On the Limits of "Postcolonial" Theory: Trespassing Letters from the "Third World"

E. SAN JUAN, JR.

> I hope I have said enough to make it clear that I am abandoning neither Marxism nor communism but only the use which some people have made of them, which I deplore. I wish to see Marxism and communism serving the black peoples, not the black peoples serving Marxism and communism. The doctrine and the movement should exist for the sake of the people, not the people for the good of the doctrine and the movement. And, of course, this principle does not apply only to communists. And if I were a Christian or a Muslim, I would say the same thing: every doctrine is worthless unless it is rethought by and for us and adapted to our own needs. . . . This is why we must insist upon a veritable Copernican revolution in order to break with the European habit, which is deeply rooted in every party and group from extreme right to extreme left, of acting on our behalf—of deciding for us, thinking for us and, in short, denying us the right of initiative which I have already mentioned—the right, in fact, to personality.
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> AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*, 1957 (112)

AGAINST THE BACKGROUND of the continuing US-led war against Iraq (with Libya and Iran looming behind) and the unprecedented upheavals in regions formerly known as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, events that are rapidly making obsolete any ongoing academic pontification, reflections on the twin fates of freedom and progress in dependent formations are bound to assume greater urgency and resonance than before. In particular, what is the fate of culture in these contested territories? There is an obvious reason for the renewed salience of the territories of people of colour (also known as "the south," "underdeveloped" or "developing" countries): it is that the bulk (at least two thirds) of the world's population inhabiting the per-

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iphery exerts an incalculable force on sovereign nation-states and transnational corporate policy decisions in the industrialized metropolis that now comprises three centres—the European Community, Japan and its satellites, and North America. The logic of capital requires a hierarchical division of labour throughout the world that constantly reproduces its own condition of existence. In a world system dominated by the messiahs of the "free market" hard on the tracks of fleeing Kurds, Palestinians, and millions of refugees from Eastern Europe and elsewhere, the inauguration of a "New World Order" opens up the space for rethinking cherished beliefs and received notions rendered anachronistic by the turn of events.

In both the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the talismanic shibboleth of "democracy" broadcast by the Western media claims to promise nothing short of absolute redemption. "Free World" triumphalism for now—despite quandaries in Somalia and Haiti—pre-empts all dissent, criticism, refusal.[1] Meanwhile, in El Salvador, South Africa, the Philippines, and other presumed democratic polities, the problems of, *inter alia*, poverty, social injustice, military brutality, ecological disasters, and so on, continue to confound the technocratic experts of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The new status quo is volatile and unpredictable. Western governments, however, are alarmed, not by the plight of impoverished citizens, but by the gigantic debt of countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and a dozen others in Africa and Asia; the corporate elite fear that foreclosure of these debts might precipitate a global financial crisis worse, in their minds, than a nuclear war. We hear this uncanny whispering behind: Never question the legitimacy of this new dispensation, which is the same old unequal exchange on a world scale, lest you unleash the barbarism of Prospero and Ariel against Caliban's hordes. In such a scenario, the significations of "postcolonial" literature and "postmodern" art, including the rubric "Third World," again become the site of struggle for redefinition, revaluation, and reappropriation (see Buchanan).

In retrospect, Peter Worsley's inaugural text *The Third World* (1964) is one of the first cognitive mappings of the world sys-

tem—its differential political economies, its "actual infinity," as it were—that privileged the "Third World" as a challenge both to late capitalism and to communism. Worsley quotes Frantz Fanon's assertion that the singular task of the "Third World" consists in "reintroducing Man into the world, man in his totality" (275). Peter Weiss concurs by rejecting the derogatory connotation of "third"; Weiss insists that by re-introducing "human dignity," these exploited and poor countries are really the actually developed ones (qtd. in Gugelberger 522). In short, to echo the fabled inversion, the last is really first. What is at stake here, however, is not the revival of Renaissance humanism or Biblical eschatology but the concept of a world society in which problems of poverty, ecology, genocide, etc., implicate every human across nation-state boundaries. This idea of a planetary ethics has long been anticipated by Marxist thought and its stress on the centrality of labour as life/species activity, work that fashions the world as an expression of self-conscious, universalizing species-power. However, it would not have been possible without the sequence of events that signalled the advent of a late-modern "givenness" some years after the onset of the Cold War: Ghana's independence (1957), Fidel Castro's victory in Cuba (1959), Lumumba's murder (1961), the vicissitudes of the Algerian revolution (1957-62), and the instructive lessons of US involvement in IndoChina following the stalemate in the Korean peninsula.

After the 1973 military coup in Chile against the socialist Allende, the US débâcle in Vietnam, and the maturing of crises in South Africa and in Central America, the quest for an internationalist ethics moved to a qualitatively new stage. The phrases "national liberation struggle" and "people's war" began to acquire substantive weight in academic exchange. The anthropologist Sidney Mintz reminds us of the original *problematique*, the interdiscursive field of our inquiry: "the uneven and multiplex relationship between the capitalist heartland and the societies and peoples on which that heartland has fed" (377). To demystify "Third Worldism" as contrived by the New Left, Mintz introduces Wallerstein's "theme of a worldwide capitalism transcending national and continental boundaries and encompassing forms of labor in no way reducible to a single proletarian

model" (378). In another context, Samir Amin introduces plurality within the "concrete universal" of liberation: "A development that is not merely development of underdevelopment will therefore be both national, popular-democratic, and socialist, by virtue of the world project of which it forms part" ("The Crisis" 383). Across the spectrum of usages and references, the term "Third World" releases its force as an operational and situational signifier rather than an analytic ontological category; thus we see the ironic unfolding of its heterogeneity in Gerard Chaliand's *Revolution in the Third World*, contemporaneous with Mintz's essay, in which disillusionment with utopianism (now synonymous with all those transitional experiments Chaliand used to extol) becomes a pretext for valorizing the key "Western" ideas of freedom and equality.

