

Third World Legal Studies

Volume 15 *Postcolonialism, Globalization, and Law*

Article 2

1-2-2000

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Recommended Citation

Rajagopal, Balakrishnan (1999) "Locating the Third World in Cultural Geography," *Third World Legal Studies*: Vol. 15, Article 2.
Available at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/twls/vol15/iss1/2>

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LOCATING THE THIRD WORLD IN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Balakrishnan Rajagopal*

I. INTRODUCTION

“...national liberation is necessarily an act of culture.”¹

Does the Third World exist as a category anymore and if so, does it make any sense? Where is it located? This essay will attempt a tentative and speculative exegesis of this question. Even though the end of the Cold War eliminated the rationale for the Three-Worlds theory of international order, one continues to hear of invocations of the category ‘Third World’. In order to think through this issue, it is necessary to consider the various meanings that have been attributed to this category.

First, Third World was understood as an ideological category, meaning a collection of States that practiced a certain form of political engagement with the dominant bipolar bloc politics, mainly through the form of nonalignment. We can call this the *ideological model*. Second, it was understood as a geopolitical concept, indicating specific areas of the world that were distinguishable from the First World and the Second World in terms of political and economic organization. We can call this the *geopolitical model*. Third, the category Third World was seen to be defined by a unilinear historical process in so far as it included those countries which had suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism. We can name this the *historical deterministic model*. Fourth, the category Third World has also been used in a popular sense to refer to a certain set of images: of poverty,

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¹ AMILCAR CABRAL, NATIONAL LIBERATION AND CULTURE § 6 (1970) (Eduardo Mondlane Memorial Lecture, Syracuse University, February 20, 1970).

squalor, corruption, violence, calamities and disasters, irrational local fundamentalisms, bad smell, garbage, filth, technological 'backwardness' or simply lack of modernity. We can call this the *popular representational model*. A common thematic thread that runs through the first three understandings is that of the idea of nation: that these national entities had struggled for and achieved political independence from their colonial rulers. The fourth understanding would, at first glance, not appear to have any direct connection to this common theme.

However, I will advance the argument in this essay that the fourth understanding of impurity, defilement and backwardness of the Third World is essential, even central, to the other three understandings in which the narrative of the 'nation' is central. In order to make this argument I will briefly refer to David Sibley's analysis of Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical basis for domination and exclusion of the 'Other'. I will further argue that the political praxis and intellectual exertions of oppositional practices that seek to empower the disempowered wrongly focus on the idea of the nation, and consequently on the Third World as a geographical concept. To that extent, all Third World discourses have been 'national allegories', to use Frederic Jameson's term.² I will situate this discussion about the decentering of the Third World from its geographical space in the context of two readings: first, Frederic Jameson's *Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism*³ and second, Aijaz Ahmad's reply, *Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'*.⁴ I will also refer, where relevant, to Ashis Nandy's book, *The Intimate Enemy*.⁵

To the extent that this essay critiques the essentialized manner in which the term 'Third World' has been received and understood in the international order, to the extent that it challenges the idea of progress that is implicit in the ways in which this term has been constructed in the four models mentioned above, to the extent that it has the objective

² Frederic Jameson, *Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism*, 15 SOCIAL TEXT, Fall 1986, at 65.

³ *Id.* at 69.

⁴ 17 SOCIAL TEXT, Fall 1987, at 3.

⁵ See ASHIS NANDY, *THE INTIMATE ENEMY: LOSS AND RECOVERY OF SELF UNDER COLONIALISM* (1983).

of exposing the myriad ways in which power is exercised by the dominant groups to the detriment of the disempowered, and to the extent that it opens up creative possibilities of decentering the category 'Third World' from its geographical moorings, this is an essay on postmodernism. To the extent that the discussion is rooted in the historical experience and continuing relevance of colonialism and imperialism, it is a dialogue between the postmodern and the postcolonial.

I conclude by arguing that decentering the Third World from its geography will enable us to focus on the various levels at which power operates to subjugate us and to engage in oppositional practices that challenge those power structures and flows. Such oppositional practices must focus, I suggest, on the contextuality of the struggles, the local hegemonies that operate to silence the voices of the subalterns and on the possibilities of building counter-hegemonic discourses and practices. Here I will briefly refer to Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and counter-hegemony.⁶

II. A NOTE ON SOME PRELIMINARY ISSUES RELATING TO METHODOLOGY

I will start with the observation that the category 'Third World' continues to be relevant in the post-Cold War era because it clearly reveals the hierarchical ordering of the international community at both the statal and non-statal levels; but more importantly, it also locates the historico-cultural roots of this hierarchical ordering in the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism. Other terms such as 'developing' or 'underdeveloped' or 'South', do not capture these sensibilities fully, even though they are also rooted in the idea that other cultures must pass through Eurocentric, and historically linear, paths. As a result, the category 'Third World' continues to be relevant, particularly as a polemical or counter-hegemonic term that is

