The Dictator Novel: Writers and Politics in the Global South

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Introduction: The Papier-Mâché Parrot

When a chancellor opens the dictator’s casket toward the end of the funeral procession in Jorge Zalamea’s *El gran Burundún-Burundá ha muerto* ("The Great Burundún-Burundá has Died," 1952), the body is missing. There lies instead an enormous parrot wrapped in or fashioned from the quotidian memoranda of the state: newspapers, annals, public announcements, and so on. The discovery incites chaos, and the army opens fire on the crowd. But, like the dictator, the people have changed: when shot, they only bleed a dull watery substance. In panic, everyone flees the city. Writing in response to his exile from Colombia, Zalamea aimed to convey the dehumanizing effects of dictatorship as well as describe its mechanics.¹ The fictional Burundún-Burundá rose to power through his rhetorical prowess, destroying his opponents with words. Once in power, however, he mysteriously lost the capacity of speech, and so decided to abolish language by progressively restricting the number of permitted words and phrases. Against those who would not comply, Burundún-Burundá mobilized the full strength of his security forces. Such attacks are a recurring motif in narratives about dictators and dictatorship. Taban Lo Liyong’s short story “Lexicographicide” (2013; South Sudan), for instance, describes a frustrated
writer who planned to become the “total dictator” of his island. Once in power, he too would create an official dictionary and reduce the number of permitted words with each yearly edition.²

Just as dictators are hostile to writing and writers, so too do writers mobilize the written word against tyranny. The dictator novel is a literary response to the political phenomenon of dictatorship, where the term dictator and its cognates tyrant, despot, and autocrat—or, for that matter, caudillo (Latin America) and Big Man (Africa)—carry a pejorative charge.³ Following the writers themselves, I define “dictator” broadly as a ruler who is neither chosen by nor represents the interests of the majority of people over whom he wields power. These works satirize or parody the authoritarian leader, condemn his collaborators, and register experiences elided in the official record. In so doing, they propose to uncover and dislodge the practices of authority and violence on which dictatorship relies. Dictator novels are part of the culture of writing and resistance and, in this broad sense, works of politically committed literature, or, what Jean-Paul Sartre called littérature engagée. But this is only part of the story.

To read the dictator novel solely for its attack on the dictator obscures its examination of the systems within which dictatorship takes shape. Such readings risk overlooking the complex ways in which novels about dictators also intervene in larger debates, whether on the internal difficulties of national consolidation, the role of external and global forces in sustaining dictatorship, or even the political function of writing itself. Similarly, while the trope of the vulgar or “barbarous” dictator abounds in representations of dictatorship—particularly of dictators in the Global South—it is rarely the singular focus of critique. These narratives are also deeply concerned with the mechanics of dictatorship, and because of this pay close attention to the dictator’s reliance on the written word. As Zalamea’s image of the dictator as a papier-mâché parrot suggests: the dictator is nothing without language. Dictatorship is itself predicated on the
cultivation of tropes and motifs not wholly dissimilar from the work of fiction, such that writer and dictator share the written word as vehicle and weapon. This is a central paradox for the literary representation of the dictator.

If the dictator’s relationship to writing is complex, so too is his relationship to the writer. Fidel Castro’s comments on his long-time friend Gabriel García Márquez offer a suggestive illustration. Here Castro, the foremost Latin American political figure of the twentieth century, celebrates García Márquez, its preeminent novelist:

[A]s a public man compelled to compose speeches and narrate events, I share the illustrious writer’s delight in searching for the precise word, a sort of mutual obsession that is unappeasable until the phrase is just right, faithful to the sentiment or idea we wish to express, even as we remain firm in the belief that it can always be improved. I admire him above all when, if the exact word does not exist, he tranquilly invents it. How I envy that license of his!

Castro credits García Márquez with convincing him not only that he would want to be a writer in his next life, but “a writer like Gabriel García Márquez, with that obstinate and persistent attention to detail that supports, like a philosopher’s stone, all the credibility of his dazzling exaggerations.” Garcia Márquez was equally admiring of Castro, praising his gifts as a thinker, writer, and rhetorician. The intimacy of writer and head of state comprises admiration and identification as well as envy and competition. In naming this affinity, Castro suggests that writer and politician are doubles. Both, to borrow a phrase from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “trade in words.”

Or, as Yunior, the narrator of Junot Díaz’s The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007) puts it: “[Salman] Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think
that’s too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like.*”

Díaz’s proposition is the point of departure for this book. To read the dictator novel solely for its attack on the dictator is to miss its constitutive tensions and the underlying ambivalence conveyed in the unsettling suggestion that writer and dictator are somehow alike. The dictator novel is first and foremost an analytic endeavor. I take as my touchstone Ángel Rama’s reading of the Latin American dictator novel, where Rama makes a strong distinction between what he calls anti-dictator “diatribes” (works whose primary purpose is to enumerate a dictator’s crimes) and the dictator novel as a work that examines the dictator as an individual as well as the historical and social contexts that make his regime possible. Central to this analysis is what Rama terms a “leap into the void,” the (creative) effort to bridge the chasm that separates ruler from ruled. Although rooted in historical precedent, the dictator novel’s critical heft inheres in its very literariness. I argue that the dictator novel is also the space in which writers grapple with their motivations for and the difficulties of writing about the dictator, interrogating the limits of committed literature as such. The dictator novel in this reading is a site of crisis. But crisis is also the condition of possibility for new ways of thinking. The political phenomenon of dictatorship, therefore, serves as the occasion for the self-conscious and even self-critical theorization of the complicated relationship between literature and politics.

*The Dictator Novel: Writers and Politics in the Global South* brings together a cross-regional and multilingual archive that spans the textual cultures of post-independence Spanish America and twentieth-century Hispanophone Latin American literature, to the emergence of the dictator novel in post-independence Anglophone and Francophone African literatures through
the turn of the twenty-first century. Not only do these two continents share a history of post-independence dictatorship, one unevenly spread across the many nations that comprise each; they have correspondingly rich traditions of literary engagement with the dictator and the problem of dictatorship at large. Juxtaposition of these works illuminates the ways in which African dictator novels both evoke and amend their Latin American counterparts, transforming understanding of the dictator novel from a “local” phenomenon that responds to national political questions into a transnational literary genre. More precisely, and to borrow a term from Fredric Jameson, the dictator novel in the Global South functions as a “generic series,” characterized by discontinuity (substitution, transformation, or repression of elements in the preceding texts) as much as continuity. Comparative analysis of the dictator novel across time and place does not just yield understanding of what the dictator novel “is” (the contours of the genre, including recurring tropes, themes, and critical motifs) it generates analysis of the complicated intersections of writing and politics in the Global South.

