenth century, and it must be seen that the spread of European imperialism was energized – financed and motivated – by nascent capitalism. In this respect, the transformation of the world market from agrarian to industrial economies (which is said to characterize modernity) can be seen as instantiating the uneven patterns of global connectivity still legible in contemporary commodity cultures. But perhaps the more prevalent view is that contemporary modes of economic and cultural interconnectedness are unprecedented in their extent and force: thus, for Paul Gilroy, what marks the difference between earlier and current modes of globalization is not so much the processes but the patterns in distribution of injurious effects.⁶ Other critics focus on the institutional control of capital and commodity flows, remarking that the World Bank, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) – and its successor, the World Trade Organization – along with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have taken over the role of colonial chartered companies and state apparatuses, to become the 'instruments for management of the ruined world'.⁷ In the context of this book, perhaps the most important distinction between early and late global systems is in the realm of ideology: whereas imperialism projected

5 This cursory summary extrapolates from ideas usefully surveyed in Revathi Krishnaswamy's 'The Claims of Globalization Theory: Some Contexts and Contestations', *South Asian Review*, 24:1 (2003), pp. 18–32; see also Crystal Bartolovich, 'Global Capital and Transnationalism', in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, eds Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 126–61, and Arif Dirlik, 'The Global in the Local', in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 22–45.

6 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

7 Misao Miyoshi, 'A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-state', in *Global/Local*, eds Dissanayake and Wilson, p. 82.

‘a self-conscious cultural project of universality’ (manifest in its ‘civilizing mission’), globalization tends to occult its politics in the logic of ‘mere ubiquity’.⁸

Michael Pusey diagnoses the dangers of such ubiquity in his robust attack on neo-liberal economists, whose values Pusey, among many others, sees as having a disproportionate and destructive influence on culture and society, specifically through an antagonism to beliefs about the significance of history and community. He contends that ‘One of the grand ideas of economic rationalism and globalisation is that the market can, will and should, for the sake of ever greater efficiency, neutralize social memory ... about what the economy *ought* to deliver to the society and to its citizens.’⁹ Writing of Australia, he claims that

Policy can only be made by people with the trained *incapacity* to reason in a way that puts the general interests of the society and its citizens first ... [E]ven those remaining institutions that have survived reform without collapse (the courts, the universities, the churches, the unions, the quality media, and others) are left with only a ‘weak capacity to detect latent problems’ and with even less strength to mobilise awareness in what remains of the public sphere.¹⁰

Pusey’s key point, about social memory, community, and the power of history, is made in a similar fashion by Richard Sennett. In his recent Castle lectures in ethics, politics and economics, Sennett asserts that a small but disproportionately influential group of economic elites have been able to reify and normalize the notion of personal freedom, experienced as untrammelled consumption – what Sennett, quoting Zygmunt Bauman, calls “‘liquid modernity’”.¹¹ Sennett is distinctive in pointing out that the cultural changes seen as being ‘inflicted’ by large corporations are also experienced *within* them: whereas challenges to management once came ‘from oddly dressed elderly ladies and vegetarian activists’, in the past few decades ‘Enormous pressure was put on companies to look beautiful in the eyes of the passing voyeur’; crucially, for senior management, ‘the willingness to destabilize one’s own organization sent a positive signal.’¹²

Following Sennett, and shifting to a more prophetic mode, it might be posited that the newer forms of imperialism effect a struggle over narrative and cultural value, but the object of that struggle has shifted from place to temporality, in the specific sense that the very idea of significance seems to demand relationship and to imply some degree of longevity. It is hardly new to observe that it is those exiled from the present, often in the name of the future, who bear the economic and cultural brunt of a surging modernity: ‘you are not part of our plans for the future’.

8 Krishnaswamy, ‘The Claims of Globalization Theory’, p. 29.

9 Michael Pusey, *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Rationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 44.

10 Ibid., p. 174. Pusey quotes here from Jürgen Habermas, *Between Fact and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 358.

11 Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 13.

12 Ibid., pp. 39, 40, 41.

In such circumstances, the severing of ‘cultural’ from ‘economic’ values becomes normative, but this does not prevent individuals and groups who trade on that severance representing themselves as embodying a static and meaningful culture – indeed, meaningful because static – such that ‘there is a naturalization or essentialization of “the culture” that views it as coterminous with the individuals who “possess” it.’¹³ Thus, at the very time that the nation as a political and economic entity is declining in significance, its cultural centrality is invoked increasingly by political and economic elites who maneuver to naturalize the view that ‘the national interest’ is coterminous with their own. This terrible collusion uses a rhetoric that purports to value stasis and simplicity, while deriving its emotional force from the instabilities created by the even more powerful drive for forward motion, intrinsic to capitalism, which aims to leave the past behind.