It seems that the messianic vision of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* has become simply a "Third World" Imaginary, an erstwhile heresy now reduced to superstition. Before the waning of "Third Worldism" into the eclectic cosmopolitanism of postcoloniality, I want to enter a personal digression here to frame my subsequent remarks. In June 1981, I organized a seminar on "Revolutionary Third World Culture: Theory and Literature" for the Inter-University Centre of Postgraduate Studies in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, as an extension of my years of teaching "Third World" cultural practices at the University of Connecticut, Brooklyn College, and other institutions. Two years before, at approximately the time when the Sandinistas (FSLN) overthrew the Somoza dynasty, a preliminary version of this essay was published in *Social Praxis*; its abstract contained these initial propositions:

> In the specific historic juncture of the late seventies, culture in the Third World has increasingly asserted itself as a form of ideological practice structurally determined by the class struggle. Literature is defined as an instance of concrete political practice which reflects the dynamic process of the national democratic revolution in the developing countries.
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> ("Literature and Revolution in the Third World" 19)

In 1983, that is, two years after the seminar in Yugoslavia, and just after the invasion of Grenada by US Marines, I attended a conference on "Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture" at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. A group of partici-

pants in Stuart Hall's class distributed a one-page leaflet entitled "Third World Intervention," whose intent and thrust can be discerned in these passages:

> Given the new international division of labor, and given this era of the multinational economy (which characterizes the postmodern), is it any longer possible to limit questions of culture and Marxism to culture defined within the framework of the nation-state or within the framework of the western world? The second related question regards the adequacy or applicability of theories generated in and for the first world context to the third world scene. . . . The third world is always an implicit part of first world cultural production.
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> The project of anthropology, which is the locus of cultural studies par excellence in the U.S., has been to describe, codify, and systematize cultures on the margins of Western civilization. Not only has ethnographic representation entailed an imposition of synchronicity upon these other societies whereby transformation can only be seen as initiated from the outside. It also displaces the question of domination into an issue of relativized cultural logics of difference. But the ideological project of anthropological practice succeeds in assigning to those other cultures a symbolic meaning within the dominant ideological discourse of the West, a meaning of alterity which is constitutive in the construction of the identity of the subject in the West, which entails a certain deformation of the colonial subject as well.

The Third World Study Group responsible for this manifesto also speculated as to whether the international division of labour has not also entailed the "international division of the subject," thus rendering suspect both the category of "nation" in the context of the dynamics of international capital, and the idea of exploitation as chiefly derivative of the capital-labour class contradiction. This instance of dissent may be taken as emblematic of the unequal distribution of interpretive power in the academy. Order is guaranteed by the "excluded middle," in this case, the "absent" or "erased" labour of subjugated nationalities. In an ironic twist, the protest against unwarranted generalization by Eurocentric discourse re-functioned the poststructuralist "exorbitation" of discourse attributed to Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, etc., such that what it ostensibly aimed to deny at the start has been re-affirmed in the end.

It is perhaps at this juncture that we can appreciate Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory* as a salutary polemical intervention, clarifying

in its exposition of the historical background the ambiguities and ironies of the new counter-hegemonic trend. Problematizing the ethos of its adherents, Ahmad attacks the poststructuralist scepticism of postcolonial theorists, their avant-gardist stance of irony, and their rhetorics of migrancy. His rejection of nationalism (of the bourgeois comprador or *desarrollista* brand) posited as the determinate opposite of imperialism is based on a prior calculation of its role "in the determinate socialist project"; hence the struggle is not against "nations and states as such, but for different articulations of class, nation, and state" (11). While condemning reactionary "third-worldist nationalism," Aijaz Ahmad does not dismiss (like the epigones of Baudrillard and Lyotard) "the historical reality of the sedimentations which do in fact give particular collectivities of people real civilizational identities" (11). In this approach he is in solidarity with partisan intellectuals situated in disparate cultures such as Aimé Césaire, Amilcar Cabral, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Tan Malaka, Sultan Galiev, Hanafi Muzzafar, Nicolas Guillen, and Edward Brathwaite. He also recognizes how "the tendential law of global accumulation" produces not greater homogenization but "greater differentiation among its various national units" (313), hence his rejection of Fredric Jameson's hypothesis of "national allegory" (which I discuss later). Ahmad's prudent qualifications, however, do not save him from a certain Leftist monumentality that has no patience with alliance or populist politics practised in, say, South Africa today; nor do we find much latitude there for calculating and harnessing to our advantage the oppositional effects of what Ernst Bloch calls "nonsynchronicities" in the interstices of middle-strata quotidian existence. Ahmad may yet prove to be a nostalgic "postcolonial" in spite of himself.