Understanding the dictator novel in this way entails reading across often-asynchronous political and literary histories. In Latin America, the tradition of writing about and against authoritarian regimes—whether in the form of caciquismo, caudillismo, dictatorship, or a military junta—stretches back to the political turmoil that followed independence in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Here, to talk about the dictator as a problem of national consolidation was also to talk about the desired political community of the new nation. Although these conversations took place across narrative and non-narrative genres, in the early decades of the twentieth century the novel emerged as a primary venue and the dictator as a key figure for understanding Latin American reality. This lineage reached an apex at the end of the Latin American literary “boom” in the early 1970s. The series (in Jameson’s sense) continues to
expand, comprising literary engagements with the post-dictatorship period and the afterlives of state violence. On the other side of the Atlantic, the dictator novel emerged in West and Central African literatures in the 1970s and 1980s as a subset of the broader category of novels of political disillusionment, which followed the anti-colonial and nationalist literature of the independence period. Here, the dictator, as the prototypical Big Man, stands alongside the larger complex of issues facing newly independent nations. These include the lasting effects of colonization, the forces of neocolonialism, and the collaboration of what Frantz Fanon called the “national bourgeoisie” with those external forces; all are part of what Achille Mbembe would later term the “postcolony.” More recent African dictator novels have increasingly turned attention to the global dimensions of dictatorship, pushing the formal and conceptual limits of the genre as it enters the twenty-first century. Reading the dictator novel in this trans-historical and trans-geographical perspective shifts emphasis away from the possible historical referents of a given work (the question of which regime or dictator is under attack) to the unifying concerns of the dictator novel as a genre that recurs throughout the literatures of the Global South.

My use of the term Global South to describe the regions covered in this study is not just a placeholder for the formerly colonized or what used to be called the Third World. The Global South is not, properly speaking, a place. Following Alfred López, Vijay Prashad, and Anne Garland Mahler, I mobilize the Global South are a discursive formation, composed in the mutual recognition of shared circumstances by those disadvantageously positioned within the capitalist world system. From here it becomes possible to speak of a “South” within the North, as in the marginalization of indigenous or otherwise racialized populations, and vice versa. In their attention to the uneven distributions of global political, economic, and cultural power, all of which create the conditions of possibility for the dictatorships that are their immediate focus, the
novels I discuss in this book intimate and even expose the dynamics that define the Global South as a transnational collectivity in the present. In short: reading the dictator novel across place and time also tells the story of the emergence of the Global South as a political consciousness at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Authoritarianism and dictatorship are by no means specific to the Global South; a fact often acknowledged in the novels, where references to European totalitarianism and imperialism, or even Roman dictators and other classical tyrants, serve as both analogy and counterpoint. Yet, a particular type of autocratic ruler—vain, cruel, incompetent, given to excess—is immediately recognizable as the iconic “Latin American,” “African,” or simply “Third World” dictator. The pervasive phenomenon of dictatorship here appears endemic: the symptom of an underdeveloped political culture or, worse, imagination. The dictator novel of the Global South responds by calling attention to dictatorship as an historical formation constituted in the imbrication of local political questions with that unequal distribution of global power; including, but not limited to: histories of colonization, neocolonialism, ongoing economic peripheralization, and proxy battles between more powerful nation-states. In this sense, the dictator novel of the Global South is fundamentally about power, understood at both the national and global scale, as well as in its political, economic, and cultural dimensions. In this configuration, literature itself becomes a mode of knowledge and interpretation.

Attention to these multiple and interlocking scales is a perspective specific to the dictator novel of the Global South. I separate what I am calling the “dictator novel of the Global South” from the larger body of literature about tyranny (or, fascism) as well as novels about dictators or dictatorship in the parts of the world now identified as the Global South. The latter are works about people who, recognizing the inadequacy of the term, I will call “outsiders.”
appellation is not a question of the author’s national origin—many, like Joseph Conrad or V.S. Naipaul, do not fit cleanly within a single literary-historical tradition—but of perspective. These works focus on the experiences of external actors within these narrative worlds. For instance, in Conrad’s *Nostromo* (1904), set in the fictional Latin American republic of Costaguana, or Graham Greene’s *The Comedians* (1966), set in Haiti under the rule of François (Papa Doc) Duvalier, the focus is on the foreigners who become embroiled in but eventually escape local political turmoil. While both novels have a lot to say about the intersection of global interests with local political questions, the dictator and dictatorship function as backdrop.

Although I limit my analyses to Latin American and African literatures, the propositions I draw offer a starting point for reading dictator novels elsewhere in the Global South. This is not a claim for uniformity across place and time. Just as the particularities of the political situations with which individual novels engage vary, so too do the thematic and aesthetic concerns of each text. I also do not postulate nor do the works themselves sustain a genealogical relationship between the dictator novel in Latin America and Africa. Examples of transcontinental influence or allusion do exist; Sony Labou Tansi, for one, parodies elements of García Márquez’s *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 1975) in *L’État honteux* (*The Shameful State*, 1981). However, these are less proof of a genre “travelling” than instances of repurposing that expand the representative vocabulary of the dictator novel. Paradigms of importation or imitation do not sufficiently explain the occurrence of this type of novel nor do they properly account for the formal and thematic variations introduced. And there is immense variance: the anti-dictator writings of the European-descended (*criollo*) lettered élites in Argentina during the 1840s and 1850s are distant from Ngũgĩ and Ahmadou Kourouma’s literary renderings of the crises faced by African dictators at the turn of the twenty-first century. Yet, beyond the common question of
dictatorship, these novels share an investment in remaking the contours of literary form to account for new political and cultural realities. The challenge, then, is one of method: of how to read comparatively across Latin American and African literatures without subordinating one to the other.

My project rests on two intertwined assertions: first, that dictator novels across contexts share critical and formal conventions that make it possible to identify them as a group; and, second, that those conventions overlap with and borrow from other textual and narrative sources, which vary depending on the political context and the literary-historical moment of production, thereby introducing significant differences into the generic series. These claims are not mutually exclusive; but to recognize them as compatible requires a multifocal mode of reading. I term this a “constellated comparison,” where “constellation” functions as a figure for the relationship of individual texts or textual features to each other (a loose configuration or grouping) while also accounting for each text’s relationship to contextually specific political questions and literary traditions. It is a mode of comparison that proceeds via paratactic juxtaposition rather than a more rigid hierarchical systematization. Contrast the constellation to the “tree” as a tool for visualizing an expansive literary field. Following Franco Moretti, the tree is an evolutionary (and fundamentally teleological) paradigm emphasizing divergence. While I am, in part, telling the story of the emergence or development of the dictator novel, this narrative is not merely evolutionary. I am interested instead in mapping the agglomeration of formal and thematic features that comprise, rather than strictly define, the dictator novel across place and time.

Yet some measure of typology, even if provisional, is a necessary starting point for the work of comparison. With this in mind, I outline four constitutive features of the dictator novel
in the Global South, as the preliminary coordinates for the constellation I will map in this book. These characteristics range from the formal to the thematic and, as the case studies that comprise this book will show, vary in importance across time and place.

