Novels and Newspapers in Piketty's *Capital and Ideology*

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Abstract

This article explores the use of textual sources in Thomas Piketty's *Capital and Ideology* as seriously as others have examined Piketty's use of statistics. Although a commendable attempt to engage with non-quantitative sources, the book focuses on elite novels, selects works unsystematically, and takes an old-fashioned approach to media. Ironically, Piketty's use of literature perpetuates the same focus on the upper classes that he wishes to guard against. In this response, I suggest how a book on capital and ideology might examine novels and newspapers rigorously. First, I look at how a broader understanding of literary production as a business and a focus on non-elite books might inform the use of novels. Second, I consider how to employ big-data techniques to study newspapers. Overall, I argue, taking novels and newspapers seriously shows the importance of non-elite sources and of incorporating big-data techniques often pioneered by literary scholars.

Keywords

Piketty, book history, newspapers, history of capitalism, digital humanities, literary realism, economic history

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Thomas Piketty's follow-up to his extraordinarily-successful *Capital* explores how ideology underpins "inequality regimes." Piketty notes two "shortcomings" of his previous book. First, it focused on wealthy, developed nations in Western Europe, North America, and Japan. Second, it "tended to treat the political and ideological changes associated with inequality and redistribution as a black box" (Piketty, 2020, p. ix). To tackle these shortcomings, Piketty uses two types of sources. First, he employs an expanded economic dataset from the World Inequality Database that includes tax records from places like India, South Africa, Poland, and Brazil. Second, Piketty (2020, p. 12) incorporates sources on "changes in ideology, political beliefs, and representations of inequality and of the economic, social, and political institutions that shape them." These include novels, speeches, parliamentary debates, newspaper articles, and political treatises. Most scholarly engagement with Piketty's work has focused on the first set of sources, with some praise for the second set, primarily because Piketty includes literature. Instead, I focus on that second set of sources, what we can call the non-quantitative primary sources, taking his use of them as seriously as others have examined his use of statistics.

Historians have, of course, long used novels and reflected upon them as sources. To give a recent example, Emma Rothschild's approach to writing the 300-year history of Marie Aymard's family in Angoulême was inspired by "the 'literature of ideas' of Sterne and Diderot," through Rothschild pointed out that the book was "the opposite of the novel" because it created stories only from available sources (2021, p. 303). Plenty of social scientists and historians use literature unsystematically or illustratively; I am not arguing against this use of literature, but instead suggesting more contextual and systematic methodologies to incorporate literature. It also matters in this case because Piketty's use of literature contrasts so strongly with the convincing, assiduous, and thorough evaluation of quantitative sources.

Upon closer inspection, Piketty's second set of materials reveals the strange disconnect between what Piketty claims that his book does and what it actually examines. He claims to address narratives that support inequality, defining ideology as "a set of a priori plausible ideas and discourses about how society should be structured" (Piketty, 2020, p. 3). He uses his second set of sources to uncover "ideology." Yet, the second set of sources take up far less space within the book, turning out to be an eclectic mix with no clear justification for including particular theorists, novelists, or politicians. Although a commendable attempt to engage with non-quantitative sources, the book focuses on elite novels, selects works unsystematically, and takes an old-fashioned approach to media. Ironically, Piketty's use of literature perpetuates the same focus on the upper classes that he wishes to guard against.

In this response, I will explore how a book on capital and ideology might examine novels and newspapers rigorously. First, I look at how a broader understanding of literary production as a business and a focus on non-elite books might inform the use of novels. Second, I consider how to employ big-data techniques to study newspapers. Overall, I argue, taking novels and newspapers seriously shows the importance of non-elite sources and of incorporating big-data techniques often pioneered by literary scholars.

