RETHINKING THE THIRD WORLD

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Introduction

"All that was solid melts into air."[1] We are living in an era of astonishing change. Many old structures are withering away or becoming obsolete. But what about the habits of mind and ways of thinking that originated in or corresponded to these structures? Short of hanging onto antiquated ideas or falling into a state of obscurity what intellectual options are we left with?

Our aim in this essay is to re-examine the theoretical assumptions and the political potency of one such obsolete mental construct, i.e., the "Third World." We intend to problematize the conventional discourse of "Third Worldism"[2] and its revered concepts of "state," "nation," and "nationalism."[3] We would like to (1) call into question the analytic relevance, normative significance, and political connotations embedded within the discourse of "Third Worldism"; and (2) propose that the privileged position of this discourse in the political lexicon of many Western and non-Western academics leads to the stereotyping of the cultures and the peoples of non-industrialized societies by entrusting their representation to "their political states."[4]

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[1] Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (London: Verso, 1982).

[2] "Third Worldism" has been defined as "the glorification and celebration of any phenomenon/movement regarding the 'Third World' that appears to challenge the West." Anila Cherian, Shan Manikkalingam and Robin Varghese, "'Third Worldism': Reactionary Politics in Progressive Disguise," Radical America, vol. 24, no. 1 (January-March 1992), p. 69.

[3] We are conscious that some readers may view our use of quotation marks and capitalization of the term "Third World" as in itself a reinforcement of a cultural stereotype. Throughout this article, however, we are using such demarcations in the hope of constantly reminding the reader that what is at stake is indeed the term's contested definition.

[4] Fredric Jameson has pointed out that the only instance in which the term "Third World" can be

used is "in an essentially descriptive sense." Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Social Text 15 (Fall 1986), p. 67. Aijaz Ahmad in an interesting critical essay makes the point that, "Jameson should know that when it comes to a knowledge of the world, there is no such thing as a category of the 'essential descriptive'; that `description' is never ideologically or cognitively neutral; that to `describe' is to specify a locus of meaning to construct an object of knowledge, and to produce a knowledge that shall be bound by that act of descriptive construction." See Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the `National Allegory'" Social Text 17 (Fall 1987), p. 6.

The Centrality of State

Two very critical linguistic symbols that give meaning to the idea of "Third Worldism" are "nation" and "state." The centrality of these concepts in the "Third Worldist" discourse signifies a deliberate attempt to privilege the global locale and external relations of these societies in reference to "other" nations (in this case, the "First World," the "Northern hemisphere" or the "West").

As a result, the internal dynamics, domestic realities, and critical reassessment of these countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that make up this nebulous entity called the "Third World" take a back seat to the international position and politics of these states. More important, since "nations" are recognized only as judicial entities that cannot endure by themselves, "states" become the sites in which "Third World nations" can fully achieve their legitimate and institutional recognition.

The misplaced polarities of the "Third Worldist" terminology does not end at this point. Since in the "Third Worldist" ideology the "nation" is recognized as the authentic embodiment of the peoples and cultures of these societies, it therefore becomes a given fact that "Third World" states are (or should be) treated as the institutional representatives of their respective societies. Hence the "state" is given carte blanche to represent, embody and uphold the rights and interests of the "nation."

The privileged position enjoyed by the two concepts of "nation" and "state" in the "Third Worldist" discourse have led to the marginalization of more historically critical concepts of ethnicity, class, gender, community, culture and people.[5] In a way, the "Third World" discourse

[5] We should keep in mind that "nation" and "state" in their modern sense are both relative

has played the role of the "police discourse" in its Foucauldian sense.[6] Ironically the discourse of "Third Worldism" which was supposed to articulate a more radical representation of the non-Western, non-industrialized world has instead produced an abstract and bureaucratic representation of these very societies.

Question of Representation

A hidden presumption in the idea of the "Third World" is that the interaction of these societies with the outside world (particularly the West) should be regarded as the single most important determining criteria in distinguishing them. It is further assumed that the international policies of these "states" can serve as a gauge to measure how well they represent their constituent "nations." They are perceived as progressive and anti-imperialist states worthy of the support and solidarity of progressive forces in the West. Pro-Western governments, on the other hand, are often branded as reactionary or puppet regimes that must be exposed and opposed. In other words, the peoples and cultures of the "Third World" can only be progressively represented by nationalist governments and nationalist ideologies.