⁶ I will be primarily referring to ANTONIO GRAMSCI, SELECTIONS FROM THE PRISON NOTEBOOKS (Quintin Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, eds., 1971).

designed to rupture received patterns of thinking.⁷ It is in that sense that I will approach this category.⁸

Now, I would like to briefly discuss the first three models of the category 'Third World' in terms of the 'national allegory', and examine the impact this discursive practice has had on international order. But before entering into that discussion, a few clarifications are warranted regarding the attitude of most of the Third Worlders towards postmodernism in general, as this essay also probes, at a more general level, the relevance of postmodernist themes to the Third World.⁹ In my view, the general tendency of the Third Worlders is to imagine postmodernism as either a peculiarly mutant form of Western (particularly American) angst that has resulted in the cultural degeneracy of the West that has little, if any, relevance to the Third World (the anything-goes critique) or as an ominous successor to the discourse of modernity (the culture of global capitalism critique).

These attitudes are legitimately grounded in certain realities.¹⁰ First of all, the 'death of the subject' proclaimed by postmodernism strikes many in the Third World, who have seen the fruits of their struggle for national identity culminate in political independence, as simply naïve, false or rather dangerous. National identity was a powerful mobilizing force against colonialism and certainly resulted in very substantial victories for colonized peoples. They also see much of their post-independence struggles, such as women's movements, as rooted in certain identities that need united fronts which are undermined by the critique that postmodernism brings. While I fully agree with this sensibility, postmodernism's critique of the subject appears to have value, as part of a common struggle against the totalizing tendencies of Eurocentric production of knowledge, at two

⁷ Frantz Fanon's influence must be obvious. See FRANTZ FANON, *THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH* (1963).

⁸ Lest it be misunderstood, let me clarify that it is not my suggestion that the category 'Third World' is to be seen in a binary relation with the category 'West' in order to give meaning to its counter-hegemonic nature. On the contrary, - as it will become clear later in this article - 'Third World' occupies a space of its own that it constantly fights to preserve and reclaim.

⁹ These and the following comments are based upon a simultaneous reading of academic texts that debate the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism, as well as conversations with other Third World scholars and activists. For a sampling of the former, see the writings collected in *THE POST-COLONIAL STUDIES READER* 117-47 (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds., 1995).

¹⁰ The following discussion is based on JANE FLAX, *THINKING FRAGMENTS: PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WEST* (1990) and *FEMINIST CONTENTIONS* (Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser, eds., 1995).

levels at least. First, to the extent that this critique challenges the unitary conception of the subject and places it in contingent, historically changing and culturally variable sociopolitical and cultural linguistic and discursive practices, the Third Worlders locate the subject in the colonial context and assert that the universal subject of reason can only be understood in terms of the concrete political contestations of the colonial encounter. In fact, this is one of the central arguments of many of the postcolonial writers, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty¹¹ and Gayatri Spivak.¹² In international relations, this may have the salutary effect of critically interrogating the formation of new subjects – such as NGOs or civil society – and thus prevent them from being applied in an essentialized manner.

Second, the critique of the subject also makes political sense as part of a wider project of assault on Western forms of domination, conducted at the intellectual level, that comes in as a useful ally in a common struggle. One can also note in passing, that even vehement anti-essentialist critiques of the postmodern persuasion - such as Judith Butler¹³ (“strategic provisionality”)- and the postcolonial stripe - such as Gayatri Spivak¹⁴ (“a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest”) - have recognized the strategic use of essentialism under continuously contested circumstances.

The second problem that Third Worlders have with postmodernism is in its insistence on the ‘death of history’. Taken literally, this could imply the *prima facie* rejection of any macro historical narrative and thereby, the denial of any connection between historical memory and political objectives. In fact, the negation of history makes struggle meaningless and mobilization impossible. Given the West’s deplorable record in erasing and denying the histories of the colonial

¹¹ See, e.g., Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?*, REPRESENTATIONS, Winter 1992, at 32.

¹² THE POST-COLONIAL STUDIES READER, *supra* note 9. For an elaboration of the method by which this is accomplished, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography*, in SELECTED SUBALTERN STUDIES (Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., 1988).

¹³ See Judith Butler in FEMINIST CONTENTIONS, *supra* note 9.