First, I distinguish the dictator novel from the broader category of “dictatorship novels” for its focus on the dictator as a character in the text, up to and including focalization through the dictator. The latter, which capitalizes on the novel’s suitability to exploring the psychology of individual characters—recall György Lukács’s assertion that the novel, contra epic, “tells the adventure of interiority”—is the most explicit mobilization of the dictator novel for an analysis of the internal workings of political power. The dictator’s definitional importance is emphasized in the Spanish and French terms for the genre, novela del dictador and roman du dictateur, where the pronouns “del” and “du” suggest possession, as in “the novel of the dictator” or “the dictator’s novel.” But the definitional function is not unidirectional: just as “dictator” defines “novel,” the novel comes to define the dictator as a literary figure, separate from its immediate historical referents.

The centrality of the dictator holds even in cases where he makes only a brief physical appearance in the novel. For instance, the dictator is largely in the background of novels such as Martín Luis Guzmán’s La sombra del caudillo (“The Shadow of the Caudillo,” 1929), Miguel Ángel Asturias’s El señor Presidente (The President, 1946), Ousmane Sembène’s Le Dernier de l’Empire (The Last of the Empire, 1981), or Chinua Achebe’s Anthills of the Savannah (1987). But he looms over and determines the actions of those in his service—his immediate circle—who remain in the thrall or “shadow” of the dictator. By contrast, dictatorship novels focus on the social, interpersonal, and psychological consequences of living under a dictatorship and most often very far from the center of power. These narratives often unfold within the context of a
romantic relationship or nuclear family, where the smaller unit is a synecdoche for the nation, and where the dictator or dictatorship are the background against which this drama plays out. Occasionally, these two tendencies intertwine within a single work, as in José Mármol’s *Amalia* (1855), Asturias’s *The President*, or Ngũgĩ’s *Mũrogi wa Kagogo* (*Wizard of the Crow* 2004-2007; 2006); but, again, what distinguishes the dictator novel is the presence of the dictator as a character in the text.

Second, the dictator of the dictator novel is fundamentally a literary figure, even when there is a discernible historical referent or set of referents for the dictator. In the most immediate terms, recourse to fiction is a tactical response to the dangers of writing about a present political reality. Yet fiction also makes available new critical, narrative, and aesthetic possibilities, which require attention on their own terms. My emphasis on the dictator’s essential fictionality rests on the conviction that literatures from the Global South, to echo an argument made by Gayatri Spivak in *Death of a Discipline* (2003), must not be reduced to evidence from the field or “cultural information.” It is necessary to attend to these texts as literature, shot through with what Spivak calls “undecideability.” The actual dictator or dictators the writer has in mind matter much less than the development of the figure within the text, which is in dialogue with other imagined dictators as much as with any possible historical referent. Literary representation of the dictator has a common vocabulary of tropes, themes, and critical motifs that recurs across time and place. These include the dictator’s “barbarity” (lack of education, cruelty, vulgarity), solitude (as both isolation and family dysfunction, where the dictator’s family stands for the larger national unit), and subservience to foreign powers, as well as attention to the broader problems of corruption, social hypocrisy, and the moral or tactical failings of the opposition.
The third feature—and one crucial to my argument about writing and politics in this book—is the dictator novel’s tendency toward self-reflexivity, which manifests as a turn inward and away from questions of political futurity. The dictator novel is acutely concerned with the writer’s relationship to the dictator, as indicated by the proliferation of writer-figures in these texts; this includes journalists, historians, biographers, storytellers, secretaries, and artists aligned against or in the dictator’s service. There is also recurrent concern with the dictator’s skill with language, even when expressed as a lack thereof, as in the trope of the barely-literate dictator. The degree of self-reflexivity and self-criticism necessarily varies. However, anxiety about the possible similarities between the writer and dictator is a vital part of the dictator novel and is, in fact, an unease that lies only partially hidden at the heart of the genre.

What I am broadly calling self-reflexivity has important implications for reading these works as politically committed literature. Sartre’s theorization of littérature engagée rests on two assertions: first, that the writer is invariably “situated” in and responsible to her time; second, that the task of the writer is to disclose a political situation or social injustice, which implicates and thereby compels further action on the part of the reader. This understanding of commitment has been deeply influential in postcolonial theory and criticism. It informs, for instance, Fanon’s notion of national literature as revolutionary or “combat literature” in Les damnés de la terre (The Wretched of the Earth, 1961), for which Sartre wrote an introduction. It is also in the background of the analogy Ngũgĩ draws between writers and politicians in the opening lines of the essay “Writers in Politics,” where he argues that politics and literature necessarily reflect as well as act upon one another. Following Rama’s distinction between anti-dictator novels (less generously, “diatribes”) and the dictator novel, the work of the dictator novel is not as straightforward as this preliminary gloss of commitment might suggest. While the
dictator novel has its roots in advocacy for the oppressed, it is also the space in which such models of advocacy are themselves put into question. Henri Lopès’s *Le Pleurer-rire* (*The Laughing Cry*, 1982), which follows the debates between a dictator’s former butler and an exiled minister who hopes to use the butler’s account of his time in the presidential palace to aid the opposition, is one outstanding example. The minister repeatedly attempts to discipline the butler’s account to fit his political ends, while the butler actively resists these programmatic imperatives by returning to such apparently frivolous subjects as his own sexual escapades. In such moments, the novel delights in disrupting programmatic models of literary commitment.

Perhaps paradoxically, few dictator novels imagine an end to dictatorship, alternate political futures, or even viable platforms for opposition. What sense of futurity there is in the dictator novel tends to focus on the problem of the persistence or cyclical repetition of dictatorship. Even when the dictator dies or is ousted, another often takes his place. This is not political fatalism. Rather, it suggests that the objectives of the dictator novel extend beyond the attack on or even analysis of the dictator, to the question of commitment itself. There is, of course, immense variation across historical contexts, as I will discuss. However, what holds these divergent examples together is a shared interest in the complicated relationship between political content or intent and the (generative) strictures of literary form.

Finally, the dictator novel of the Global South also attends to the external or global forces that support and benefit from the existence of dictatorial regimes. This unfolds alongside exploration of the challenges of national consolidation—both in the broad sense of national unity and as the concentration of sovereignty in the state—be it following independence, under conditions of neocolonialism, or in the era of the rise of neoliberal globalization toward the end of the twentieth century. Even when a narrative pays little explicit attention to the larger

geopolitical context of a given (fictional) dictatorship, it nevertheless registers the influence of international forces. Foreign advisors, diplomats, security experts, and other operatives lurk in these novel-worlds. Very rarely are these outsiders seen as viable support for opposition to dictatorship. This is true even in nineteenth-century Latin American iterations of the genre. In Mármol’s *Amalia*, for instance, the U.S. ambassador aids the protagonists, while his British counterpart colludes with the dictator; in Juana Manso’s *Los misterios del Plata* ("The Mysteries of the Plata," 1855), the guards of the dictator’s pontoon prison are a tee-totaling American and a drunken Englishman. In the twentieth century, the so-called “gunboat diplomacy” of the United States in Latin America and the involvement of multinational companies such as United Fruit are vital points of reference. Later, the Cold War becomes the framework for discussing the role of the U.S. and Soviet Union in sustaining dictatorships in Africa as well as Latin America.