Certainly, a nation's stand in opposition to imperialism is important in determining the support of progressive forces around the world. However, it is the behavior of the political state toward its citizens that should be given the primacy over its foreign policy posture. Furthermore, the official state nationalism in the "Third World" is now more than ever an ideology of

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newcomers to the political vocabulary of "Third World" societies.

[6] For a full explanation of Michel Foucault's concept of "police discourse" see: Renier Schürmann, "Modernity: The Last Epoch in A Closed History?" Independent Journal of Philosophy, vol. IV (1983), pp. 51-59.

manipulation, political control and elite domination. The belief that the international policies of a given state is a good yardstick for judging its domestic policies should also be abandoned. We argue that: (1) the primacy accorded to the state in the "Third Worldist" discourse comes at the expense of civil society; (2) domestic policies fall victim to foreign policy; and (3) rights of citizenry are too readily sacrificed in the name of upholding the principles of national sovereignty and political independence.

The catastrophic result of the aforementioned beliefs, long held by Western and non-western radicals, have been that the international politics, diplomatic posturing and anti-imperialist rhetoric of "Third World" states has been given more weight than their often abhorrent, corrupt and ruthless policies at home. As a result, officially sponsored nationalism of many populist "Third World" strongmen, dictators and military juntas have succeeded in masquerading themselves as the "authentic" and "native" voices of the "disenfranchised masses." Hence, it is not surprising that the truly genuine cultural sentiments of "Third World" masses have more often than not been overlooked or defined in relation to the officially sanctioned nationalist ideology.

It may be time to bring in other concepts, actors, and units of analysis to our discussion of the "Third World." There is no reason why critical issues such as cultural diversity, ethnic pluralism, gender equality, and individual and collective rights, are less relevant to the life of "Third World" peoples than the nationalist stand of the "Third World" regimes against the West. It is also the time to include actors other than states within the radical political discourse on the "Third World" (i.e, United Nations, governmental and non-governmental international organizations, regional organizations, human rights organization, labor union organization, etc.).

As it stands today in its capacity as a paradigmatic discourse, "Third Worldism" is impoverished and politically misleading. More important, however, it tends to marginalize, misrepresent or even ignore alternative potentials, ideas, and movements for progressive change and democratization. By according "Third World" states a central position in its analysis, "Third Worldism" manages to portray these institutions as legitimate mediators between the "outside world" and the indigenous people. This ontological error has led a considerable number of Western radicals to the equally simplistic position that "Third World" societies and people can only be represented through their states, if not exclusively identified by them.

Therefore, there is little wonder why some "Third World" elites and states promote and perpetuate the ideas and rhetoric of "Third Worldism." It enables them to monopolize the terms of discourse and reference when their citizens are deprived of the means and institutions needed to voice popular opinions. Furthermore, ideological and repressive apparats enable the state to suppress political dissidents and label nonconformist movements, parties or even thousands of ordinary citizens as undesirable, foreign lackeys, traitors, etc.[7] In short, "Third World" states are not necessarily symbols of struggle or resistance against oppression and imperial domination, which in the past has been solely identified with the West. In fact, there is little symbolic about them. It is time to look beyond both the underdog rhetoric and the pompous bravado of "Third World" politicians and elites. What needs to be examined are the social and political forces and interests which these elites and politicians represent.