In general, I agree with Ahmad and others (for example, Mukherjee) in their view that theory from the metropolis cannot escape the "specter" of insurgent "natives," of anti-imperialist resistance; but neither can we in the "Third World" escape its contagion. The question is: how do we negotiate the complex linkages of this ideological conjuncture and use the "weak links" of the enemy? In my judgment, the only dialectical way of mediating the capitalist world system and historically specific na-

tional formations as we examine concrete processes of cultural production is to deploy Gramsci's concept of the "national-popular," which I attempt in my books *From People to Nation* and *Allegories of Resistance.* Following Otto Bauer's insight that "in each country, the socialist ideology merges with its peculiar cultural tradition and becomes nationally differentiated" (274-75), Gramsci emphasizes the circumstantiality of aesthetic form and cultural practice in general as shaped by varied audiences and generic conventions (117-19), local knowledges, ethnic self-constructions, and other contingencies. The philosophical justification for discerning the force of a specific "national" concern and a popular orientation lies in Gramsci's historical-materialist understanding of aesthetic praxis:

> If one cannot think of the individual apart from society, and thus if one cannot think of any individual who is not historically conditioned, it is obvious that every individual, including the artist and all his activities, cannot be thought of apart from society, a specific society. Hence the artist does not write or paint—that is, he does not externalize his phantasms—just for his own recollection, to be able to relive the moment of creation. He is an artist only insofar as he externalizes, objectifies and historicizes his phantasms. Every artist-individual, though, is such in a more or less broad and comprehensive way, he is "historical" or "social" to a greater or lesser degree. (112)

The historicity of the forms of individual consciousness, the social contradictions immanent in the language of the psyche, the dynamic interconnections of social existence registered in the flows of desire and flux of lived experience—all these axioms found in Gramsci can be used to explain the collectivist impulse behind artistic representation. In the peripheral hinterlands, this impulse is very much alive. It has escaped complete dissolution by the levelling "realism" of exchange-value in the marketplace. As far as one can calculate from this distance, the force of reification has not yet sublimated or transmogrified its inhabitants into free-floating signifiers or aleatory simulacra.

Given this unashamedly totalizing (but not essentializing) framework, we can now appreciate Jameson's cogently argued hypothesis that when a dialectical hermeneutic or metacommentary is deployed on the typical "Third World" narrative, the

narrative emerges as a kind of national allegory. (This is the method Jameson uses to develop his readings of Lu Hsun's "Diary of a Madman" and Sembene's *Xala*). Jameson writes: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69). Note that his formulation assumes that in the West the public-private split tends to reduce everything into subjectivist or psychologized phenomena, while the radical disparity of the "Third World" lies in its uneven, unsychronized milieu, in which subjectivity is grounded and re-figured by its social context, where the metonymy/syntax of personal lived experience ultimately finds intelligible expression in the paradigmatic axis of the community (see also Beverley and Zimmerman). In the "Third World" narrative of quotidian existence, the artist is necessarily a political intellectual, since the forms of artistic expression assume political valence in all the moments of its production, circulation, and reception.[2]

At this point, I can think of no better illustration of what Jameson is saying about the necessarily ethico-political function of the "Third World" intellectual than C. L. R. James and his massive lifelong engagement in the cultural and political transformation of three continents. One can easily demonstrate how, for example, James's early story "Triumph" exemplifies the Caribbean allegory of conscientization originating from the intersection of sexuality, economics, and the resistance against patriarchy. Suffice it to consider here briefly his dramatization of the non-synchronic and overdetermined process of Haiti's slave revolution, *The Black Jacobins*. The subtle choreography of moods, attitudes, and actions displayed by the major protagonists of the drama—Toussaint, Dessalines, and Moise—is plotted primarily to reveal the complex sensorium in which the colonial *habitus* operates and to indicate how uneven is the alignment of diverse ideological agencies in any transitional conjuncture. Moise, who symbolizes autonomy and becoming-human, is defeated; at the same time, the displacement of voo-

doo by European music and dance symbolizes the eclipse of the masses. These plot developments indicate the way in which the force of historical necessity limits the influence of European radicalism (bourgeois individualism); they also signal how the deformation of the Bolshevik revolution by Stalin's authoritarian *diktat* translates into James's quest for a new historic agency in the form of the colonized, oppressed people of colour in the "Third World." Nationalitarian allegory metamorphoses into a world-system parable. A note in the staging of the play betokens James's prefigurative sensibility: "Crowds say little but their presence is felt powerfully at all critical moments" (68). Certain key texts may be alluded to here as effectively demonstrating James's overarching principle that the masses of workers-peasants, with their organized spontaneous energies, create the decisive breaks in history (for example, the destruction of mercantilism by the slave revolt); these texts are "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," "The People of the Gold Coast," and the uncompromising testament of his faith, "Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity." Because James perceived the paradoxical and contradictory effects of capital, its progressive and regressive pressures on specific communities, which triggered the astute responses of all classes and types, he was fully appreciative not only of the totalizing regime of commodity exchange where the socialist project is the only alternative, but also of the concrete sites where resistance is born. Thus by attending to the configuration of events in specific arenas of struggle and its interplay with the concrete mechanisms of the world system, James embodied in his life's work the allegorizing imagination, catholicity, and rigour that distinguish Marxism as a revolutionary praxis, the name of an intractable heterogeneous desire.

Under the aegis of allegory, synecdoche writ large, the "Third World" presents itself as a complex of narratives juxtaposing movements of disenfranchisement and of empowerment, of ruptures and convergences. In the light of varying temporalities, "nation" is only one term for re-inscribing the fusion between agency and structure; other categories are race, class, ethnicity, religion, and their permutations—all loci for the strategic affirmation of a creative "Third World" subjectivity. The moment/

process called "nation" is easily conflated or subsumed in that of class, gender, etc. How is it that Fanon's inaugural project of the nationalitarian conquest of identity has been disparaged and disavowed by postcolonial intellectualism?