As the most recent dictator novels suggest, opposition to dictatorship must take the form of transnational resistance to the forces that sustain and benefit from such regimes. It is in these latest iterations of the dictator novel that the emergent Global South consciousness of the genre is most explicitly manifest. Dictator novels written around the turn of the twenty-first century pay increasing attention to the transnational dimensions of dictatorship in its imbrications with global capital and finance, particularly in the wake of the ravages of “structural adjustment” programs. Attention to the role of global political and economic forces offers a distinct image of the dictator, who must placate external interests to remain in power. The resulting disjuncture between the dictator’s apparent omnipotence at home and servility abroad is often the subject of derision and comedy. Dictatorship in these novels is never simply a local question. This is not to say that the dictator is merely a puppet of foreign power; rather, the complex interplay of internal tensions and external interests increasingly becomes the topic of interest for these works.
The Dictator Novel in Latin American and African Literary Criticism

The histories of post-independence dictatorship in Latin America and Africa have long invited analogy. In *Wretched of the Earth*, for instance, Fanon repeatedly refers to Latin America for examples of the challenges (*mésaventures*) that await newly independent African countries. Latin America exemplifies the dangers of neocolonialism, the transformation of the national bourgeoisie (élite) into a servant class for foreign interests, and the rise of dictatorship as “the dialectical result of the semi-colonial State which has prevailed since independence.” But Latin America is not merely a precedent. Along with Africa and Asia, it forms part of what Fanon calls the world’s “underdeveloped countries”—also the “formerly colonized countries”—and a nascent Third World consciousness to which Fanon makes forceful appeal in the conclusion.21

In a similar vein, the Nigerian critic Chinweizu, writing in the journal *Okike* in 1975, called on his fellow writers and critics to turn away from Europe and toward Latin American writers. “Their works,” he argued, “are vibrant, alive, deal powerfully with experiences under imperialized histories and conditions that are, in many significant ways, quite similar to ours in Africa.”22 A decade later, Tchichellé Tchivéla traced the influence of Latin American novelists on Congolese writers of his generation. Noting the comparable histories of Latin America and Africa, Tchivéla argued that Latin American novelists demonstrated that it was possible to write meaningful, locally oriented works in the language of the colonizer, offering models for the novel beyond Balzac. In literature as in politics, he added, strategy and expertise flow from a broad variety of sources.23 The literature, too, sustains such associations by invoking the intertwined histories of post-independence dictatorship in Latin America and Africa, even if only in passing. For instance, in Lopès’s *The Laughing Cry* the dictator worries about rumors that a
mysterious “Tché” or “Chez” has infiltrated the country. The reference to Ernesto “Che” Guevara points to both actual histories of exchange and symbolic associations between the two continents during the Cold War. Such lateral connections among regions of the Global South not only contravene the colonial relation, contrasting a hierarchical center-periphery orientation to that of horizontal relations amongst different locations on the periphery, they supply instructive models and opportunities for solidarity in the future.

Much of the comparative scholarship on Latin American and African literatures has focused on the Caribbean, the Atlantic slave trade (both north and south), and the consequent emergence of Afro-Latin American cultural forms. But there are also instances of comparison that proceed from the kinds of connection anticipated by Fanon. Such work analyzes, to quote Edna Aizenberg, “the way comparable, yet not identical circumstances of colonization and ‘third-worldliness’ have affected literature.” These comparisons draw on analogous yet discontinuous and asynchronous histories of colonization and exploitation, rather than the realities of material exchange. From approximate histories, the argument goes, arise similarities between texts from the Third (or, formerly colonized) World, distinct from their possible similarities to those of the West or First World. This is what Josaphat Kubayanda has in mind when he argues that dictator novels in Latin America and Africa “pinpoint an unfinished business of decolonization.”

The comparisons put forward by Kubayanda and Aizenberg do not require a mutual recognition of shared circumstances, past or present, within the texts themselves. It is the critic who identifies the thematic, morphological, and contextual similarities between texts. Yet the category “Third World” does assume a common identification of shared circumstances and goals in the present; see, for instance, Fanon’s call for the Third World to “start over a new history of
man” in the conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*. I raise this distinction to signal the slippage between political movements as transnational frameworks and the use of these frameworks as the bases for comparison in literary criticism, which comes to bear on my invocation of the Global South. Here, earlier debates about the category “Third World literature” are a productive reference point. Jameson’s notorious argument for Third World literature as national allegory in the essay “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” (1986) assumed the Third World as a stable, already-described category on which to base his claims. In his response, Aijaz Ahmad criticized Jameson’s suppression of significant differences amongst and within the regions described in the service of establishing functional comparative analogy, which undermines the argument as a whole. Ahmad insists: “there is no such thing as a ‘third-world literature’ which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge.”

Roberto Schwartz said much the same in response to a survey in 1980: “there is no such thing as the aesthetic of the Third World.” To assume a necessary sameness of texts within large-scale comparative frameworks such as the Third World or Global South elides crucial differences between texts as well as contexts, and the differences are as instructive as the similarities. Not only do Latin American and African dictator novels emerge from distinct historical contexts and literary traditions, they have very different critical histories. This book aims to bring these into conversation.

Latin American criticism generally reads the dictator novel in trans-historical perspective. This tendency has a precipitating event: the publication between 1974 and 1975 of Alejo Carpentier’s *El recurso del método* (*Reasons of State*, 1974), Augusto Roa Bastos’s *Yo el Supremo* (*I the Supreme*, 1974), and García Márquez’s *Autumn of the Patriarch*. The near-simultaneous appearance of these works prompted an eruption of critical attention. Scholars
assembled histories of the dictator novel, identifying precursors from earlier decades, the
nineteenth century, and even the colonial period, and declared the dictator a uniquely Latin
American myth or archetype. Emphasis on the contrast between successive periods sustained an
evolutionary model of increasing formal and thematic complexity.\textsuperscript{31} Such taxonomic schema are
useful for identifying the dictator novel as an object of study, and productively synthetize a
variety of genres (novels, theatre, essays, poetry) and narrative modes (realism, romance, farce,
modernism, postmodern pastiche, and so on).\textsuperscript{32} However, because of emphasis on what
constitutes the dictator novel, there is a tendency in much of this scholarship to overlook the
conceptual work of narrative mechanics. Here, Rama’s attention to the critical function of
focalization in his critical study of the dictator novels of the 1970s, \textit{Los dictadores latinoamericanos}
(“The Latin American Dictators,” 1976), is instructive. For Rama, Asturias’s \textit{The President} and Zalamea’s \textit{El gran Burundún-Burundá ha muerto} are positive examples of the
critical potential of the dictator novel in their attention to the systems of authoritarian power. But
Carpentier, Roa Bastos, and García Márquez go further:

\textit{Not only do they enter into the [presidential] palace, sniff around its corners,}
\textit{survey the dictator’s various guards, [and] his European residences, they skillfully}
\textit{install themselves in the very consciousness of the character and in that manner}
\textit{occupy the center from which power is exercised. It is a matter of a drastic}
\textit{inversion of perspective [vision].}\textsuperscript{33}

The “leap” into the dictator’s consciousness makes it possible to interrogate authoritarian power
from within, uncovering overlooked motivations, and to map out the mechanisms that drive the
obstinate and apparently illogical persistence of dictatorship. This kind of analysis, Rama
maintains, is the necessary starting point for the transformation of political realities. It is also
fundamentally an imaginative endeavor facilitated by narrative mechanics. Simply put: this kind of critique is only possible in and as literature.