To omit the question of internal political domination in discussions of any "Third World"

[7] Here we can recall the horrors inflicted by the military juntas in Argentina, Greece, Uruguay, Chile, and Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

society leads into a misconstruction of their "indigenous realities." Part of our rethinking of the "Third World" centers on the idea that we need to recognize the existence of social spaces and civic institutions outside the parameters of the state. "Civil society" might have first emerged in the West but it is no longer confined to it. We find such arguments to the effect that "civil society" cannot be used as a heuristic device in the analysis of "Third World" societies, because it is neither linguistically nor culturally grounded in these polities, to be rather naive if not outright racist.[8] Modernization theory's scenario of "benevolent dictators" who would uplift their societies by modernization, secularization, and incremental introduction of democracy has not produced too many thriving examples. Similarly, the track records of such supposedly progressive and anti-imperialist leaders as Ataturk (Turkey), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), Sukarno (Indonesia), Ayatollah Khomeini (Iran), Saddam Hussein (Iraq), Mengistu Haile-Mariam (Ethiopia), and successive generations of Chinese leaders show how autocratically and ruthlessly they acted toward their political opponents (especially radicals), ethnic minorities, women's movements, and autonomous unions.

We recognize that there may be some danger in our suggestion that the domestic affairs of any "Third World" nation-state can be a matter of concern for the global community. Imperial powers and regional forces may very well use some of the above arguments as pretexts for political meddling or even military intervention in the affairs of any given country. The pretense of protecting ethnic, religious, and human rights has served this purpose in the past and can continue to be evoked in the future. This however, should not lead us to turn a blind eye to the

[8] Ironically enough, "Third World" dictators often use these very same arguments to justify their heavy-handed policies vis-a-vis domestic opponents who object to their reign of censorship and terror.

initial problem. After all, what does it mean for the progressive forces to support an indigenous yet ruthless dictator who is confronted with a more powerful foreign adversary? Would protection of national sovereignty in any way lead to greater civil, political and social rights for the citizenry? At what cost?

To answer the above questions, one has to delve into the issues of nation-state formation, nationalism and sovereignty in the "Third World." It is to these concerns that we now turn our attention.

Nations and Nationalism

Ernest Gellner in his book, Nations and Nationalism, defines nationalism as "a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent."[9] Taking this definition as his starting point, Eric J. Hobsbawm writes: "the political duty of Ruritanian nation overrides all other public obligations, and in extreme cases (such as wars) all other obligations of whatever kind."[10] He then goes one step farther and suggests that this definition of nationalism should be put in its proper historical context:

> Nations exist not only as functions of a particular kind of territorial state or the aspiration to establish one-broadly speaking citizen state of the French Revolution- but also in the context of particular age of technological and economic development. Most students today will agree that the standard national language, spoken or written, cannot emerge as such before printing, mass literacy and

[9] Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1.

[10]. E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 9.

hence, mass schooling.[11]

Hobsbawm also makes a very interesting criticism of Gellner's theory of nationalism, which is important for our discussion:

> If I have a major criticism of Gellner's work it is that his preferred perspective of modernization from above, makes it difficult to pay adequate attention to the view from below. That view from below, i.e., the nation as seen not by governments and the spokesmen and activists of nationalist (or non-nationalist) movements, but by the ordinary persons who are the objects of their action and propaganda, is exceedingly difficult to discover.[12]

This is the theme of Hobsbawm's earlier study in which he points out that national identity is in fact an assortment of "invented traditions" engineered by political elites to control mass political mobilization during periods of rapid socioeconomic change.[13] Following this mode of reasoning, Benedict Anderson, an Anglo-Irish political scientist, has developed a more powerful theory concerning the definition of nation-ness and the genesis of nationalism.

Like Hobsbawm, Anderson argues nation-ness and nationalism are nothing more than cultural artifacts which are invented by collective imaginations. He, however, parts ways with his British colleague with a more elaborate definition of the "nation" as "an imagined political community--and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[14] He writes:

> a) "It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the

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[11]. Ibid. p. 10.

[12]. Ibid. pp. 10-11.

[13] See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[14] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1989), p. 15.

minds of each lives the image of their communion."

b) "The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations."

c) "It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm."

d) "It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[15]

Anderson maintains that the convergence of capitalism and print technology (or print-capitalism) created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, i.e., the modern nation.[16] This metamorphosis was facilitated by the erosion of the dynastic realms and religious communities of antiquity and the Middle Ages. The introduction of newspapers ("one day best sellers") in the eighteenth century, which in part led to the overthrow of Latin, the spread of Protestantism and the spread of vernacular languages, made the introduction of nationalism possible. Since then, nationalism has served as the dominant ideology of human societies and there are no prospects for its retreat anytime soon.