One answer lies in the world-wide hegemony of poststructuralist ideology that valorizes the primacy of exchange, pastiche, fragmentation, textuality, and difference as touchstones of critique and understanding. Repudiating myths of origin (for example, Wole Soyinka's invocation of "universal verities" contained in the world view or "self-apprehension" of indigenous peoples) via techniques of abrogation and appropriation, the Australian authors of the influential textbook *The Empire Writes Back* proclaim that only syncretism, hybridity, and counter-discourse can be the authentic categories of postcolonial literatures. But who authorizes this new doctrine? And what kind of rationality or will to power underwrites its portentous agendas? We are now indeed far removed from the time when a skilfully nuanced historicizing approach to cultural practices such as that illustrated by Umberto Melloti's *Marx and The Third World* is still a viable option. After criticizing the Eurocentric discourse of "Asiatic despotism" as well as the distortions of "bureaucratic collectivism" in transitional formations, Melotti proceeds to demarcate "Third World" civilizational uniqueness as an integral part of "world society":

> The different structure of the Third World has given birth to other no less important values, such as the communal ethic, the concept of a proper balance between man and nature, and the integration of the social and natural worlds, but it has never interpreted them in a truly liberating sense and has frequently carried them to a repressive conclusion. But today we are more than ever one world, and the synthesis of those values through truly socialist relations will finally permit the supersession of bourgeois individualism and repressive collectivism alike by a society where, as summed up in Marx's phrase, "The free development of each is the premise of the free development of all." (157)

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, we arrive at the crossroad of tradition and modernity in the far-flung margins of the empire. Obviously this trope of a journey insinuates a metanarrative biased against fixity and stasis, a "totalizing" figure

suspect to postcolonial thinkers. But what is the alternative? Mapping the contours of the recent past may help prefigure the shape of what is to come in the controversy over the internationalization of critical (poststructuralist) theory (see McClintock). The impasse of technocratic development in the "Third World" in the last 25 years, since the two UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) sessions in 1964 and 1968, returns us to the ineluctable questions that defy any premature forecasting of "the end of history" as touted by neo-conservative pundits. Among the questions: Is the Enlightenment project of winning human freedom from Necessity a ruse for imperial hegemony over people of colour? Is the discourse of progress a mask for oppression? Is Marxism, inheritor of Enlightenment ideals, complicit with the discourse of modernization? What original humane culture can the "natives" in the periphery offer to counter the fetishism of simulacra, pastiche, spectacle? Culture for the sake of whom, in the name of what?

We know from the historical record that the uneven and combined development of the "Third World" is the consequence of the lop-sided and hierarchical division of international labour as well as of the accumulation of capital by the industrial powers through plunder, slave trade, direct expropriation of resources and surplus value in the colonies from the sixteenth century to the present (see Balibar and Wallerstein; Rodney; Weisskopf; and Wolf). Notwithstanding the periodic realignments of nation-states today, we still persist in the reign of sameness-with-difference: commodity exchange for the sake of profit/surplus value. The growth of productive forces and people's critical responses, however, have altered the systemic forms of capital accumulation. From market to transnational capitalism, the pattern of imperialist exploitation of the world's labour and resources has undergone a series of mutations. When the prescription of import-substitution carried out in the 1950s and 1960s failed to usher sustained, independent growth, the elite of the dependent countries resorted to export-oriented industrialization administered by the National Security State. The result? A rich harvest of massive human rights violations by US-backed

authoritarian regimes, systematic corruption of cultures, degradation of work through "warm body exports" (migrant labour), ecological havoc, and unrelenting pauperization of the masses. In the Free Trade Zones, where the global assembly line generates superprofits out of cheap labour, total surveillance and draconian prohibitions prevail. Western monopoly of knowledge/information and the means of communication (mass media) become more crucial (see Schiller). Empirical evidence and all kinds of testimony demonstrate that the cult of the GNP (Gross National Product) institutionalized by the disciples of W. W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960) and the Chicago school of monetary economics, among others, has brought with it, for people of colour whose underdevelopment is reproduced daily by such formulas meant to maintain archaic patronage systems and "trickle-down" philanthropy, only rampant unemployment, widespread poverty, cycles of repression and stagnation, cultures and environments destroyed (see Alavi and Shanin; Woddis; and Amin, *Imperialism*). Meanwhile, World Bank/IMF (International Monetary Fund) structural adjustments or conditionalities serve only to reinforce dependency. The plight of Argentina or Chile might well foreshadow the future of the Asian NICs (Newly Industrialized Countries).

In this life-and-death *agon* for millions, the literary conceits of undecidability and indeterminacy offer neither catharsis nor denouement, only mock-heroic distractions. Long before the failure of the reformist UN "Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order," Denis Goulet, in his provocative work *The Cruel Choice*, had already proposed that the philosophy of development involves not just democracy in the political realm but "the basic questions about the quality of life in society, the relationship between goods and the good, and human control over change processes.... Will 'underdeveloped' societies become mere consumers of technological civilization or agents of their own transformation?" (xvii). To answer this question, we need to confront the key issue of self-determination in the realm of civil society and the public sphere: who decides and ultimately determines the goals, means, and trajectory of any development programme? Can the indigenous elite that inher-

ited the colonial state be relied upon to mobilize the masses, articulate their aspirations, and redistribute wealth/power? In short: Is the path of material progress for former colonies via dependent capitalism or popular-democratic (socialist) revolution?