¹⁴ With specific reference to the Third World, Gayatri Spivak points out: “If the ‘third world’ is used as a mobilizing slogan for the developing nations, that’s fine, but that is rather different from essentialism. That is in response to specific policies of exploitation. In the arenas where this language is seriously used, each country comes asserting its difference. They really do know it’s strategic. That is a strategy that changes moment to moment, and they in fact come asserting their differences as they use the mobilized unity to do some specific thing.” OUTSIDE IN THE TEACHING MACHINE 13 (1993).

peoples, this issue raises sinister suspicions among the Third Worlders. Some notorious examples come to mind: Hegel claiming that Africa has no history¹⁵ and Marx's attitude towards British colonialism in India ("whatever may have been the crime of England she was the unconscious tool of history").¹⁶ However, my inclination is to understand this issue as merely the death of the meta-narratives of the unilinear histories of civilization, progress and development, a circumstance that makes alternative subaltern histories possible. This would then mean only the end of all grand narratives and would open up the possibility of building little histories of subjugated and disempowered peoples such as women, minorities, the poor, the colonized and others.¹⁷ It should be noted that this is also what the postcolonial writers such as Ranajit Guha call for.¹⁸

The third problem that Third Worlders have with postmodernism has to do with its essentially European or transatlantic cultural and geographical location and the resultant centrality that such a perspective accords to the European in history and in the construction of knowledge. In many ways, such centrality of location is seen as a mere continuation of the imperial process of Eurocentrism. As David Slater has pointed out in a recent study of the history of theoretical discourse on international questions, "the tendency to erase theory from the history of the non-West can be seen as a pivotal strategy in the West's construction of an international division of intellectual labor, and the turn towards a global agenda has been marked by a continued reflection of the same construction".¹⁹ Even the isolated legal academics who study or teach 'Law and Postmodernism' in the United States, reveal very little familiarity with any writers from the Third World, including the postcolonial writers such as Guha or Spivak. None of the postmoderns such as Baudrillard, Lyotard and even Jameson are principally concerned with issues of domination and

¹⁵ See G.W.F. HEGEL, *THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY* 99 (J. Sibree, trans. 1956).

¹⁶ See Karl Marx, *The British Rule in India* in KARL MARX AND F. ENGELS, *ARTICLES ON BRITAIN* 166-72 (1971).

¹⁷ These 'little histories' or what George Rude calls 'history from below', have indeed been written by post-colonial, neo-marxist and cultural revivalist scholars long before the advent of post-modernism.

¹⁸ See Ranajit Guha, *On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*, in *SELECTED SUBALTERN STUDIES*, *supra* note 12, at 37-45.

¹⁹ See David Slater, *Contesting Occidental Visions of the Global: The Geopolitics of Theory and North-South Relations*, 4 *BEYOND LAW - MAS ALLA DEL DERECHO* 97, 113 (1994).

exclusion of the Third World Other, though Jameson is clearly a Marxist who labels postmodernism “the cultural logic of late capitalism”.

I am very sympathetic to this criticism, particularly from a sociology of knowledge perspective, and I would suggest that this problem results from the inability of the postmoderns to come to terms with or recognize the internal dimensions of colonialism: that is, the extent to which colonial ideas and practices have, in an ironic return of compliment, affected the societies of the colonizers themselves.²⁰ Given the fact that modern European culture, with its notions of progress, order and civilization, has developed in direct response to the expansion of European imperial power during the colonial encounter (as argued by many including Edward Said²¹), any attempt by the postmoderns to engage the cultural determinants of hegemonic practices must start by locating itself in the colonial and neocolonial context; in other words, to transcend domesticity in the scope of its critique. Therefore, I would suggest that the postmoderns have much to learn from postcolonial and neomarxist theory. Without taking colonialism and its effects seriously, the postmodern project degenerates into an intellectual style without ethical content.

So it would seem that the sense of discomfort of the Third Worlders with postmodernism is, while serious, not fatal. Following Anthony Appiah, I would suggest that maybe we must strive to recover the postcolonial writers’ humanism within postmodernism, while still rejecting the master narratives of modernism.²² It is in that spirit that I would offer the following part of the essay. I will start by examining the psycho-political construction of the category ‘Third World’ during the historical process of colonialism and imperialism.

III. DAVID SIBLEY AND THE PSYCHO-POLITICS OF THE UNCLEAN

My examination of the psycho-political roots of the representational model of the Third World is an attempt to show that

²⁰ For a detailed discussion of this idea, see Ashis Nandy, *supra* note 5; HOMI BHABHA, *THE LOCATION OF CULTURE* (1994).

²¹ See EDWARD SAID, *CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM* (1993).

²² See Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern*, in *THE POST-COLONIAL STUDIES READER*, *supra* note 9, at 123.

the category 'Third World' has been constructed as the uncivilized, deviant 'Other' by the European *and* the Third World elites *together*, during and after the colonial encounter that makes its embrace of the 'national allegory', and therefore of geography, rather essential. My discussion in this section relies primarily on David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion*.²³

David Sibley discusses the problem of exclusion by describing the role of space in the reproduction of social relations; that is, he shows how many forms of economic and political alienation/domination/exclusion are actually rooted in and constituted by notions about space, about the environment. Central to this endeavor, according to him, is the "construction of the self, the way in which individual identity relates to social, cultural and spatial contexts".²⁴ This self is constituted from infancy through a continuous process of projection (the capacity to attribute feelings to other people) and introjection (additions to the personality that comes from the situations that a child lives through), both of which result in building a sense of border, a sense of selfhood and a sense of the social.²⁵ This sense of border is initially manifested, for example, in a distaste for bodily residues. As a result, his conclusion is that the self is a cultural production in which the boundary between the inner (pure) self and the outer (defiled) self acquires a cultural significance. This results in the peculiarly Western puritanical obsession with order and cleanliness and a detestation of bodily wastes, dirt, soil, ugliness, and so on. At a societal level, this sense of border in the infant is the basis for the construction of and distancing from the 'Other'. This 'Other' is not only the 'Other' of the colonial encounter, but also the 'Other' of gender, as the mother can not experience the sense of autonomy that this sense of the self grants due to her oneness with the baby in 'dirty' tasks like nappy changing.