More recent work on the Latin American dictator novel and the novel of dictatorship focuses on their ideological dimensions, re-opening this archive to contemporary critical concerns. In *Cosas de hombres: Escritores y caudillos en la literatura latinoamericana del siglo XX* (“The Affairs of Men: Writers and Caudillos in Twentieth-Century Latin American Literature,” 2008), for instance, Gabriela Polit Dueñas argues that even as narratives about authoritarian political figures critique the dictator, these novels can also help to consolidate the hegemony of patriarchal, authoritarian, and classist systems. In both Latin America and Africa, there are relatively few dictator novels written by women, and women characters are most often peripheral. When present, they generally serve as the vehicle for the most visceral elements of critique, whether as victims or proxies. The exclusion of women from the dictator novel is frequently justified as an extension of their more general absence (or, more precisely, exclusion) from the political sphere; as Kourouma commented to one interviewer: “You know that for us [chez nous] dictatorship is a masculine thing [la dictature est quelque chose de masculine].” This characterization is pointedly disputed by the work of women such as Juana Manso, Juana Manuela Gorriti, and Aminata Sow Fall, as I will discuss. The relative absence or exclusion of women does not obviate the need for gender as an analytical lens. Rather than treat the scarcity of women characters and writers as a necessary reflection of the *modus operandi* of authoritarian regimes as male (or, masculinist) spaces, I read it as an “enabling fiction”—a narrative that, to quote Rita Felski, “engenders a sense of collective identity but is achieved only by obscuring actual material inequalities and political antagonisms among its participants.” In this case, the “fiction” is the idea that opposition to dictatorship benefits all those oppressed by the dictator in
the same way—here I have in mind women as well as group marginalized on the basis of class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so on—even as the specific nature of their oppression is not directly addressed.

Novels about Latin American dictators and dictatorship continue to appear and circulate internationally. Díaz’s *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which explores the long afterlives of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora, traces new vectors for the dictatorship novel as a transnational form. As Jennifer Harford Vargas elaborates, the Americas have a common literature of dictatorship. The genre (loosely defined) travels with exiled (Latin American) populations and is taken up by the next (Latinx) generation to account for a history of displacement and U.S. imperialism, as well as marginalization and oppression in the present.\(^3\) Dictators and dictatorship are also a recurring motif in recent work by diasporic African writers—see, for instance, the discussion of African dictatorships between the characters in Dinaw Mengestu’s *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007)—although it remains to be explored.\(^3\) Such texts offer diaspora as a spatial and temporal axis for reading the literatures of dictatorship that is complementary to my own focus on the Global South, because they too embed dictatorship and its aftermaths within broader global relations.

Despite Gitahi Gititi’s call for such scholarship over two decades ago, there is as yet no other large-scale study of the dictator novel as a transnational and multilingual tradition on the African continent.\(^3\) Responding to this absence is part of my task in this book. Studies of African dictator novels make frequent reference to the Latin American dictator novel and, occasionally, its criticism.\(^4\) These comparisons draw on historical analogy, following Fanon, as much as thematic and morphological similarity. There is also a tendency to read dictator novels alongside a much larger body of social scientific scholarship on dictatorship in Africa.\(^4\) The
implication is that the prevalence of dictatorship explains the prevalence of literature about dictatorship. Without disputing this basic claim, I see such work as a contemporary iteration in the African context of the tendency in Latin American criticism to treat the dictator as a uniquely Latin American archetype. In both cases, emphasis on historical referentiality—as argued above—threatens to foreclose closer analysis of the work as literature as well as in relation to other literary works. Which is to say: while dictator novels and social scientific scholarship on dictatorship may respond to the same historical phenomenon, their projects and methods diverge significantly.

Only in the most recent scholarship has there been an attempt to differentiate the African dictator novel from novels about dictatorship. Here, the critical emphasis is on the ways in which dictator novels disrupt the dictator’s hegemony or apparent omnipotence, enabling the reader to see past the dictator’s claims to absolute power. In such instances, focalization through the dictator receives less attention than the moments in which alternate sources of authority (rumor, for example) and the perspective of those either working with the dictator or living under his rule are mobilized in the service of critique. This is a reflection of the kinds of formal experimentation common to these texts. While focalization, heteroglossia, and shifts in narrative perspective play an important role in African dictator novels, these texts also tend to draw on a much wider array of narrative tactics—including pastiche, allusion, and intertextuality—that can inform and even revitalize readings of the Latin American dictator novel. Indeed, if existing scholarship on the African dictator novel is piecemeal, it is also instructively comparative in spirit. This is where my project takes its lead: if we cannot fully understand the African dictator novel without reference to the Latin American novels and criticism, the reverse is also true; and this holds as we expand the argument outward to include other literatures of the Global South.
The Dictator Novel and the Global South: A Framework

I have, to this point, used the term “Global South” to name the south-south comparative axis of this study. However, as suggested above, it is not a fixed or internally homogeneous category. The term originates in development discourse and the social sciences, and has more recently emerged in conversations about literature and culture. It is most often used to refer to the same areas of the globe as the term “Third World” once did. In such usage, Global South generalizes the metonymic association of underdevelopment with the Third World to a global North-South divide, understood as the distinction between the developed and developing world but only roughly correlating to geographic location. This particular connotation of “South” emerges from post-World War II discourses of modernization and was in widespread use by the 1970s. The phrase “Global South” comes into circulation around the turn of the twenty-first century, in the wake of discussions of globalization in the 1990s, taking on “global” to address the enlarged scope of issues previously treated in national or regional terms. Increasing scholarly interest in the Global South is also a response to the post-Cold War proliferation of insurgent, transnational movements working collaboratively across national and regional boundaries. In this sense, as Anne Garland Mahler observes, the Global South as a critical category is both “the resistant imaginary of a transnational political subject that results from a shared experience of subjugation and also to a model for the comparative study of resistant cultural production.”

Yet use of the term Global South frequently elicits ambivalence, as in the phrase “so-called Global South.” When thus invoked, the Global South serves as a placeholder or temporary designation for something that it announces but does not properly describe. At issue are the difficulties presented by the apparent geographical specificity of the term, undermined by the
conflictive combination of the generalizing “global” with the delimiting “South.” Much of the
territory to which the term refers lies well north of the equator, up to and including the
designation of marginalized groups within countries of the global North as part of the Global
South. The Global South also overlaps with regions that have traditionally been the purview of
postcolonial studies—although there is long-standing debate about Latin America’s place in that
paradigm—and shares the same lineage of anti-imperial thinking, which suggests redundancy or,
worse, the intended displacement of an established field. Finally, critics such as Spivak have
recently accused current definitions of the Global South of perpetuating essentialist notions of
identity, effectively ignoring what she calls “the largest sector of the electorate in Asia, Africa,
and Latin America, below the radar of nongovernmental organizations and below the class
apartheid in education.” Such skeptical responses usefully indicate the extent to which the
convinced origins and associations of the term Global South complicate its function as a
literary-critical framework. But they also tend to take “locational” definitions of the Global
South at face value, without acknowledging its wider conceptual (that is, political) and figurative
potential for the comparative analysis of cultural production. Both “global” and “South” are
heavily freighted terms—think here of debates around the categories of “world” versus “global”
literature” or Spivak’s own proposition of “planet” as a figure to overwrite “globe,” as the space
of capital-driven abstraction. For my purposes, to speak of the “global” is less a claim for
world-covering totality (the “global” of “globalization”) than a name for the desire to think
expansively and therefore comparatively beyond established national, regional, or sub-
disciplinary boundaries. The term “South” requires further elucidation.