There is no doubt that this mode of critical inquiry challenges conventional wisdom and official paradigms. Its criterion of social practice unsettles postcolonial ambivalence and Manichean delirium. It repudiates the bureaucratic syndrome concerned with "who gets what when" and with the economics of scarcity and supply-and-demand. In practically all orthodox thinking on modernization, private ownership of the means of production (land, technology, etc.) and efficient resource allocation and enhanced productivity through foreign investment and marketing strategies of elite sectors function as axiomatic givens, received "common sense." By privileging private interests and instrumental/utilitarian solutions, the explanatory model of neo-classical economics fails to take into account the historical contexts of class, ethnicity, gender, sectoral conflicts, etc. It elides the centuries-long dispute over land. It evades the question of citizen participation in political-economic decisions, a context in which (as the Philippine case demonstrates so clearly)[3] ownership of land is only one factor embroiled in the larger issue of oligarchic monopoly of wealth and power maintained by hierarchical structures, institutions, and mentalities left over from the past. Top-down bureaucratic planning ignores the overriding force of the international division of labour in the removal of economic surplus by foreign capital, a phenomenon that Paul Baran, in his classic study *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957), has thoroughly analyzed. Baran, in his "A Morphology of Backwardness," suggests that

> It is the economic strangulation of the colonial and dependent countries by the imperialist powers that stymied the development of indigenous industrial capitalism, thus preventing the overthrow of the feudal-mercantile order and assuring the rule of the comprador administrations. It is the preservation of these subservient governments, stifling economic and social development and suppressing all popular movements for social and national liberation, that makes possible at the present time the continued foreign exploitation of

> underdeveloped countries and their domination by the imperialist powers. (203-04)

It is not surprising to discover once again that neo-liberal empiricism and its post-Fordist descendants cannot envisage what is really at stake in such life-or-death matters as land reform or grass-roots democracy in contested zones.

One last marker of geo-political import needs to be rehearsed here. The centrality of transnational corporations in structuring power relations among nations and peoples needs no elaborate argument. Considering that today 600 of these corporations produce 25 per cent of everything made in the world and account for 80 to 90 per cent of the exports of the US, Japan, Britain and Canada, no substantive appraisal of programs for democratic change can be conducted without interrogating the role and impact of such entities in the social, political, and cultural transformation of the "Third World" (see Fitt, Faire, and Vigier; Sklair). This is precisely what Armand Mattelart has accomplished in his book *Transnationals and the Third World* (1983). Mattelart analyzes the logistics and ideological apparatuses engaged in the production of cultural commodities for the world market and reveals how the ethos of Western business practice, legitimized by such notions as security, freedom, efficiency, and so forth, are normalized in "Third World" societies through the virtually unconstrained operations of the Western-managed knowledge or consciousness industry.[4] Can the post-colonial intellect dismantle this setup? Fed to this recuperative machine of the conglomerates, the now-archetypal romance of decentred alterity can only be one more consumer item for Baudrillard's and Lyotard's indefatigable shopper.

This prospect, however dismaying, may also be regarded as an occasion for intoning the mantra of certain fellow-travellers: "pessimism of the mind, optimism of the will." Against the long duration of colonial reification and fragmentation fostered by metropolitan High Culture, virtually the "prehistory" of people of colour, "Third-World" activists inspired by Fanon, Mao, Ché Guevara, Malcolm X, and others, have mounted offensives against the Orientalizing will-to-power of the Western Self. One can cite here Aimé Césaire's eloquent *Discourse on Colonialism*;

the *testimonios* of Rigoberta Menchu and other indigenous witnesses from Puerto Rico (still a US territorial possession) and from the "internal colonies" of "La Raza," various Native American nations, Pacific Islanders, and other racialized "minorities" within the settler polities of North America; *Song of Ariran*, the magnificent allegory of a revolutionary coming-of-age by the Korean Kim San; and film-texts from the Philippines such as *The Perfumed Nightmare* by Kidlat Tahimik and *Orapronobis* by Lino Brocka, not to mention the rich exemplary achievement of Cuban cinema.

In a revisionary move in the early 1980s, I proposed that national allegories composed in the midst of authoritarian or military fascist regimes be designated "emergency writing," after Walter Benjamin's ever-timely exhortation:

> The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency. (257)

Thus, instead of the rubrics "postcolonial" or "subaltern," the resonance of "emergency" corresponds more to the structure of feeling enunciated in the works of Ngugi, Darwish, Dalton, and others in their beleaguered and besieged positions.

The rise of postcolonial textualism is symptomatic of the attenuation of "Third World" resistance in the 1980s. In contrast to the counter-canonical archive cited above, this new speculative trend inaugurated by Edward Said's pathbreaking *Orientalism* (and its sequel, *Culture and Imperialism*) focuses on one singular task: the demystifying interrogation of Eurocentric discourse. It seeks to dismantle the truth-claims of this discourse by exposing how its epistemic violence has fashioned the marginal, negative, subaltern Other. The problematic within which postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and their disciples operate is defined by what Aijaz Ahmad calls "the main cultural tropes of bourgeois humanism" (36): the exorbitation of discourse; the poststructuralist epistemology of the unstable, schizoid, and polyvocal subject; the constitution of knowledge/power by language, by *différence*, aporia, and so on

(Bhabha; Spivak). Such manoeuvres to transcend the fate of marginality bear all the stigmata of their social-historical determinations. Where is the "Other" situated in this play of Symbolic and Imaginary registers? Benita Parry has charged postcolonial deconstructionists with erasing "the voice of the native" or else limiting "native resistance to devices circumventing and interrogating colonial authority," thereby discounting the salience of "enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis" (43). Thus the "posting" of reality coincides with, if it does not actually sanction, the metaphysics of the West's infamous "civilizing mission" (see Callinicos; Dirlik).