In over 1,000 pages, Piketty cites nine novelists: Jane Austen, Honoré de Balzac, Carlos Fuentes, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, John Steinbeck, Emile Zola, Ya Hua, and Tancrède Voituriez. As part of the research for this article, I read (or reread) all these novelists. Piketty describes some novels in one or two sentences, often missing their most compelling narratives. Adichie's *Half a Yellow Sun*, for example, is deployed to illustrate that

female political representation in Eastern bloc countries was greater than in Western countries until the 1980s, when it fell precipitously to under ten percent (Piketty, 2020, p. 591). Yet, the book is really about the Biafran War and the economic, social, cultural, and personal devastation wrought by civil war and hatred. Other novelists receive more attention, particularly Balzac and Austen, whose novels serve to describe a proprietarian world where land generated stable annual incomes in England from 1790 to 1810, in the case of Austen, and in France from 1810 to 1830, in the case of Balzac. Austen's *Mansfield Park* also emerges as an example of slave-ownership as the novel mentions that the character Sir Thomas possesses plantations in Antigua (Piketty, 2020, p. 210), though other scholars (Jones, 2014) have produced more nuanced discussions of slavery in that novel. Piketty (2020, pp. 155, 171-2) uses these novels to describe a world about to transform from a proprietarian order into an industrial age of capitalism.

We can only infer from the novels mentioned in *Capital and Ideology* what types of literature seem to possess the power of representation for Piketty. Piketty (2020, p. 1038) provides only the following clue about his choices: "this book is the work of an author who reads fluently only in French and English and who is familiar with only a limited range of primary sources." But the selection process remains unclear. If slavery and its racial legacies are crucial to understanding inequality, why no Toni Morrison or James Baldwin? Piketty expanded his repertoire from Jane Austen and Honoré de Balzac (who appear prominently in *Capital* and this book) to include novels about colonialism and the non-Western world, including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Carlos Fuentes, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer. But why no Joseph Conrad, Rabindranath Tagore, or Amitav Ghosh? Other work by historians (Jasanoff, 2017) offers an insightful reading of how colonialism affected Conrad's literature and thought. Ghosh (2016) has himself reflected on how to incorporate history into fiction in a response to an *American Historical Review* roundtable on

his Ibis Trilogy. Piketty (2020, p. 466) mentions John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* to claim that the Wall Street crash and the Great Depression mattered more than World War I. Why not include Zora Neale Hurston? There may have been a specific methodology behind Piketty's selection, but in the absence of explanation, the reader can only speculate.

One explanation is that these novels are generally realist, perhaps because Piketty (2020, p. 15) sees literature's value in its "unique ability to capture the relations of power and domination between social groups and to detect the way in which inequalities are experienced by individuals." On this reading, realist novels would lend themselves most readily to understanding a capitalist past. Indeed, realism has "long been considered the aesthetic mode most intimate to capitalism" (Shonkwiler & La Berge, 2013, p. 1). As literary scholars Carroll & McClanahan (2015, p. 656) noted for *Capital*, Piketty's claim about realist novels' verisimilitude "accords with a century of literary criticism."

But literature is so much more than representation; realist novels offer just one genre of literary production. Not all genres convey the same meaning, something that literary scholars have long and ably demonstrated. Even if we stick to analyzing financial and economic circumstances, literary scholars have shown how using different genres convey different interpretations of financial transactions and politicians' ability to regulate them. Examining the 700-page *Financial Crisis Inquiry Report* written in 2011 by the Congressional Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, Carroll & McClanahan (2015, p. 656) found that the report gravitated to referencing science fiction and alien invasions. Rather than see those references as reflecting an extraterrestrial-filled reality, literary scholars asked: "why does the *Inquiry Report*, struggling to frame its own narrative, veer so decisively away from the stolid language of what Mary Poovey influentially described as 'modern facts,' and towards the more capacious worlds of popular-genre (science) fiction?" The

report's references to science fiction dovetail with broader trends in literary and filmic representation that speculate about the future. Rather than merely note these references, literary scholars diagnose the turn to science fiction as evidence that the report's authors do not "evince the kinds of confidence we commonly associate with realism: neither confidence in the potential transparency of the world nor in its confirmation to the laws of plausibility and probability; neither faith in the objectivity of understand nor in an unattenuated agency born from that cognitive power" (Carroll & McClanahan, 2015, pp. 658–659). Examining these literary references, then, evokes a world where politicians and civil servants see not a comprehensible capitalist world, but an uncontrollable one. Science fiction too can reveal much about how politicians or other elites (to stick with those actors) interpret the world.