Anderson farther demonstrates that the political elites of the three continents that make up the "Third World" or the Southern hemisphere (Asia, Africa, Latin America) were quick to respond to the inspiring model of that invented community called the nation. In no time, nationalism had invaded the minds of "Third World" people. Its success soon became a *fait accompli*.

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[15] Ibid, pp. 15-16.

[16] Ibid, p. 49.

We believe Anderson's theoretical model can also be extended to the "Third World." The creative use of social engineering to produce an image of community, of solidarity and of identity is also at work in this even more broadened act of imagination. As Mohammed Ayoob has put it, the "Third World" is a "perceptual category."[17] Intellectual and political elites and states perceive themselves as belonging to this category based "on a *feeling* of deprivation (more at the collective psychological level than at the level of individual-material level)."[18] The "ourness" of the "Third World" can only be constructed vis-a-vis a "First World" other. For the "developmentalists" the "Third World" constitutes a distinct concept and category given the contexts (pre-colonial evolution and colonial trauma), goals, strategies and outcomes of development that these countries pursue.[19] For the "dependency school" the term collectively refers to those countries whose socio-economic existence is subject to a condition of dependency and exploitation in the hands of the metropolis.

In this context, then, "modernization" and "development" have simply become different code words for the importation of scientific-technological goods and services to the "Third World." It is thus not surprising that the infatuation of modernization and development schools with the transfer of resources to less developed governments--which often use these technologies to consolidate their shaky hold on power--has come at the expense of ignoring the cultural context, social ramifications and political aptness of the acts undertaken. An equally inadequate

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[17] Mohammed Ayoob, "The Third World in the System of States: Acute Schizophrenia or Growing Pains?" International Studies Quarterly, vol. 33, no. 1 (March 1989), p. 72.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid, p. 67.

approach has been one undertaken by many "Third World" nationalists who resort to romanticizing their local tradition in face of advancing, global modernity.[20] Their call for indigenization has often produced nothing more than archaism, fanaticism and anti-Westernism.

Let us return to the question of nation-ness. The Post World War II period witnessed the formal independence of most "Third World" nation-states. For many "Third World" leaders nationhood was the equivalent of having a flag, a national anthem, a passport, a national airline and a seat in the United Nations General Assembly. It was as if the only qualification for nation-ness was to be formally independent, sovereign actors in an artificially global political context. The former colonial powers' act of carving up new state entities had ensured that ethnic, national and territorial conflicts would flare up with almost consistent frequency. At present there are more than twenty five internal wars and civil conflicts underway in such countries as Peru, Guatemala, Liberia, Somalia, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa.

Nowhere is the fragility of new "nation-states" more evident than in the Middle East. The breakdown of the Ottoman Empire gave rise to new state structures whose first responsibility was to the new ruling elites and their colonial patrons. In cases such as Lebanon, the formation of the state preceded the formation of the nation.[21] There was more concern with creating a state structure than creating a sense of national cohesiveness. Hence, what was often forged was not

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[20] For a criticism of the futility of such an undertaking see: Bassam Tibi, The Crisis of Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific-Technological Age (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988).

[21] Richard Falk, "The Cruelty of Geopolitics: The Fate of Nation and State in the Middle East," Millennium, vol. 20, no. 3 (Winter 1991), p. 388.

so much a "nation-state" but rather a "state-nation." It is perhaps symbolic that such countries as "Kuwait, Qatar and Israel retain the word 'state' in their official name, as if their statehood was too vulnerable not to be systematically reasserted."[22] Moreover, such unbounded nations as the Armenians, the Kurds and the Palestinians were to experience first hand the cruelties of nation-building.

The fascination of International Relations scholars with the state centric model of world politics has meant that the state/society complex has failed to draw their attention as the basic entity of international relations.[23] While these theorists have gone to great lengths to explain the behavior of particular states in the international arena, the actions of these states vis-a-vis their own society and citizenry has gone largely unnoticed. This negligence is most conspicuous in regard to "Third World" states. Why? After all, we have known for a long time that states are more than just territorial entities. Furthermore, we have had ample warning that the classic dividing lines between foreign and domestic policies are becoming increasingly irrelevant. So why the neglect? We believe the answer lies in the nature of state formations in these societies.