The 1980 publication of North-South: A Program for Survival marks the consolidation of
“South” as a synonym for underdevelopment. The report was prepared by the Independent
Commission on International Development Issues, convened by the World Bank and chaired by the former West German chancellor, Willy Brandt. The Brandt Report, as it is commonly known, presented North-South relations as “the great social challenge of our time,” responding to concerns about the political consequences of growing inequality. Its orientation was decidedly global, in the sense outlined above, with an emphasis on shared interests and the need for coordinated action. Emerging economic, social, and environmental challenges, the authors argued, could only be confronted at the global scale. Accordingly, it was necessary to restructure international relations, giving the Third World a share in decision-making and facilitating North-South as well as south-south cooperation. Although the authors acknowledged the flaws of dividing the world into two camps, their propositions nevertheless depended on a bipartite division of the globe, enshrined in the report’s cover image, which features a map of the world cleaved in two (Figure 1). This delineation—referred to as the “Brandt line”—also distinguishes the developed from the developing world. The choice of map was important: the editors used the Gall-Peters map, an “equal area” projection aimed at rendering a more accurate representation of the earth’s surface, rather than the more recognizable Mercator projection, which privileges Europe and North America. Yet, even as the authors endeavored to give the South its due by drawing attention to the economic, political, and cultural forces that produce “south-ness,” its visualization reifies and perpetuates a spatialized notion of the South. Despite its ambitions, the Brandt Report’s recommendations would quickly prove to be out of date and out of step with a changing global economy. Its influence is instead discernible in ongoing preoccupation with “South” as an improperly descriptive term, reflected in the later work of the South Commission and its report, *The Challenge to the South* (1990), as much as in current criticisms of the Global South.
Figure 1: Independent Commission on International Development Issues, *North-South: A Program for Survival* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980); over image reprinted courtesy of the MIT Press.

The term “South” has a much longer lineage in Marxist criticism, stretching back at least to Antonio Gramsci’s “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” (“Alcuni temi della questione
This unfinished essay is an extended meditation on the divide between the northern proletariat and southern peasants, understood as the “Southern question” in Italian communism and a major topic in Italian political, economic, and cultural thought. Gramsci takes as his starting point the Turin communists’ articulation of the (Italian) South as the space the North has reduced to exploitable colonies; in the process, the North ascribes the problems of the South to “Nature” (“laziness,” “backwardness,” and so on) rather than to the demands of capital. Without disputing this claim, but acknowledging Northern communists’ limited success in fostering solidarity and successful collective action, Gramsci lays out the bases for a closer analysis of the various strata of Southern society intended to account for the political affiliations of the peasantry, the interests of the élites, and the role of the intellectuals. The essay is exemplary for thinking seriously about the need to attend to conditions on the ground, while acknowledging that “South” is itself a conceptual category. Such non-locational understandings of “south-ness” and attention to the importance of internal differentiation provide a working model for thinking the “South” in Global South today.

In development circles, the term Global South is most often invoked to spur cooperation between developing countries. Something similar is true of the Global South understood in political terms. In this sense, the Global South is a successor to, rather than post-Cold War replacement for, the Third World. Beyond and, indeed, before its association with underdevelopment, the Third World was imagined as an alternative to existing models and grew into a contestatory political project. This vision of the Third World was rooted in anti-colonial movements and nurtured by gatherings such as the Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955 and the Tricontinental Conference for Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America in Havana (Cuba) in 1966, as well as by the creation of cultural
networks and associations such as the Afro-Asian Writers Bureau (AAWB) and the Organization for Solidarity for the Peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). It was also the basis for such transnational organizations as Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the formation of the Group of 77 at the United Nations.\textsuperscript{54} Despite the Global South’s political energy, it does not yet have an easily definable political direction comparable to its predecessor.\textsuperscript{55} But its very unwieldiness allows for wide-ranging and flexible frameworks of association—rooted in the identification of processes and shared experience rather than location—which is where I locate my own project.

Having outlined the historical specificity of the term’s emergence, it would seem ahistorical to apply the label “Global South” to most of the texts discussed in this book. I only make an explicit connection between the Global South and the novels analyzed in the fifth chapter. I do, however, argue that much of what comes to constitute the Global South—from the involvement of foreign powers in recently independent countries and their continued marginalization in the world system to interest in horizontal vectors of solidarity—are long-standing and constitutive topics of concern for the dictator novel. Hence my assertion that dictator novels anticipate or expresses the dynamics that define the Global South in the present. This proposition draws on the more theoretical or abstract invocations of the Global South, which nuance the above emphasis on recognition as its central constituting force. In \textit{Epistemologies of the South} (2009), for instance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos describes the Global South as “a metaphor for the systemic and unjust human suffering caused by global capitalism and colonialism.”\textsuperscript{56} The term “metaphor” implies a relation of resemblance, rather than a call for active recognition. The Global South here “exists” in and as the space of multi-scalar comparison, where points of connection might be drawn and where recognition and
collaboration become possible. It is another example of “constellation”: a speculative and even provisional formation that only takes on concrete form as the connections or collectivities it makes visible are channeled into action. As such, it can accommodate incommensurability and difference while facilitating the kinds of comparison across space and time I undertake here.

The case studies that form the core of *The Dictator Novel: Writers and Politics in the Global South* are four key junctures in the unfolding of the dictator novel as a transnational literary genre; these are moments in which the dictator novel comes to the fore in and elaborates new thematic and formal features, expanding its representative vocabulary and grammar. My readings follow a temporal arc from the mid-nineteenth century to the turn of the twenty-first. The chronological arrangement makes it difficult to avoid an evolutionary argument, one that would seek to prove increasing formal and thematic complexity across time and space. The dictator novel certainly develops across the four junctures I identify; but I use the term “develop” with the older senses of “unfurl” or “open outward” in mind, and as counterpoint to its more linear and teleological associations. This sometimes-muddled unfolding produces unexpected coincidences, which I highlight in the diachronic comparisons between chapters as much as in the synchronic comparisons within the chapters themselves.