Precisely because globalization continues ‘to admit different cultures into the realm of capital only to break them down and to remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption’,¹⁴ the roots of the current system, its historical connections with earlier kinds of imperialism, demand analysis and critique. Again, Wallerstein’s work is instructive. In 1975, he contended that scholars would be misguided if they looked for what was new in the system rather than long-term, continuing features.¹⁵ In 2004, evidently frustrated by what he saw as superficial responses to problems of globalization and terrorism created by inattention to the history of capitalism, Wallerstein reiterated his view that the global system ‘is a social creation, with a history, whose origins need to be explained, whose ongoing mechanisms need to be delineated, and whose inevitable terminal crisis needs to be discerned’.¹⁶ Crucially, he added this ‘credo’: ‘the emergence of this mode of analysis is a reflection of, an expression of, the real protest about the deep inequalities of the world-system that are so politically central to our current times.’¹⁷ This kind of statement is an important counter to those economic histories that seek to foreground colonialism’s ‘success stories’, such as ‘the settler societies of North America and Australasia’, or that centralize debates about the ‘benefit’ of imperialism, asking whether specific regions ‘benefited’ from colonization.¹⁸ In Wallerstein’s terms, this hypothetical question is meaningless because it ‘sets aside’ – often in the name of disciplinary purity – the destruction of indigenous peoples and their cultures.

Considerations of the relationship between commodity and culture are often particularly effective in terms of enabling scholars to interrogate the alibi of benevolence – ‘civilizing and Christianizing’ the heathen – integral to the moral

13 Billing, pp. 253, 254.

14 Dirlik, p. 32.

15 *The Capitalist World-Economy: Essays by Immanuel Wallerstein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 1979), p. 120.

16 Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. ix, x.

17 Ibid., *World-systems Analysis*, p. xi.

18 This claim and question are in D.K. Fieldhouse’s *The West and the Third World: Trade, Colonialism, Dependence and Development* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), p. 351. The question is not merely hypothetical but, when framed within a discipline that presumes the normativity of capitalism, tautological.

justification of imperialism. Michael Taussig's influential *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, for example, highlights the extreme atrocity that can characterize colonialist plunder, a point also foregrounded in the numerous studies of slavery and of its later form, indentured labor.¹⁹ In terms of the continuing influence of key works in postcolonial studies which emphasize the connectedness of subjectivity – Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* is paradigmatic here – it is essential to note that a key element of slavery and forced labor was (is) not just trade, but promotion of the view that the mass reorientation of non-monetary or poor economies to the consumer demands of the rich was (is) entirely legitimate. In that sense, one of the more pernicious but prevalent effects of various modes of imperial and colonial discourses is to erase this connection, and to naturalize possession and consumption as prerogatives of the rich.

To date, most works in postcolonial studies that have brought together the imperial and the industrial have tended to focus on single commodities or industries, particularly colonial products such as salt, cotton and (especially) sugar, and to consider the ways in which colonization plays out in debates about the adoption or rejection of specific commodities and practices of commodification.²⁰ Keith Sandiford's *The Cultural Politics of Sugar* is one of the more densely argued and subtle of these; the book analyzes 'the representation of sugar as matter and metaphysic, a substance potent enough to transform not only consumptive patterns but also to alter perceptions

19 Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Studies of modern industries like tourism, and 'niche' commodities (as well as the old colonial staples), draw attention to the same flows of capital remarked as characterizing imperialism. See, for example, Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, *Capital and Entrepreneurship in South-East Asia* (Houndmills, Hants: Macmillan Press; New York: St Martin's Press, 1994); Richard Wilk, *Home Cooking in the Global Village: Caribbean Food from Buccaneers to Ecotourists* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006); and Susanne Freidberg, *French Beans and Food Scares: Culture and Commerce in an Anxious Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). On slavery, see for example the work of James Walvin, including his *Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire*, 2nd edn (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) and *The Slavery Reader*, eds. Gad Heuman and James Walvin (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). On indentured labor, see for example Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labour Migration in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); David Northrup, *Indentured Labour in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834–1920*, ed. Kay Saunders (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

20 See, for example, Sadananda Choudhury, *Economic History of Colonialism: A Study of British Salt Policy in Orissa* (Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1979); Richard L. Roberts, *Two Worlds of Cotton: Colonialism and the Regional Economy in the French Soudan, 1800–1946* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); William K. Storey, *Science and Power in Colonial Mauritius* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997); Timothy Burke, *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 185. Burke's study of hygiene, which focuses on changing understandings of the body and cleanliness, is wry and carefully politicized.