Sovereignty and State-Formation in the "Third World"

World War II is generally credited with having ushered in a new era in human history. High on the list of achievements was the condemnation of the legacy of colonialism, the defeat of fascism as an ideology offensive to humanity, and the demonstration of the fact that international cooperation was not only desirable but also possible. This last achievement, however, should

[22] Ghassan Salame, "Introduction," in Ghassan Salame (ed.), The Foundations of the Arab State (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 2.

[23] For a criticism of this negligence see: R. W. Cox, "Social Forces, State and World Orders," Millennium vol. 10, no. 2 (1981), pp. 126-155.

remind us that Western leaders and governments had not abandoned their Hegelian vision of the march of civilization.[24] History was still perceived as a uniform and ascending process during which the former colonies were to be helped to become more like "us." Of course, this successive approximation toward civilization could no longer be carried out through direct colonial rule. Instead, an international civil society had to be formed. The formation of the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monitory Fund, non-governmental organizations, and international regimes were undertaken with the aim of training a cadre of international civil service officials.

Drawing on their own history, Western governments adopted the Westphalian model of sovereign nation-states as the fundamental organizing principle of international life. They chose a metaphysical idea known as "sovereignty" to be the core constitutive element of this new world system. As perhaps the single most powerful concept in international relations and international law, "sovereignty" meant the recognition of existing state boundaries and the acceptance of the principle of non-interference in other states' domestic affairs. Hence, sovereignty became the criteria for nation-ness.

But did anyone really expect that by granting juridical independence to many artificially created entities (i.e., Indonesia, Mauritania, Yugoslavia) their inhabitants would soon develop a sense of identity and nationhood? Furthermore, even in the case of those self-generated "Third World" states, did any enlightened observer foster the illusion that these mostly poor states would be on equal footing with their wealthy Western counterparts? Obviously, the answer to both

[24] For one such view see: Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

questions is no.

The diversity of contending nationalities in such countries as Afghanistan, Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Nigeria, Turkey, and Yugoslavia still plagues us to this very day (to say nothing of the recently independent Soviet republics). In much of Africa as well as such countries as Indonesia, India, and Israel the novelty of state building processes has not yet worn itself out.[25] In a highly theoretical and empirically-rich new book Robert H. Jackson has aptly labeled many "Third World" states as "quasi-states," meaning states that are juridically independent but economically non-viable and administratively ineffective.[26] He maintains that sovereignty in much of the "Third World" is sustained by an egalitarian and welfarist international normative regime. This regime allows the unstable and fearful despots who rule these quasi-states to wage war on their own subjects under cover of international norms.[27] Hence, even on those selective (and we mean selective) occasions when the international society decides to show its support for the causes of freedom, liberty and human rights in the "Third World," the issue of not infringing on these state's right of sovereignty still presents itself.[28]

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[25] One has to bear in mind the newness of the state building process in the "Third World" as demonstrated by the fact that more than fifty percent of the world's independent countries gained their independence over the last three decades.

[26] Robert H. Jackson, Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[27] Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, Duvalier in Haiti, Jean-Bedel Bokasssa in Central African Republic, Idi Amin in Uganda, General Pinochet in Chile, Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Zia al-Haq in Pakistan are perhaps the more notorious examples of these types of leaders.