Piketty's justification also suggests that he values "high literature" or canonical texts for their literary style. Yet, historians have often found that the most popular books of the past bear little resemblance to the ones now taught in schools or held up as representative. And those works shaped understandings of the world. To take Imperial Germany as an example, working-class German readers often devoured pro-colonial literature in the late nineteenth century. Along with visual representations and ethnographic shows, such material shaped understandings of the world for many more people than Austen's novels. One historian (Short, 2012, pp. 19–20) uses such sources to argue that colonialism was "the form of consciousness in capitalism in which the *world* was remade as market, as exchange, as contested source of raw materials." Or "Wild West" novels by the German Karl May or American James Fenimore Cooper (the inventor of the genre) highlight a shared transatlantic interpretation of Native Americans as both "ignoble" and "noble," forming part of an ideological justification for violent territorial expropriation and murder. Historians (Guettel, 2012, p. 86) have incorporated such sources to argue that "many German imperialists

accepted the Anglo-American colonial experience as normative" and sought to follow its example. That many people liked lightweight books and that historians can use them to understand a particular time and place will come as no surprise to practitioners of book history, whose work ironically was greatly shaped by looking at the same Revolutionary period in France that Piketty finds so crucial.

If a book on capitalism sticks with literary tradition, however, it might also consider that any novel is a form of economic production. Even on a basic level, the length of Dickens' or Dostoyevsky's novels is explained by the magazine business of the nineteenth century which paid by the word. Piketty (2020, p. 7) believes that his book's emphasis on "ideologies, institutions, and the possibility of alternative pathways" differs from Marxism because he believes that "the realm of ideas, the political-ideological sphere, is truly autonomous." While disagreements might reign about the philosophy of history, Marx was right in the sense that the political and ideological ideas extracted from literature were shaped by the structures in the business of publishing. The late nineteenth-century Egyptian novel emerged from the context of Arabic capitalism, not just in its subjects but also because of investments from profits in the silk and cotton trades that moved from Beirut to Cairo (Holt, 2017). Capitalism also excluded. Authors now as celebrated as Chinua Achebe seemed like chance propositions and only managed to get published through luck and connections: Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, had an initial print run of 2,000 in 1958 (Morrison, 2007, p. 3). In a white-dominated business, only from Achebe onwards did African writers start to receive the platforms that could eventually elevate a writer like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

Like any other form of production, there is a political economy of literature. Far from reflecting a capitalist reality, books form part of it, often functioning as commodities in a

marketplace (Dittmar & Watt, 1997; Tatlock, 2010). At the same time, literary production was constantly embedded within politics. During the Cold War, for instance, the CIA-funded Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) or the US Information Agency's "Books from America" program helped to elevate certain voices over others (Hench, 2010; Scott-Smith & Lerg, 2017). A US Senate Select Committee report of 1976 noted that "In the world of covert propaganda, book publishing activities have a special place" (cited in Shringarpure, 2019, p. 134). And such arrangements took inspiration from earlier British, French, and German cultural programs like the British Council and Alliance Française. Money and politics made the canon as much as, if not more than, literary style. New international institutions like UNESCO sought to create anti-racist programs and publish a greater variety of world literature (Gatti, 2017). But these efforts were stymied in part by the US and UK withdrawing from UNESCO in the 1980s. While such programs may not have directly promoted the authors whose works Piketty cites, they are reminders that the political economy of literature is both widely explored and deeply integrated into how scholars understand literary production. No book exists outside its historical context. Colonial legacies and Cold War rivalries underpin literary production as much as they explain long-run inequality statistics.

A further element of political economy lies in the material constraints of literary production. Books are printed on paper to which different people had very different amounts of access. In 1949, only around ten percent of paper was consumed in Africa, Asia, and Latin America combined. Almost two-thirds was consumed in the United States. This affected newspapers as much as books, leading to newsprint and paper rationing outside the United States (The Economist, 1949, p. 53). Even within North America, access to paper bolstered Robert R. McCormick's right-wing, anti-New Deal newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune* (Stamm, 2018). Novels and newspapers did

not emerge outside of, but were subject to, capitalist networks of paper production that produced deeply unequal results.

Such historical concerns around the business of literature can also apply to media and newspapers. The media plays an odd role in *Capital and Ideology*. Although Piketty only cites specific newspapers or articles twice, he derives many of his suggested solutions for combatting the ideological underpinnings of inequality from ideas on how to reform the media business. It is unclear how many articles Piketty read or if he used any specific methodology to analyze them. First, Piketty (2020, p. 396) mentions an article written by Marx on the Taiping Rebellion in June 1853 in the *New York Daily Tribune.* Second, Piketty (2020, p. 627) calls it "highly instructive" to read the Chinese regime's official newspaper, the *Global Times*, which "raises questions about the supposed civilizational and institutional superiority of Western electoral democracies." Piketty suggests new approaches, including establishing nonprofit and participatory media companies. Here he draws on work by fellow economist (and his partner) (Cagé, 2015).