Ashis Nandy has drawn attention to the important parallel between the development of colonialism and the development of the modern

²³ See DAVID SIBLEY, *GEOGRAPHIES OF EXCLUSION: SOCIETY AND DIFFERENCE IN THE WEST* (1995), particularly chapters 1, 2, 4 and 6.

²⁴ *Id.* at 3.

²⁵ This part of David Sibley's discussion relates to Melanie Klein's work. For other works by Melanie Klein, see *OUR ADULT WORLD: AND OTHER ESSAYS* (1963); *THE SELECTED MELANIE KLEIN* (1987).

concept of childhood in the seventeenth century.²⁶ As he puts it, before, the child was seen as a smaller version of the adult; now the child became an inferior version of the adult which had to be educated and developed into a responsible and mature adult. It now became the responsibility of the adult to 'save' the child from "a state of unrepentant, reprobate sinfulness through proper socialization, and help the child grow towards a Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity".²⁷ Colonialism picked up on these ideas and drew a new parallel between primitivism and childhood, wherein the colonized were often portrayed as minors.

Similarly, Anthony Anghie has recently written about the formulation of basic doctrines of sovereignty by Francisco Vitoria in the seventeenth century, during the colonial encounter between the Spanish and the Indians.²⁸ As described by him, the Indians were seen as child-like and inferior versions of the Spanish by Vitoria, who had to be redeemed and civilized. This imagery of the Indians as minors, was central to the formulation of basic doctrines of sovereignty and intervention and their violent application to colonized peoples during the subsequent centuries by naturalists and positivists. It is instructive to read his analysis with Nandy's analysis of childhood and primitivism in the colonial encounter and compare it to the following account by David Sibley.

David Sibley proceeds from the above discussion of the boundary of the self and the construction of the 'Other' to discuss the construction of the uncivilized 'Other' in the colonial encounter. In fact this understanding of the self was the basis for judging cultural difference. He observes, "the expansion of European empires and the development of the capitalist world economy required fitting dependent territories and dependent peoples into the cosmic order of the dominant powers" that led, on a global scale, to a spatial and cultural boundary between civilization and various uncivilized, deviant

²⁶ See Ashis Nandy, *supra* note 5, at 14-15. See also Ashis Nandy, *Reconstructing Childhood*, in *TRADITIONS, TYRANNY AND UTOPIAS: ESSAYS IN THE POLITICS OF AWARENESS* (1987).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ See Anthony Anghie, *Francisco de Vitoria and the Colonial Origins of International Law*, 5 *SOCIAL & LEGAL STUD.* 321 (1996).

'Others'.²⁹ Thus, the edge of civilization was marked by the presence of grotesque people, who were imperfect, physically deformed, and/or black and at one with nature. This 'edge' was not a mere spatial metaphor, but was developed into a physical boundary that made it clear that the civilized stayed within the safe confines of the European center while the uncivilized and the grotesque stayed at the periphery.

The spatial images created, and the cultural differences emphasized, by this boundary have been at the core of the modern international order. They are reflected in notions about development and progress in general and in various doctrinal forms in the international legal order at a more particular level, such as 'just war' and 'humanitarian intervention' doctrines.³⁰

The Third World elites who came to power after political independence did not challenge the colonial origins of these notions of development and progress.³¹ Instead, they adopted them towards their own peoples. Why did they do it? It was due to an uncritical and emphatic faith in the emancipatory idea of the nation, understood as the State. To them, the project of nation-building meant the establishment of many of the same values that the colonialists had

²⁹ It must be noted that this imagery is not peculiar to Western imperialism alone; other imperialisms share it. The Chinese 'culture', to take one example is built on the difference between the civilized Chinese in the Middle Kingdom and the barbarians surrounding it. The discussion focuses on the European example due to the historical experience of Western colonialism and the continuing experience of neocolonialism especially in the context of global capitalism.