The German critic Frank Schulze-Engler has recently explained that because Bhabha, Spivak, and others consistently fail to recognize that "it is the interaction of communicating people that constitutes the world for language," they cannot account for "subjectivity" or "agency" except in a highly instrumental or strategic sense (4). The result is "epistemological necrophilia" (5). In this carnival of shifting positionalities, amid this ludic heteroglossia inconceivable even from the standpoint of the arch-dialogist Bakhtin, the postcolonial intelligence is unable to discriminate the specific modernities found in the settler colonies (one model of a postcolonial society proposed by *The Empire Writes Back* is the United States!), the invaded/occupied domains, and assorted neo-colonies. It cannot imagine such an unthinkable event as New Zealand becoming the nation of Aotearoa (see During; Slemon). It cannot follow the Brazilian People's Party in envisaging, in the words of Party spokesman Luiz da Silva, "a new society founded on the values of liberty and social justice" (174). It cannot comprehend the commitment of Hawaiian Haunani-Kay Trask in fighting for Papahanaumoku, the Earth Mother. Could it be that these intellectuals, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. insinuates, are merely sophisticated narcissists acting out the predicament of exile and dislocation? Or are they the new heroines/avatars of an apocalyptic judgment looming in the horizon?

We in the "Third World" certainly hope for change, not for utopia but for the chance to be in control of our lives. This can happen only under conditions not of our own making, in the

shadow of "forms of life" inherited from the past. While my recent works, in particular *Reading the West/Writing the East* and *From the Masses, to the Masses*, evoke, in response to the circumstantial imperatives of the 1970s and early 1980s, a conjuncture that will not be replicated again after the demise of "actually existing socialism," I believe that the examples of Ho Chi Minh, Ngugi, Dalton, Ramirez, Turki, and many others (the rich tradition of oral performances have only been alluded to here), possess a catalyzing usefulness and relevance for present and future generations. The reason for this is that the ground or substratum of manifold experience allegorized by their art persists in the "Third World," manifest in the nightmare of exploited and alienated labour, of sexism and racist oppression, and latent in the gratifications of the postmodern Sublime. The historic agency of native actors/protagonists and the sensuous particularities of their resistance demand to be witnessed, not just represented, inscribed in that space once circumscribed by the colonial episteme and now multiply determined by global exchange, a stage where social identity has become world-historical in its constitution. It is in the context of an evolving planetary horizon of cultural politics that Neil Lazarus contends that postcolonial intellectuals disavow their comprador ventriloquism and instead try to revitalize the category of universality—nationalitarian, radical, liberationist—"from which it is possible to assume the burden of speaking for all humanity" (52).

We are finally faced, then, with the problem of discriminating among native informant, ethnographic construct, subaltern mimicry, and/or genuine historical agent of insurrectionary practice. We are in search of the collective speaking subject, a figure that refers to specific communities, variegated and no longer anonymous "identity groups," with all their incommensurable genealogies and dissonant traditions. They comprise the quanta of energy in the unsynchronized force field of the "national popular." They are not unitary or monadic subjects of a metaphysical nationalism sprung from Hegel's brain and privileging the telos of self-realization (Eagleton). They materialize in a contradictory unity of classes and groups locked in conflict but in permanent motion (which is what "dialectic" signifies), in

the uneven disarticulated sites labelled (for the sake of convenience) the "Third World." In those sites, what proves efficacious is a dialectical approach that subverts the containment strategy of idealist metaphysics. Such an approach enables Samir Amin (in *Eurocentrism*) and Eqbal Ahmad, among others, to discern the resonance of autochthonous or aboriginal subtexts in dependent milieux, and thus to hear a multiplicity of voices running against the grain. It also enables us to acknowledge the originality of the Palestinian *intifada*, its virtue as the "moral and mobilizable force of coordinated, intelligent courageous human action" (El Masri 5). This dialectical method of allegorizing the resistance of the subjugated is our antithesis/substitute for postcolonial scholasticism.

In July 1993, a gathering of Left and progressive organizations around the world known as the Sao Paolo Foro released a Declaration that makes obsolete previous UN programmes. The founding vision is enunciated in this affirmation: "We urge . . . the creation and implementation of development models which, expressing the interests and organized power of mass movements, move toward sustained and independent, environmentally balanced economic growth with equitable distribution of wealth, in the framework of strengthening democracy in all areas" (Pizarro 22). Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista party in Nicaragua counseled that, while integration of national economies is needed, "policies must be according to our own circumstances in our own countries." This is a view shared by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, leader of the Revolutionary Democratic Party of Mexico, for whom policies "must be rooted in our own country's history and culture" (22). We apprehend here not a totalizing unity but a contradictory or dialogical synthesis that heralds the advent of a new epoch for the impoverished majority of our planet. We are just beginning to witness the emergence of "Third World" peoples as historic agents in the shaping of their own ethnic, racial, and national histories salvaged from the hubris of Manichean politics and the specular abyss of *différence*. Amid the revolt in the hinterlands, metropolitan elites, with their monopoly of knowledge and apparatuses of ideological hegemony, continue to uphold and impose their supremacy over a

planet where exchange-value and the commodification of everything still govern our sensibilities, stultify our imagination, and limit the pleasure of use-values in our everyday lives.