Piketty is right to point to the economic structures and incentives of the media business as crucial for influencing what realm of possibilities are presented to readers and users. For concrete examples of how companies manipulate ideology through PR and media, we could look to work by Oreskes and Conway (2010), who have traced how tobacco companies, libertarian think tanks, and neoliberal economists distorted public understandings of science. Such campaigns shaped the media landscape of the United States as early as the 1935, when the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) sponsored a popular radio program, *The American Family Robinson*, to promote free market fundamentalism (Oreskes, Conway & Tyson, 2021). This program was one of many aspects of PR campaigns by the NAM, which used films, lectures, newsletters, and more to generate business opposition to the New Deal.

Yet, Piketty (2020, p. 627) claims that "the implications of how the media and political parties are financed have never really been fully thought through." This is a bizarre statement, but it reflects an understanding of media drawn mainly from economists, who have only recently started to investigate newspapers (Anand et al., 2007; Angelucci & Cagé, 2019; Di Tella & Francheschelli, 2011; Gentzkow et al., 2011). This viewpoint disregards the long tradition of media criticism, much of which focused on the problems stemming from media's capitalist nature. While better known for his critique of the meat-packing industry, Upton Sinclair also took aim at the media for framing the news only for capitalist gain. Sinclair self-published *The Brass Check* in 1919, after he could not find a publisher. Sinclair castigated the newspaper industry, including papers of record like the *New York Times*, for bowing to business interests and keeping readers' attention through sensationalist portrayals of death. The obsession with gruesome deaths was, thought Sinclair (2003, p. 227), "typical of the capitalistic mind, which is so frugal that it extracts profit even from the suicide of its victims." A muckraking exposé, Sinclair's work diagnosed a century ago many of the problems inherent in the capitalist incentives of the news business, including sensationalism, the influence of business, and the lack of attention to broader social issues. Sinclair also proposed solutions that presage Piketty's: independent newspapers and critical journalism to break the stranglehold of capitalism.

Such left-wing critiques had emerged over a decade earlier on the other side of the Atlantic. A German newspaper researcher, Robert Brunhuber, decried the development of the newspaper business in 1907, because he believed that the creation of public opinion should remain separate from capitalist control. Brunhuber despaired of the increasingly close connections between capitalist companies and the press. He even compared newspaper production disdainfully to a schnapps distillery, implying that capitalist news intoxicated the population. Brunhuber (1907, p.

104) saw the root of all the press' problems in the increasingly prevalent equation of the creation of public opinion to a capitalist business enterprise. In many ways, the Frankfurt School built on Brunhuber's pessimistic assessment of the relationship between media and capital. Habermas (1989) argued that the increasingly monopolistic structures of news in the nineteenth century had undermined the possibility for deliberative public discourse. And indeed, Habermas' very concept of the "public sphere" has now been subject to decades of lively and important critique (Tworek, 2020) for its focus on the white male bourgeoisie as well as his idealization of rational discussion that ignores "the extent to which its institutions were founded on sectionalism, exclusiveness and repression" (Eley, 1992, p. 321).

Even more broadly, an anti-colonial stance critiqued the very idea of news as a Western-centric concept. No solution, whatever the funding model, could have worked to prevent the ills that Mahatma Gandhi diagnosed in the early twentieth century. Gandhi rejected the very idea of news as capitalist and subject to distortion because the incentives pushed for rapidity over accuracy and contemplation. While in South Africa in the early 1900s, Gandhi created a newspaper that promoted an alternative ethic of slow reading (Hofmeyr, 2013). For someone who emphasizes the importance of ideology in the past, it is a shame not to see Piketty feature those who have suggested his solutions during the periods he studied. A book on ideology might explain why those roads were not taken and how such proposals could find more purchase today.

Turning from long-standing critiques of media business models, it would also be worth reflecting on how scholars have substantially advanced their analysis of newspapers' contents. Piketty (2020, Chapter 2) uses digitized inheritance records from Parisian archives to trace how much land remained in noble hands. Given that he examines several hundred thousand records,

this offers an example of a classic big data project. Similar or allied big-data techniques could be applied to newspapers.