³⁰ Indeed, it could be argued that the entire edifice of international law is constructed upon the physicalization of the spatial images created by the politics of cultural difference. The very concept of a nation-state as a bounded entity, distinguishing between 'us' and 'them' and enabling the legitimate deployment of coercive power to maintain those boundaries, as well the principles of non-intervention and domestic jurisdiction, are paradigmatically rooted in this politics of cultural difference. That is, however, a large project that needs to be dealt with elsewhere. I should note that recent international legal scholarship, under the umbrella of 'New Approaches to International Law', has begun moving in that direction. See, e.g., Anthony Anghie, *Creating The Nation-State: Colonialism and the Making of International Law* (Unpublished SJD Dissertation, Harvard Law School, 1995); Annelise Riles, *Aspiration and Control: International Legal Rhetoric and the Essentialization of Culture*, 106 HARV. L. REV. 723 (1993). A bibliography of the recent scholarship, compiled by Professor David Kennedy, is available at Harvard Law School.

³¹ For an incisive critique, see Dianne Otto, *Subalternity and International Law: The Problems of Global Community and the Incommensurability of Difference*, 5 SOCIAL & LEGAL STUD. 337 (1996). I would distinguish this from the rather intense attempt made by Third World elites to attribute the 'backwardness' of their economies to neocolonialism. While the latter strategy created waves in the 1960s and 70s, particularly in the form of the New International Economic Order claims that were based on the ideas developed by dependency theorists from Latin America, it was still caught up within the teleological confines of the ideas of development and progress. Indeed, the central objective of these critiques was to progress as quickly as possible so that the Third World could 'catch up' with the West. This is entirely different from a critique that refuses to accept the very ideas of progress and development.

relied upon to establish and consolidate their rule - values such as progress (measured by industrialization), order (measured by the exclusion of social undesirables such as prostitutes, working class, poor, and so on) and cleanliness (measured by the exclusion of poor, slums and other 'eyesores'). Urban planning in particular, was extensively used - and continues to be used - for removal of slums in 'beautification campaigns'; the most notorious examples that come to mind are the Marcos regime's forced eviction of the poor from the slums in Manila during the 1970s, and Sanjay Gandhi's clean-Delhi drive against the poor and slum-dwellers during the 1975-77 Emergency period in India. These neocolonial elites have failed to realize that the effort to banish the 'grotesque' to the periphery is a mere continuation of the colonial project.

Finally, a word must be added about the role of the international media, which is mostly Western-dominated, in reinforcing the stereotypical images of the Third World: of poverty, squalor, dirt, chaos, and violence. These images correspond to the 'grotesque-in-the-periphery' imagery referred to above. The continuing salience of the representational model of the category 'Third World' critically depends on this negative stereotyping by the international media and reflects the neocolonialism of multinational capital that drives this media business.

To conclude this section, the representational model of the category 'Third World' is firmly rooted in the spatial geography of difference. Locating the Third World in its geography is central to the colonial and the neocolonial project of judging and excluding the cultural 'Other'.

IV. FREDERIC JAMESON'S 'NATIONAL ALLEGORY' AND AIJAZ AHMAD'S 'CIVILIZATIONAL OTHER'

In his essay, Jameson argues for rethinking the humanities curriculum of the Western academia to include Third World literary texts.³² He rests this argument on what he sees as the epistemological priority of the allegorical vision of the Third World texts, most of which, according to him, collapse the distinction between the private

³² See Jameson, *supra* note 2.

and the public, between the poetic and the political³³; in other words, the ‘telling of the individual story’ and experience ultimately involves the “whole laborious telling of the experience of the collectivity itself”.³⁴ In that sense, all Third World texts are to be read as ‘national allegories’.³⁵ This, he contrasts with one of the determinants of capitalist culture, that is, ‘the culture of the Western realist and modernist novel’ which always involves a radical split between “the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power: in other words, Freud versus Marx”.³⁶ He adds that it is precisely this very different relation of the personal to the political that makes the Third World texts so alien to the West.³⁷ He gives two illustrations of this from the Third World: the Chinese author Lu Xun’s *The Diary of a Mad Man* (1918) and the Senegalese author Ousmane Sembene’s novel *Xala* (1973).³⁸

Jameson’s ‘national allegory’ analysis is built on a certain understanding of the ‘Third World’ that is rooted in the historical deterministic model discussed above in the introduction. That is, he defines ‘Third World’ exclusively in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism’ while the First World and the Second World are defined in terms of modes of production, namely capitalism and socialism.

Aijaz Ahmad takes Jameson to task on precisely this issue. He argues that since Jameson defines the category ‘Third World’ solely in terms of its experience of colonialism and imperialism, the political category that necessarily follows from this exclusive emphasis is that of the ‘nation’, with nationalism as the peculiarly valorized ideology³⁹; and that it is precisely because of this privileging of nationalistic ideology that Jameson is able to argue that “all Third World texts are... national allegories”.⁴⁰ This emphasis on the nationalist ideology

³³ *Id.* at 69.

³⁴ *Id.* at 85-86.