The first chapter takes a synthetic approach in order to elaborate the critical questions that undergird the project. Using Ngũgĩ’s *Wizard of the Crow* as a touchstone, I explore the question of politically committed literature in its theoretical and contextually specific dimensions. Key here are writers’ own reflections on the purpose and difficulty of writing about the dictator. This brings me, first, to what I call the “aporia” of the dictator’s vulgarity, where I draw on Mbembe’s theorization of the “aesthetics of vulgarity” in authoritarian regimes of the African postcolony.
The obscene and the grotesque are two essential characteristics of dictatorship and its representation. But these are not exclusive to the dictator. Both ruler and ruled participate in the complex symbolic economy that sustains the regime. This is the apparent impasse that each dictator novel must confront, and it forms the basis for a symptomatic reading of key tropes in the representation of the dictator. Second, I consider the formal dimensions of the dictator novel’s political project, which highlights the wide range of narrative modes mobilized in this expansive body of texts. These observations form the basis for a discussion of comparison and elaboration of my own comparative method. While the conceit of this book tends toward a comparative morphology, it does not have merely taxonomic ends. I offer instead a model of relational comparison (or, comparison as relation) for thinking the dictator novel across place and time.

The second chapter turns to the first of four case studies: the diverse textual cultures that developed under the regime of Juan Manuel de Rosas in mid-nineteenth century Argentina (1835-1852). Here, writing about the dictator served as a forum for the elaboration of alternate political futures for the emerging nation. Alongside debates about the dictator, I show, raged much more complicated arguments about what type of subject and which kinds of experience were counted—that is, acknowledged and included—in the new nation. I juxtapose the work of anti-Rosas writers (Esteban Echeverría, José Mármol, Juana Manso, and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento) with that of his official supporters (Pedro de Angelis) as well as the mobilization of the vernacular poetic form of the gauchesca (the gaucho genre) on both sides of the political divide. From this archive emerges a constellation of tropes and ideas that continue to shape the literary representation of dictators in both formal and ideological terms.
Having established this point of departure, the third chapter takes up the resurgence of the dictator novel at the end of the Latin American literary “boom” in the 1960s and early 1970s. The near-simultaneous publication of Carpentier (Cuba), Roa Bastos (Paraguay), and García Márquez’s (Colombia) dictator novels was not coincidental. In the late 1960s, all three were involved in a project about Latin American dictators titled *Los padres de las patrias* (“The Fathers of the Fatherlands”). Organized by Carlos Fuentes (Mexico) and Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), this was to have been a collection of short texts authored by prominent writers of the moment, but it never materialized. Using the archive of correspondence surrounding “Fathers of the Fatherlands”—material largely unexplored in existing criticism—I highlight three key issues the authors confront in their respective texts. These problems are neither dismissed nor fully resolved; they form part of the self-reflexive dimensions of each novel. First is the difficulty of making literature out of the historical facts of dictatorship, which pits fiction against the seemingly incredible extremes of history. This proved an obstacle in successive drafts of García Márquez’s *Autumn of the Patriarch* and drives the formal experimentation of the final version. Second is the difficult relationship between art and politics subsumed in the category of “committed literature,” which Carpentier foregrounds in *Reasons of State*, suggesting and then systematically subverting alignment between art and politics. The final challenge is anxiety about the possible parallels between writer and dictator. Here, Roa Bastos’s narration of the bulk of *I the Supreme* from the dictator’s perspective, I show, brings about a collapse of the oppositional logic that previously structured the genre.

The fourth chapter, which moves from Latin America to West and Central Africa in the decades following independence, is the comparative hinge of this book. The first part lays out what I call the “local” origins of the dictator novel in African literatures: the dictator novel
emerges as a concentration of the critical concerns of the literature of political disillusionment into the figure of the dictator. This I demonstrate through analysis of a series of works by Ousmane Sembène (Senegal) and Chinua Achebe (Nigeria). For both, foregrounding the dictator necessitated a reworking of the existing textual idioms of disillusionment. The second part of the chapter reads the above observations back into the generic series of the dictator novel; this is not a simple progression, but rather one in which the nascent conventions of the dictator novel cross with other genres (narrative conventions, modes, and so on) and critical concerns expanding the critical and literary vocabulary of the genre. Examples here include novels by Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal), Henri Lopès, and Sony Labou Tansi (both Republic of Congo).

In the final chapter, I move forward to the post-Cold War period, in which long-standing African dictatorships were displaced (if not exactly toppled) by the larger operations of global capital. This chapter illuminates the ways in which African dictator novels responded to this shift, but it also asks what happens to the dictator novel once the dictator is no longer a central player. The analysis centers on Kourouma’s *En Attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* (*Waiting for the Vote of the Wild Animals*, 1998; Côte d’Ivoire) and returns to Ngũgĩ’s *Wizard of the Crow* (Kenya). At issue in these novels, beyond the shifting profile of dictatorship, is the nature of so-called transition: the political and economic liberalization that was to have followed the “triumph” of democracy and capitalism in the Cold War. I read Kourouma and Ngũgĩ’s works, first, as dictator novels in continuity with earlier examples of the genre in African literatures; second, as critical uses of the dictator novel to account for global political and economic changes; and, ultimately, as explorations of the possible limits and futures of the dictator novel at the cusp of the twenty-first century.
1 Zalamea outlines these goals in a prefatory letter; see El gran Burundún-Burundá ha muerto y La metamorfosis de su excelencia (Bogotá, Colombia: Arango Editores, 1989), 77-79.


3 The caudillo and the Big Man provide the tropes and critical language for representation of the dictator in Latin America and Africa, respectively. The terms themselves require further attention. The caudillo is a regional leader or strongman, but not all caudillos are heads of state. The Spanish word “caudillo” has its roots in the Latin capitellum (head) and acquired its military association during the wars of independence in Latin America, where it occupied the territory between the general term “leader” and a specific government position such as president. Only over the course of the nineteenth century, via its association with Juan Manuel de Rosas (discussed in chapter two), did the term become fixed as an analog for dictator. This inflection of the term was cemented in Spain, where Francisco Franco took the title “El Caudillo” as an analogue for “il Duce” (Mussolini) and “die Führer” (Hitler). See David Rock Argentina 1516-1987: From Spanish Colonization to Alfonsín (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 129; John Lynch, Caudillos in Spanish America 1800-1850 (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1992), 3 and 304; and Jorge Lafforgue, ed. Historias de caudillos argentinos (Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 1999).

   “Big Man” refers to a highly influential individual who wields both formal and informal authority; he sits atop a large patronage network but is not necessarily in government. Despite its close association with the continent, the term “Big Man” is not specific to Africa; the term originates in ethnographic studies of Melanesia and Polynesia. See Mats Utas, “Bigmanity and Network Governance in African Conflicts,” in African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks, ed. Mats Utas (London: Zed Books, 2012), 1-34, and Glynn Cochrane, Big Men and Cargo Cults (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).


5 Ibid., 86.


9 Ángel Rama, Los dictadores latinoamericanos (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1976), 9-10.