Ironically, scholars have analyzed reviews of Piketty's first book to understand its reception. Some (Rieder & Theine, 2019) used 41 articles; others (Grisold & Silke, 2019) analyzed 329 articles discussing *Capital* in Ireland, Austria, Germany, and the UK in twelve newspapers. Using critical discourse analysis, the authors (Grisold & Silke, 2019, p. 265) found that the press' reaction is defensive, employing "discourses which act to either downplay, deny or conflate Piketty's work, or attempt to deflect the debate by arguing inequality is a non-issue." Furthermore, the authors looked for silences to show that ideology is also shaped by what is not said or what is suppressed. One recent article (Grisold & Theine, 2017, p. 4265) noted that "the problem of how economic inequality is mediated to the public is not discussed in economics at all, and hardly mentioned in communication studies." Others (Raoult et al., 2017), meanwhile, have analyzed the academic reception of Piketty through reviews in France and the United States, finding that disciplinary affiliation better explains the reception of *Capital* than nationality. Such methodologies might have helped Piketty himself in exploring the ideologies portrayed in newspapers.

Even beyond these fairly standard methods of discourse analysis, digitized historical newspapers offer a chance to understand the past far more rigorously than reading sample articles. Here, literary scholars led the way. The Viral Texts Project (Cordell, 2021) used computational linguistics on nineteenth-century newspaper databases to "develop theoretical models that will help scholars better understand what qualities—both textual and thematic—helped particular news stories, short fiction, and poetry 'go viral' in nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines." Quotidian, practical articles, or what Cordell (2015) termed "information literature," were most

widely reprinted. The second most reprinted article in the project's database prior to 1861 was a recipe for gum arabic starch. Like with novels, what mattered most to people at the time could tell historians a great deal about how they lived and imagined capitalism; but that capitalism differed from elite descriptions.

Another example is British attitudes towards the United States in the nineteenth century. While novelists like Dickens despised America, the culture of reprinting could take an American joke in the late nineteenth century from Nevada via New York to British publications, whose readers would retell them in political meetings in North Wales (Nicholson, 2012). Digitized newspapers offer scholars a chance to understand and analyze the broader informational landscape more seriously. Rather than cherry-pick, scholars can be as systematic about analyzing newspapers as they are about other sources (Nicholson, 2013). Such pleas are even more critical in times of Covid-19, when limited archival access has made historians more reliant on digitized newspapers than ever.

Many digital humanities techniques now being used for newspapers were first explored on literary texts (Moretti, 2013). Literary scholars have also pointed the way to examining popular, non-traditional sources. The Data-Sitters Club, for example, is a collective of six scholars who use digital techniques to analyze the wildly popular *Babysitters' Club* books that were published from 1986 to 2000 (and subsequently revived in updated format in the last decade). The series contained over 200 books and sold over 175 million copies (Rich, 2009). While Ann M. Martin wrote around 60 of the books, the others were ghost-written. These books wouldn't make anyone's list of high literature, but they influenced the worldviews of millions of children, many of whom had never visited the United States. When I was growing up in the UK, these books shaped my understanding of the US as a place of safe single-family-home suburbs where 12- and 13-year-old girls became

young participants in capitalism by earning money through babysitting (and bizarrely did not wear school uniforms). *The Babysitters' Club* molded my views of the US more than Steinbeck.

The Data-Sitters' Club collective takes these children's literature books seriously and uses digital techniques to analyze them. Bessette, Bowers, Cecire, Dombrowksi, Lang, and Risam (2022) have produced twelve books so far on topics ranging from Voyant tools to digital humanities collaboration to multi-lingualism in the books' translations (which are often also cultural translations). Such work is one example of taking popular and children's literature seriously with new methods of data analysis to understand the world portrayed. I am not suggesting that all scholars become digital humanists, but that digital humanities can offer rigorous methods to analyze the non-quantitative past.