³⁵ *Id.* at 69.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ See Aijaz Ahmad, *supra* note 4, at 5.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 5-6.

leads Jameson, he suggests, to argue that the only 'choice' for the Third World is between 'nationalism' and 'global American postmodernist culture'.⁴¹ He criticizes Jameson for positing a totalizing binary opposition of nationalism/postmodernism which has no basis in reality. In fact, many of the bourgeois nationalisms of the Third World have no problems with global American postmodernism; they deeply desire it.⁴² Indeed, Ahmad sees a 'very tight fit' between the Three Worlds theory, the over-valorization of the nationalist ideology and the assertion that all Third World texts are national allegories.⁴³ This mode of argument has two dangers, according to him: first, to say that all Third World texts are this or that is to say that all other texts that are *not* this or that, are not 'true' narratives.⁴⁴ Second, this exclusive focus on the 'national' denies the possibility that there are other motivating forces for history such as the struggles based on class, gender, race, region, and so on and that narratives that are rooted in those struggles will be denied their authenticity.⁴⁵

Ahmad also finds it particularly problematic that the historical deterministic model of the 'Third World' relied on by Jameson defines it purely in terms of an externally inserted phenomenon, namely colonialism and imperialism, while the First and Second Worlds are defined in terms of their modes of production: "a classification that divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it".⁴⁶ This ignores several realities and is built on neocolonialist assumptions that have to be challenged. First, within the Third World (in Jameson's sense) there are countries such as the East Asian Tiger economies of Singapore and others, or even India that resemble the First World in many ways. India, for example, has an economy that is twice the size of the gross industrial product of Britain, has more than twice the number of technical personnel of France and Germany combined and has had longer bourgeois democratic Parliamentary tradition than Spain or Portugal. Where then does one locate such countries? In the absence of an empirical

⁴¹ *Id.* at 8.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 11.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 8-9.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 7.

basis, what then is the politics of locating countries across a spectrum of differences?

Second, the historical deterministic model of the category 'Third World' rests, according to Jameson, on the idea that the modes of production in the Third World are either primitive (African) or Asiatic (India and China).⁴⁷ We have seen that empirically they are not, that many countries in the Third World do not fall into one category or the other and have both First and Second Worlds within themselves. But there is a deeper problem of cultural evaluation - and therefore the construction of the 'Other' - here; it ignores the hierarchical and linear relationship between these modes of production and the Western ones of capitalism and socialism. For example, Ashis Nandy has shown that Marx's theory of progress that conceptualized a movement from prehistory to history and from infantile or low-level communism to adult communism, and his theory of the Asiatic mode of production, rest on a certain racist imagery of the Asian 'Other'.⁴⁸

Third, the historical deterministic model of the Third World relied upon by Jameson also ignores the reverse effects of colonialism. Ahmad points out that the unity of the public and private, so characteristic of the (pre-industrial) Third World, has occurred in the First World as well: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) or Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) are examples of this effect.⁴⁹ Conversely, the separation between the public and the private, characteristic of capitalism, has occurred in the Third World as well, precisely because of the effect of colonialism and imperialism and the penetration of capital into the Third World. Ashis Nandy also shows how colonialism has produced cultural and psychological pathologies in the colonizing societies as well.⁵⁰

Finally, Ahmad points out that much of the Third World literature is actually not exclusively about the experience of colonialism and imperialism, but also about class structure, familial ideologies, the management of bodies and sexualities, and so on.⁵¹ The criminality of the colonizer was a concern, but it certainly came later than, and was a

⁴⁷ See Jameson, *supra* note 2, at 68.

⁴⁸ See Nandy, *supra* note 5, at 13.

⁴⁹ See Ahmad, *supra* note 4, at 15.

⁵⁰ See Nandy, *supra* note 5, at 30-32.

⁵¹ See Ahmad, *supra* note 4, at 21.

competitor to, brutalities of the indigenous oppressors. To take only the most obvious example, the oppression of women in India predates colonialism and can not certainly be narrated as an 'experience of colonialism and imperialism' alone. This leads him to conclude that there is no such thing as a Third World literature that can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge.⁵²

By analogy, I have argued that there is no such thing as the Third World, that can be understood solely in terms of a singular determinant, namely, the political geography of ex-colonial nationalism. Now let me turn to a discussion of the three models of the category 'Third World' in the light of the above issues.

V. THREE MODELS OF THE 'THIRD WORLD' AND THE 'NATIONAL ALLEGORY'

Returning to the first three nation-based models of the category 'Third World', I start with the ideological model, the one that defines the category by its neutralist political engagement through nonalignment with the bipolar model of bloc politics. It is a fairly trite fact that European domination of the world through colonialism had assumed the form of the supremacy of the Great Powers from 1945 onwards. As many commentators have argued, this shift merely changed the form of European hegemony, not its substance.⁵³ As a result, the general understanding among scholars is that this fact accounts for the response from the Third World in the form of nonalignment and that as a result, the Third World truly tried to break down this binary form of world politics. The Bandung Conference⁵⁴ is often cited as a historical moment when this political realignment was wrought globally. However, closer attention to the micropolitics of the Bandung Conference may reveal that, at least for the leading personalities of the Conference including Jawaharlal Nehru and Zhou En-Lai, many complex political considerations, including domestic,

⁵² *Id.* at 4.