11 Macarena Gómez-Barris, Where Memory Dwells: Culture and State Violence in Chile (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 5-6. For more on transition and post-dictatorship in Latin America and Latinx fiction, see Idelber Avelar, The Untimely Present:


13 If these works represent a “category,” it is itself internally differentiated. For instance, in counterpoint to Conrado and Greene, V.S. Naipaul’s A Bend in the River (1979) illuminates the experiences of the descendants of South Asian traders in an unnamed central African country whose lives are jeopardized by the rise of authoritarian regimes. Here, the protagonist’s options for “escape” (global mobility) are complicated by a generational history of migration and marginalization. Novels such as Ramón del Valle-Inclán’s Tyrant Banderas (Tyrant Banderas, 1926) and John Updike’s The Coup (1978) are interesting exceptions, too, in that they focus on and even focalize through the dictator. In Updike’s case, the satire of the recently-deposed Islamic-Marxist dictator of a fictional African republic falls flat, because the dictator remains the object of mockery rather than analysis. Tyrant Banderas is often cited as an important juncture in the Latin American dictator novel; see Conrado Zuluaga, Novelas del dictador / Dictadores de novela (Bogota: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1977), 11-12; Mario Benedetti, “El recurso del supremo patriarca,” in El recurso del supremo patriarca (Mexico: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1979), 12; Carlos Pacheco, Narrativa de la dictadura y crítica literaria (Caracas: Fundación Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos, 1987), 9; Adriana Sandoval, Los dictadores y la dictadura en la novela hispanoamericana (1851-1978) (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1989), 13; and Addis, “Synthetic Visions,” 192-200.


16 As a matter of translation, hyphenation of the English phrase (dictator-novel) more aptly conveys the link between “dictator” and “novel” of the Spanish or French terms, which I generally prefer. Roberto González Echevarría offers a similar translation from the Spanish; see The Voice of the Masters: Writing and Authority in Modern Latin American Literature (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). However, whether in Spanish, French, or English, critical nomenclature varies immensely; I therefore use the phrase “dictator novel” as the simplest possible appellation.


18 I am summarizing both Qu’est-ce que la littérature? (What is Literature? 1948) and “Introducing Les Temps modernes” (1945); see What is Literature? And Other Essays, ed. Steven Ungar (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

19 The phrase “combat literature” comes from Fanon’s address to the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists (Rome, 1959), which was the basis for the chapter “On National Culture” in
Wretched of the Earth; see Fanon, “Fondement réciproque de la culture nationale et des luttes de libération.” Présence Africaine 24/25 (1959), 82-89.


27 Fanon, Wretched, 238.


31 Critics most often organize the Latin American dictator novel into three phases, roughly corresponding to literary-historical periods: romanticism, modernism, and the “contemporary,” to use a capacious term. The first phase begins in the nineteenth century; the historical referent is clear, and the principal concern of the anti-dictator argument is with the ways in which the dictatorship destroys the emerging nation. The second unfolds in the early- to mid-twentieth century and includes texts such as Guzmán’s La sombra del caudillo, Asturias’s The President, and Zalamea’s El Gran Burundún-Burundá; the dictator represents the rotten core of national political life, but its historical referent is more heavily fictionalized. The third includes the novels of the 1970s, in which the dictator is not just a central character but the narrator of substantial portions of the novel; the critique centers on themes such as the dictator’s vanity, solitude, and decadence. For a more detailed description of these three phases, see Pacheco (1987, 67-72). There some adjustments to this framework: Juan Carlos García, for instance, offers a four-phase model, placing “regionalism” (costumbrismo regional), which extends from the late-nineteenth century into the first part of the twentieth; see El dictador en la literatura hispanoamericana (Santiago de Chile: Mosquito Comunicaciones, 2000). González Echevarría, meanwhile, designates Carpentier, Roa Bastos, and García Márquez’s dictator novels as the “postmodern” phase of the Latin American dictator novel (1985, 65).

(New York: Verso, 1989). Franco reads dictator novels within a larger body of literature engaged with violence and the fragmentation of the social body, issues that remain central to Latin American literature and culture; see The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Expanding on this line of thinking, Franco has more recently analyzed the ways in which the pressures of modernization unleashed a wave of state violence, understood within the longue durée of coloniality in the Americas; see Cruel Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

32 Pacheco and Julio Calviño Iglesias each include wide-ranging lists of works about dictators and dictatorship in Latin America written by Latin American as well as U.S. and European writers; see Pacheco (1987, 103-127) and Iglesias, La novela del dictador en Hispanoamérica (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1985), 12-22.

33 Rama, Los dictadores, 15-16.


Kubayanda’s work on literature and dictatorship in Latin America and Africa is perhaps the clearest precursor to my project. The manuscript for a book-length project remained unfinished after his death in 1991; but a posthumous essay, “Unfinished Business: Dictatorial Literature of Post-Independence Latin America and Africa” (1997), contains the kernel of its argument.


The relationship between the Global South and postcolonial studies remains for me an open question, not least because the latter has undergone productive waves of self-interrogation and expansion. Some articulations of the Global South define it in contrast to postcolonial studies, positioning the field as uniquely suited to addressing the new challenges of neoliberal globalization; see López, “Introduction,” 3; and Mahler, “The Global South in the Belly of the Beast: Viewing African American Civil Rights through a Tricontinental Lens,” *Latin American Research Review* 50, no. 1 (2015): 96. However, as Mahler has more recently observed, critical understanding of the relationship between the two remains undeveloped; her work in *From the Tricontinental to the Global South* addresses this issue in historical terms.


As the authors note on the copyright page, “This projection represents an important step away from the prevailing Eurocentric geographical and cultural concept of the world.” See Willy Brandt et al., *North-South: A Program for Survival* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980).


The South Commission formed within the Non-Aligned Movement (1987), with Julius Nyerere as chair. The majority of its report attends to the conditions that have engendered the present situation and seeks a new paradigm for understanding the South. But it ultimately makes few recommendations for the future. As Prashad demonstrates, the report itself is less interesting than the debates surrounding its production and dissemination (2012, 85-141).


Prashad makes this historical argument toward the end of *The Darker Nations* and throughout *The Poorer Nations*. Although the end of the Cold War may have obviated three worlds theory, it was not properly the end of the Third World project. Per Prashad (2007), the economic crises of the 1970s, nurtured by the restructuring of international finance and the imposition of neoliberal structural adjustment policies (SAPs) and accompanied by the emergence of a transnational global elite whose shared interests superseded those of individual nation-states caused its unravelling.

Like the Global South, the term Third World has a complex history. Alfred Sauvy coined the term in 1952 to name the countries already considered as “developing” or “underdeveloped” (sous-développés). He describes the Third World as an entity separate from the First (capitalist) and Second (socialist or communist) worlds, which was therefore the object of the struggle between First and Second for global hegemony; see Sauvy, “Trois mondes, une planète,” *L’Observateur* 118 (14 August 1952): 5.

In the 1970s, Mao Zedong reshuffled Sauvy’s categories, designating the United States and Soviet Union as the First World (“the biggest international exploiters, oppressors, and aggressors”); Japan, Europe, and Canada as the Second World (the “middle section”); and the international proletariat and the oppressed nations as the Third World; see Editorial Department of *Renmin Ribao*, *Chairman Mao’s Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1977).