Historical materialism affords us insight into the present crisis of revolutionary movements in the "Third World." Changes there will come from a convergence of popular initiatives, the mediating force of the indigenous intellectuals (in the large sense defined by Gramsci) both traditional and organic, and the solidarity of progressive forces across nation-state, linguistic, and religious/ethnic borderlines. This is perhaps the moment to suggest how the absence of a democratizing impulse in mainstream development thought (soon to be absorbed in the new discipline of Cultural Studies), a characteristic of the ideology of competitive accumulation in the global marketplace, can be traced to two foundations of capitalism as a world-system that Immanuel Wallerstein denominates as racism and universalism (75-93). While racism functions as a world-wide mechanism to control the direct producers by hierarchical and differential distribution of wealth (see also Sivanandan), universalism proclaims truth (in the mind of the ascendant European bourgeoisie) to inhere in technical and instrumental rationality, hence the slogan of progress and modernization justifying the predatory effects of Western cultural imperialism. Opposing technocratic modernization sponsored by transnational conglomerates are diverse nationalisms, ethnic revivals, and a diverse coalition of communities and regions bound to be sacrificed in the name of free enterprise and consumer satisfaction. What is called for in any democratizing mandate, in any counter-hegemonic project today, is critical anatomy or diagnosis of the contemporary resurgence of ethnically based or religion-oriented nationalisms and, in particular, of sharp racial antagonisms overdetermined by *ressentiment*, unaddressed grievances, and assorted libidinal investments, which are currently re-negotiating the boundaries of First-World/"Third-World" transactions.

The revolutionary power of native agency absent in post-colonial discourse may be encountered in the current trans-valuation of traditional beliefs and archaic practices. From the

perspective of liberation theology (as enunciated particularly by Asian and Latin American activists), the radically democratic aspiration of people of colour in both metropolis and periphery is in essence a struggle for liberation, a process of self-empowerment. This endeavour problematizes the construction of subaltern agents in neo-colonial society and releases social energies otherwise channelled into profit-making and other wasteful pursuits. This process of transition involves difficult choices, antinomies, zigzags and detours, vexing ambiguities and paradoxes (Fagen). Refusing to be seduced by "the built-in ethnocentricism and structural paternalism," as Goulet puts it, of the Eurocentric North, the struggling, impoverished masses will have to choose either a social organization that values efficiency and social control, or one that values social justice and "the creation of a new man" (Goulet 55). While the rhetoric of that statement is oppositional, disjunctive, and even utopian, the emancipatory thrust of grass-roots organizing among workers and peasants in many developing countries is unequivocal. Meanwhile, in the industrialized nations, fetishisms both of technology and of untamed nature (advocated by some ecology groups) rule out the attainment of social justice and the shaping of new alternative forms of life, collective goals that Raymond Williams foresees as the real challenge of the twenty-first century (175-217). The spirit of national-popular liberation celebrated by "Third World" allegories encompasses both order and freedom, discipline and social justice. What is at stake in this initiative of reconceptualizing popular agency and foregrounding the transgressive potential of the national-popular imagination? Precisely the answer to the questions introduced earlier: Growth for whom? Progress for what?

The People's Development Agenda (1990), drawn up by the Council for People's Development in the Philippines, sums up the lessons of half a century of mass struggles for popular democracy and national liberation. It also presents an alternative to the chauvinist eitism of Western planners and advisers. "Development," according to the *Agenda*,

> refers to the struggle to advance the socioeconomic rights of the poor majority, to strengthen their capacity to gain control of production

> resources, to improve their capability to meet basic needs, and to create the means towards their sustained development. It is an integral part of the process of transferring political and socioeconomic power from the elite to the majority who are poor. (3-4)

This Filipino desideratum of "democratic participation of the people in development processes" echoes the sentiment of "Third World" self-determination crystallized in "The Pastoral Letter from the Third World," issued by 15 Latin American bishops headed by Dom Helder Camara in 1968. It takes up the message of the Cocoyoc (Mexico) Declaration formulated in 1974 by the participants of the Symposium organized by UNCTAD and UNPE (United Programs for the Environment) on "Models of Resources Utilization: A Strategy for the Environment and Development." The Cocoyoc declaration affirms the primacy of self-reliance even as it valorizes the solidarity of peoples: "reliance on the capacity of people themselves to invent and generate new resources and techniques . . . to take a measure of command over the economy, and to generate their own way of life" (24). It upholds production for equitable use, not for profit or power, to satisfy basic human needs, which include self-fulfillment, participation, togetherness, conviviality. It also calls for affirmation of the first principle of human dignity, "namely that human beings as well as their culture need to be treated by others with due respect, for their own sakes and on their own terms" (25). Surpassing the demand for formal civil rights, this principle of reciprocity/integrity rejects outright the canonical methodology of technocratic development and assigns priority to the task of preserving and enriching indigenous, national/popular culture as "an integral whole of accumulated resources, both material and non-material, which they [the Calibans of transnational capital] utilize, transform and transmit in order to satisfy their needs, assert their identity and give meaning to their lives" (Mattelart 25).