⁵³ See, e.g., MOHAMMED BEDJAOUI, *TOWARDS A NEW INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC ORDER* (1979).

⁵⁴ The Bandung Conference brought together 29 Afro-Asian nations, in a show of Third World solidarity, with the apparent purpose of forging the basic principles of non-alignment as a viable third option in international politics. On Bandung conference, see CARLOS ROMULO, *THE MEANING OF BANDUNG* (1956); A. APPADORAI, *THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE* (1955); RICHARD WRIGHT, *THE COLOR CURTAIN* (1956).

may have been more predominant than a common global urge to create a Third Front.⁵⁵

While subsequent historical development has shown that the nonalignment model of politics failed during the Cold War period, the reasons for such failure have not been carefully analyzed. This analysis is essential for arguing that the Third World must be decentered from its geographical moorings, that is, from its 'national allegory'.

I would venture to suggest that the failure was rooted in two internal contradictions: first, the Third World countries were dedicated, at the level of domestic political and economic organization, to the pursuit of either the (American) capitalist model or the (Soviet) communist/socialist model, without realizing that the pursuit of nonalignment at the international level could only succeed if they devised a real alternative to both of those dominant Eurocentric forms of government and economy domestically; in other words, *external* neutrality presupposed the availability of an *internal* choice that would not implicate the foreign policy interests of both the Great Powers. This the Third World did not attempt to do, as it remained mired in the Eurocentrism of both these meta-narratives of capitalism and communism/socialism both of which shared much common ground in their Eurocentrism, models of rationality, and the relation between man (sic) and nature. It made nonalignment a rather artificial political stance. Also, the state-centeredness of the discourses emanating from both polarities also suited the tendencies of the elites who came to power, most of whom were Western-trained.

I suggest that the Third World failed to develop an internal alternative because the elites who came to power in most of the Third World countries, after independence, shared the belief with the Great Powers that they had to follow the West in a linear historical path that placed a premium on the mobilizing and central power of the 'nation'.⁵⁶ A classic example was Jawaharlal Nehru. This 'national allegory' was a central theme of the political imagination of the

⁵⁵ I am not elaborating on this issue here except to note that scholars have already begun examining this. See AJAZ AHMAD, IN THEORY: CLASSES, NATIONS, LITERATURES, chapter 8 (1992).

⁵⁶ This is a familiar argument. See e.g., PARTHA CHATTERJEE, THE NATION AND ITS FRAGMENTS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL HISTORIES (1993).

progressive anti-colonial elite during this period, and all subsequent interpretations of that period, including by some of the most astute.⁵⁷

The second internal contradiction that ensured the failure of the nonalignment model of politics is that it defined its own identity only in relation to the binary of East versus West and thereby affirmed the centrality of these European/transatlantic categories. In other words, it defined itself as the decolonized 'Other',⁵⁸ by positioning itself in oppositional terms to the European discourses. This had the effect of rendering it as the *object* of history, a geographical lump that was ripe for ideological contestation between two European/American powers precisely because it defined itself an ideological *terra nullius*.

As a result, the ideological model of the Third World was built on the twin pillars of the imagery of the nation and the totalizing binary of First World/Second World. It enabled the Third World to attempt to submerge regional and local complexities and postpone consideration of issues under the rubric of solidarity of the nonaligned. After the end of the Cold War, these complexities have suddenly started to become more visible, in the form of local nationalisms and ethnic rivalries, though they are hardly new.

The second model of the category 'Third World', the geopolitical one, defined the category in terms of difference in the forms of political and economic organization. This model was based on a linear understanding of history, by a hierarchical ordering of modes of production and political organization. Thus, the 'Asiatic' and 'primitive' modes of production were seen as the initial phases in the evolution of capitalism and communism, as seen in the past section, while liberal market democracy modeled on the rich industrial countries was touted as the final form of human evolution, as Francis Fukuyama has argued.⁵⁹ This linear view of history, which provided the driving force behind the colonial discourse of civilization and progress, was merely continued under the different name of 'development' during the neocolonial period after independence.

⁵⁷ According to Aijaz Ahmad, even Edward Said interprets the spirit of Bandung by focusing on how the new Orient had armed itself with nationalism. The question, however, is: whose nationalism are we talking about? See Aijaz Ahmad, *supra* note 55, at 291.

⁵⁸ I rely on Edward Said's insights here. See EDWARD SAID, *ORIENTALISM* (1978).

⁵⁹ See FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *END OF HISTORY AND THE LAST MAN* (1992).