and invent new aesthetic and imaginative space'.²¹ Through her evocative notion of 'commodity racism', Anne McClintock has explored the ways in which 'domestic commodities were mass marketed through their appeal to imperial jingoism' through Victorian advertising campaigns.²² McClintock concludes by arguing that 'In the imperial contest zone, [commodity] fetishes embodied conflicts in the realm of value', and that these collisions of value 'were from the outset the embodiment and record of an incongruous and violent encounter'.²³

Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake have also emphasized the interconnectedness of the cultural and the colonial, remarking that imperialism 'has thrived since the days of ... Adam Smith maximizing the "wealth of nations" upon circulating spectacles and discourses of social difference and cultural heterogeneity'.²⁴ In this vein, the chapters in this volume implicitly take up Crystal Bartolovich's call for more particularized approaches to the development of capitalism: 'When "globalization" is examined in a truly "global" context ... it implies a politics of history as well as geography: its "newness" depends to a large extent not only on how it is conceptualized but where you look for it'.²⁵ This kind of insistence on geography would have seemed passé ten years ago, when the author of an introduction to 'globalization' could argue that the new millennium would bring 'the end of geography' (and with it, presumably, the environment): 'Importantly territoriality will disappear as an organizing principle for social and cultural life; it will be a society without borders and spatial boundaries. In a globalized world we will be unable to predict social practices and preferences on the basis of geographical location'.²⁶ As Saskia Sassen contends, such remarks are evidence of an academic rhetoric and policy context in which 'place is seen as [being] neutralized by global communications and the hypermobility of capital'.²⁷ One shared characteristic of many of the essays gathered here is that they interrogate and complicate homogenizing representations of place, arguing instead for the need to complicate the well-worn vectors of difference such as class, race and gender.

The chapters in the first section, 'Colonialism and Commerce', frequently reflect the dictum that while people do (attempt to) make their own history, they do not always do so in conditions of their own choosing. This paraphrasing of Marx's remark, taken from the first page of his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, slightly understates the case that Marx makes in relation to history. In one (translated) account, he does begin by observing that 'Men make their own history, but they

21 Keith A. Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 16. Sandiford remarks that he reaches conclusions similar to those drawn by Edward Brathwaite in *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), not by Brathwaite's 'historical method' but by 'literary critical and theoretical practices' (p. 21).

22 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 209.

23 Ibid., p. 231.

24 Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, 'Introduction: Tracking the Global/Local', in *Global/Local*, eds Dissanayake and Wilson, p. 7.

25 Bartolovich, p. 136.

26 Malcolm Waters, *Globalization*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 5.

27 Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: New Press, 1998), p. xxi.

do not make it just as they please'; crucially, though, he follows this statement by drawing attention to the fact that the circumstances in which people are trapped are 'directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past.'²⁸ Having argued that political struggle is therefore a struggle over perceptions of the past, Marx draws attention to what he seems to see as a paradox created by the desire for change:

... just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.²⁹

The crux of Marx's observation, at least for our purposes, is that the struggle for transformation of the present is also a struggle about the meanings of the past; commensurately, it is through historical analysis that we can call into question the values and processes of supposedly ahistorical and implacable economic forces. Such claims are made in deliberate opposition to institutional thinking that manifests a pervasive aggression towards the notion of history itself, a violent stripping away of context, in favor of that 'radical economic present' which Wallerstein identifies and likewise contests. Thus, he laughs at the results of a survey which showed that most economists had no use for data that was more than ten years old, and advocates going on the front foot to respond: 'Of course the emperor has no clothes! What of significance can we possibly know with data about only the last ten years of human existence? Precious little! Instead of defending ourselves against academic divestment by the economists, economic historians should lay to claim to replacing economists completely. Away with economics!'³⁰

This struggle over history is at the heart of the various discussions of the relationship between colonialism and commerce in this book. The first chapter that follows begins, fittingly, with an analysis of an iconic narrative of 'first encounter' by Christopher Columbus. Peter Hulme's discussion of the banana trade – or what one textbook of international economics calls the banana war³¹ – briefly considers Columbus's concern with trade and commerce (noting his 'years working in Genoese trade'), before going on to examine the ways in which the banana industry and its collapse have placed increasing pressure on the inhabitants of Dominica to embrace cultural tourism. Hulme counterpoints his study of industry with the resonant lines of Olive Senior's 'Meditation on Yellow', using the poem as echo and commentary on exploitation, while also flagging concern about the way in which indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean have been positioned in terms of their skin color.

28 K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, c.1948), p. 15.

29 Ibid.

30 Wallerstein, *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 258.

31 Robert M. Dunn, Jr., and John H. Mutti, *International Economics: Sixth Edition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 195.