A decade after the UN call for a New International Economic Order, Samir Amin reprised the major contradiction in the world-system arena: "between the pressures of globalization (or 'transnationalization') imposed by the predominance of capital, and the aspirations of working classes, peoples and nations for some autonomous space" ("The Crisis" 2). To remedy the disar-

ticulating effects of the new "electronic revolution" resulting in drastic time-space compression (Harvey) and various forms of coercive displacements, constituencies in the "Third World" have invented an arsenal of novel techniques of resistance, transgression, and self-recovery. Unity of opposites thus gives way to antagonism and subject formation. Witness (to cite only the most well-known instances) the 1986 "people power" insurrection in the Philippines, the student rebellions in South Korea, the revival of revolutionary opposition in Brazil after decades of military rule, and the inexhaustible resourcefulness of Mandela's African National Congress faced with the vicious terrorism of the apartheid state. Sparks of hope in the wasteland of the global mega-mall? Perhaps. This intervention of new historical subjects —the spiritually dispossessed "hewers of wood and drawers of water" carving out a zone of nomadic, perverse energies, which then explode and circulate across the East-West ideological divide—is a protean and self-renewing movement that may bridge the gulf between North and South, between rich and poor nations, between the past and the future.

Of late, some activists in the US have put out the claim that the Brundtland UN Report of 1987 on Environment and Development, focusing on the theme of "sustainable development," can serve as a basis for a political-ethical alliance between North and South. Resource depletion, environmental injury, burgeoning human populations, oppression—surely these are urgent concerns with universal appeal. Yet, can the project of participatory democracy and self-reliance survive the "New World Order" born from a war propelled by racist exterminism and commercial greed? There are, in fact, several wars raging today in every continent; one can cite offhand those in East Timor, in Kurdistan, in the Philippines, and recently in Mexico. With the demise of Soviet and East European "socialism" as a counterbalance to the domination of the transcendental commodity and the omnipotent market, increased rivalry among the European states, the US, and Japan is bound to complicate inter-state relations, notwithstanding the establishment of free-trade linkages and respective spheres of influence. Tomorrow's scenarios will undoubtedly feature local surrogate wars, targeting recal-

citrant states such as Iran, North Korea, or Cuba. Some observers (Petras, for example) predict that the comprador-ization of Eastern Europe and the re-feudalization of other regions as a result of the weakening and fragmentation of state structures will open up new markets of cheap labour and capital. This will occur in the wake of revitalized racisms and ethnocentrisms, along with the recrudescence of sexist, chauvinist, and religious intolerance of all sorts.

What is the alternative? In a recent lecture delivered at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, Sam Noumoff, director of the Centre for Developing Area Studies at McGill University, sketched the dismal prospect of development in the "Third World": greater penetration of these societies by the transnational market's control of the production process (knowledge-intensive industries); loss of leverage with the decline of the need for raw materials; decrease of agricultural earnings due to Western protectionism; the traps of the "green revolution" and of a debt that, administered by the IMF/World Bank, prevents indigenous capital formation; export-led growth ensuring permanent dependency through import of capital-intensive technology; the rule of comparative advantage freezing the "Third World" in a dual economy; and so on. Noumoff suggested several countermeasures, including regional co-operation in research to break the technological monopoly of the North; integrated training in joint ventures to break the marketing monopoly of multinational corporations; and internal diffusion of technology throughout society.

In retrospect, Noumoff's proposal evokes the ideal of self-reliance affirmed by the 1974 Cocoyoc Declaration, the theme of empowerment in the Filipino *People's Development Agenda*, and the prophetic passion of the Latin American theology of liberation:

> One must institute a program which uses as a measure of development the most deprived in the society. The measure of a developed society is not how the best live; the measure of a society is what is the state of the poorest person, and one must start there. . . . It is through internal strength and empowerment at the local level that self-sustained development will occur which will be the basis of the prosperity of this country [Nepal]. (8-9)

Only in that way, I think, will the antinomy of postcolonial democracy and capitalist modernization inscribed in the history of the world system be transmuted by those whom Fanon designated as "the wretched of the earth" into the protracted process of liberation and empowerment of the majority—workers, women, peasants, the poor in general—that will also guarantee the preservation of the earth's biosphere. Against the Leviathan of commodification marching on the ruins of Baghdad and the Kremlin, one can oppose the solidarity of peoples of colour, their history of creativity and resourcefulness, their heterogeneous cultures of resistance, and their commitment to the dignity and freedom of specific communities, as the best hope of humankind's survival and regeneration in the next millennium.

NOTES

[1] An article in *Newsweek* (9 September 1991), entitled "How the West Can Win the New World Order," registers this Establishment triumphalism in a mass-media style (33).

[2] To validate this thesis, one need only to consult Wlad Godzich's "Emergent Literature and the Field of Comparative Literature," an ingenious commentary on a short story by Angolan writer Manuel Rui, as part of his argument for the recognition of "emergent literature" as constitutive of the field of comparative literature.

[3] A succinct background to the problems of land reform and social inequality in the Philippines, and to the prospect of popular democracy there, may be found in Canlas, Miranda, and Putzel.

[4] For a brilliant speciment of deconstructive analysis dealing with asymmetrical North/South encounters, and also epitomizing the dialectic of an exploitative modernity and popular resistance, see Buck-Morss.

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