For the elites who came to power in the Third World after political independence, this view of history was central to the 'nation-building' project, so that they could 'catch-up' with the West. This was the governing logic behind the whole idea of the New International Economic Order (NIEO), which focused on reducing the income gap between the North and the South. Indeed, to this day, the spatial relationship between the North and the South is caught up in this teleological narrative. Any social facts that did not fit into the pattern of this narrative - such as the East Asian miracle of the 1970s and 1980s - was sought to be explained away through a Weberian framework that stressed the cultural determinants of those social facts and implied, therefore, the essential irreproducibility of those social facts elsewhere. In other words, the framework for interpreting the relationship between different communities and peoples had to be grounded either in an ahistorical teleological narrative or in an essentialized melange of 'values' that contrasted the exotic 'Other' with the West.

The institutional basis for this framework was the nation-state. This is the main reason why the General Assembly Resolutions dealing with the NIEO in the 1970s began by stressing the sovereignty and independence of states and the primacy of the state in the development process. Indeed, this primacy was even emphasized in counter-sovereignty discourses such as human rights, where the state was recognized as having the primary responsibility to promote and protect the human rights of its citizens. In sum, the geopolitical model of the 'Third World' is central to the dominant discourse of development which is a 'national allegory'. In addition, the geopolitical model and the linear view of history that it rests on, also construct an image of the Third World as imperfect, squalid and so on, that needs to be revealed, remedied or renounced through appropriate 'technical' interventions.⁶⁰

The third model of the category 'Third World' is the historical deterministic one, in that it is defined by the singular historical experience of colonialism and imperialism. My discussion of Jameson

⁶⁰ I base these comments on a rich and growing literature, which I would loosely term, 'Critical Development Theory'. See, e.g., DEVELOPMENT DICTIONARY: A GUIDE TO KNOWLEDGE AS POWER (Wolfgang Sachs, ed., 1992); POST-DEVELOPMENT READER (Majid Rahnama & Victoria Bawtree, eds., 1997).

and Ahmad brings out the various aspects of this model in great detail and shows how such an understanding inevitably leads to the construction of all Third World narratives as 'national allegories'. So I will not expand on it except to indicate that my purpose is not to deny the importance of the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism; on the contrary, it affirms it. My argument is only that such historical experience does not need to privilege the 'national' narrative over the others, because it has the effect of sweeping other forms of local oppressions and struggles under the carpet. This is nowhere more true than in the field of international relations, where the continuing centrality of the nation-state has rendered all Third World narratives as essentially 'national allegories' that do not allow political space for other emancipatory narratives. It may then be the case that to capture a distinctive 'Third World' voice that has any relevance for constructive oppositional politics, we may need to critically reinterrogate the radical voices of the past, including non-Western, women, indigenous and other voices of the ordinary people which are silenced by law's traditional narrations.

VI. CONCLUSION: RETHINKING THE MEANING OF THE 'THIRD WORLD'

Let me conclude on a constructive note: is there a way to reimagine the category 'Third World' in such a way that it remains alive to its historical roots of colonialism and imperialism, while, at the same time, resisting the totalizing tendencies of the 'national allegory'? I believe that it can be done. The category 'Third World' can and should be decentered from its geographical moorings of the 'nation' for the reasons outlined in the previous sections and should be reimaged as a counter-hegemonic discursive tool that allows us to interrogate and contest the various ways in which power is used. Here I rely on Antonio Gramsci's notion of counter hegemony.

Gramsci defines hegemony as the process which generates "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great mass of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group (historical bloc)".⁶¹ Hegemony to him, then, is an active process

⁶¹ See Antonio Gramsci, *supra* note 6, at 12.

involving the production, reproduction and mobilization of popular consent, which can be constructed by any 'historical bloc' that takes hold of it and uses it. Of course, being a Marxist, he favors the working class to do this, but there is no reason why this analysis can not be extended to any oppressed group.

His notion of counter-hegemony, on the other hand, is not a pure oppositional project that seeks to overthrow everything that is in place. As he puts it, "it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity".⁶² Thus the emphasis is on putting into place discourses which, while building on the hegemonic discourses, transcend them by introducing new elements through a critical interrogation of the ways in which the hegemonic project succeeds and fails.

Viewing the category 'Third World' as a counter-hegemonic discursive practice liberates it from its geographical 'national' moorings while at the same time insisting on the hegemonic power formation of the colonial encounter. The emphasis henceforth, would be on the actual terrain that power operates on, rather than some predetermined given one such as the 'nation'. That would enable us to focus on issues of class, gender, sexuality, region, language and so on, which have been submerged by the totalizing power of the 'national allegory'. We could then interrogate the contextuality of the local struggles, and the differences in the experience of local oppressions, that are hidden from view.

This would have fundamental implications for the way in which international order is imagined. For a start, this would compel the dominant discourse to rethink the relationship between the local and the global. If Third World is not defined by political geography, but by the actual contestation of power formations such as gender oppression, it is possible to think of transnational linkages among the oppressed. One would then have to map the world by a cultural geography which denies the category of the civilizational 'Other'.

⁶² Quoted in J. LARRAIN, *MARXISM AND IDEOLOGY* 84 (1983).