Within the realm of economic literature, digital work can uncover the world of capitalism as people in the past experienced it. Reinert used online catalogues to create an extensive online database of printed editions of Benjamin Franklin's *The Way to Wealth*, showing that there were almost ten times more editions of the book than previously thought. Reinert's database documented over 1,100 editions prior to 1850 printed in 26 languages ranging from Breton to Bulgarian, Polish to Portuguese. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) was "the arguably most widely disseminated eighteenth-century work on the high end of the spectrum." But Franklin's work was "arguably the bestselling example of the other end" (Reinert, 2015, p. 65). The short text praised industry and frugality, suggesting that individual citizens' social attitudes held the key to a polity's prosperity.

While it is impossible to know how most readers interpreted Franklin's text, the publication network also showed how texts spread. Most editions were printed in Europe and America with only five appearing in the Southern Hemisphere. This meticulous work offers an alternative

methodology to trace the impact of texts and showed that "the spatial enculturation of capitalist motives, values, and habits during this first period of globalization diverged markedly from capitalism's worldwide reach as an economic system" (Reinert, 2015, p. 88). Ideology did not travel the same paths as capital.

The use of novels and newspapers in *Capital and Ideology* reveals a profound mismatch between evidence and solutions. Piketty uses novels as evidence, but does not see literary production as a business. His solutions look to education and media, yet he barely cites newspapers and does not investigate media outlets to show how they have produced the ideological narratives that he decries. By using media and literature in these ways, Piketty unintentionally reinforces the very hierarchies that he hopes to overturn. Literature only exists to reflect a "reality" about capital. The complexities of the publishing business are sidestepped, when they would actually help to explain why certain viewpoints could become so widespread at particular moments in time. If we only see the printed products without exploring the capitalist networks that made them, we impoverish our own ability to understand the past.

Capital and Ideology seeks to find alternatives to our current inequality regimes. But historians have long sought to uncover the work of those seeking alternatives, who go far beyond the canon of bestselling authors. African-American and Afro-Caribbean female activists imagined a different world in the mid-twentieth century (Blain, 2018). Latin American and Caribbean feminists like Bertha Lutz (Marino, 2019; Olcott, 2017) created a global movement for human rights, filled with contestation and complex fights over how to advocate for women's suffrage, economic equality, and self-determination. Anti-colonial thinkers like Kwame Nkrumah or Eric Williams debated how regional political structures might transcend colonial national boundaries

or how to create a New International Economic Order (Getachew, 2019, Chapters 4–5; Ogle, 2014). Here, historians and political theorists have laid wide-ranging and incisive paths for Piketty and his fellow economists to follow.

Another reaction to Piketty might trace his selection of particular neoliberal thinkers like Friedrich von Hayek rather than the broader network of neoliberals highlighted by Slobodian (2018) and Rosenboim (2017), both of whom Piketty himself cites. Or his selection of political theorists and sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu or John Rawls (Forrester, 2019) rather than Habermas or W.E.B. Du Bois. Or even expand beyond literature to analyze the role of film and television in portraying capitalism, a rich field rife with possibilities beyond name-dropping Downton Abbey, Star Wars, and Ridley Scott's All the Money in the World. Or consider how Piketty's focus on education grows out of an intellectual tradition of meritocracy and beliefs in the power of education (on this tradition in the US, see Petersen, 2020).

Perhaps I am especially troubled by Piketty's use of novels and newspapers because it disregards disciplines bound to my own intellectual trajectory. I began studying literature as an undergraduate and moved into history as a discipline because I was drawn to history's mode of contextualization and its myriad methods of locating literature within its political, economic, and cultural contexts. When working on the history of news, I saw demonstrated over and over again that published opinion was *not* "public opinion." Single newspapers could not be used as proxies for societal opinion, even if political and economic elites have often done just that (Hucker, 2020; Tworek, 2019, Chapter 1). The business models of news mattered to understanding why certain people could publish op-eds and why some events were reported as news, while others were not. The readership for novels paled in comparison to pulpier colonialist adventure stories or children's books. All this mattered deeply for how people understood the world.

I am not alone in noting the tendency to focus on the upper classes in Piketty's work. After analyzing Piketty's use of novels in *Capital*, a geography scholar (Jones, 2014, p. 730) was "struck by the attention to the rich, to those with wealth and their distance from the means of incomes and wealth/capital, and how little analysis is given to the poor." Perhaps Piketty might address this shortcoming in his next book by including novels and newspapers that focus on those often marginalized from economics and popular histories. Happily, there are plenty of literary scholars and historians who can point the way.

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