[28] The case of the recent Gulf War is a classic illustration of this problem. When Iraq violated the sovereignty of its neighbor, Kuwait, the Western world caused an uproar. However, when Saddam Hussein pursued a systematic policy of persecuting the Kurds and the Shi`ites within his own borders the world community stayed in the sidelines in the name of honoring Iraq's sovereignty

As Max Weber and his disciples in the field of International Relations have informed us, states differ from one another not only on the basis of their power stature in global politics but also on the degree of their "statehood" vis-a-vis domestic society. Hence, it is of vital importance to distinguish between weak and strong states. Barry Buzan makes this distinction in the following manner: "When the idea and institutions of a state are both weak, then that state is in a very real sense less of a state than one in which the idea and institutions are strong."[29] He further points out that "strength as a state neither depends on, nor correlates with power. Weak powers, like Austria, the Netherlands, Norway and Singapore are all strong states, while quite substantial powers, like Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Iran and Pakistan, are all rather weak as states."[30]

Hence, weak states can be distinguished as those in which the idea and institutions of a state are contested to the point of violence, and that there is accordingly a "high level of concern with domestically generated threats to the security of government."[31] As a result of their narrow social and political base of support, these governments fail to create strong ideological and administrative links between state and society. These dominant, yet non-hegemonic states, thus become highly vulnerable to a crisis of legitimacy.

To maintain their hold on power, these "leaders" rely more and more on the army and security apparatuses and thus make their state highly vulnerable to a crisis of legitimacy. Once

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and "protecting" its territorial integrity.

[29] Barry Buzan, People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 66.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid, p. 67.

again, the Middle East provides a classical example. As one expert on the region has recently demonstrated, the ratio of armed forces to the total population has risen dramatically in such countries as Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.[32] Thanks to petro-dollars, foreign aid, and increasing technologies of mass control, these states have managed to subdue their citizens. This condition has led Richard Falk, a long-time human rights activist, to write rather despairingly "[In the Middle East] no nation-state has been able to establish and maintain a constitutional democracy with a strong record of respect for law and human rights."[33]

One way in which Middle Eastern quasi-states have dealt with internal problems has been to foment crisis at the regional or international levels. Such regional conflicts as those between the Arabs and the Israelis (in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1987), Iran and Iraq, Iraq and Kuwait, and Turkey and Cyprus are cases in point.[34] Similarly, Gamal Abdel Nasser's three circle theory of Arab, Muslim and "Third World" unity and Ayatollah Khomeini's pan-Islamism can be regarded as attempts to push the frontiers of identity, legitimacy and sovereignty beyond the constricted boundaries of a single nation-state.

The cumulative result of these processes in the Middle East in particular and the "Third World" in general, to borrow from Marx's famous maxim, has been the "fetishism" of the state. Just like the worker who neglects the fact that it is (s)he who bestows value upon commodities,

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[32] See F. Gregory Gause, III, "Sovereignty, Statecraft and Stability in the Middle East," Journal of International Affairs (Winter 1992), pp. 441-469.

[33] Richard Falk, op cit, p. 383.

[34] For more on the nature of "Third World" conflicts see: Mohammad-Reza Djalili, "Analysis of Third World Conflicts: Outline of a Typology," International Social Science Journal 127 (February 1991), pp. 163-172.

people in the "Third World" are led to forget the truth that the state's raison d'etre was to serve them and not the other way around.

Even for the revolutionary radicals who have agitated against dependent, weak and corrupt leaders ruling many "Third World" quasi-states, the solution has rarely ever been anything other than strengthening the state. Their imagination has been captive to what Georg Lukacs has referred to as "reification," in this case the reification of the idea of the state.[35] Thus, many "Third World" radicals have mistaken statism for anti-imperialism. For them, nationalism has been synonymous with authoritarianism, militant homogenization and dissolution of civil society.

The "Third World" As An Alternative

With the onset of political de-colonization in much of Asia and Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, nationalism became the primary ideological formation as well as the mobilizing political force of the era.[36] "Third World" nationalist thinkers (Chinua Achebe, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, C.L.R. James), artists (Carlos Fuentes, Pablo Neruda, L. S. Senghore), leaders (Ben Bella, Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Jawaharlal Nehru, Kwame Nkrumah), and movements (Algeria, Cuba, Guinea, Palestine) came to dominate the terms of discourse, narrative, imagery, and rhetoric, as well as the aspirations, of millions of their own people. Their calls for political independence, cultural authenticity and knowledge indigenization were all a response to the reprehensible colonial vicissitudes of the not-so-distant past. To compensate for

[35] Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness (London: Merlin Press, 1974).

[36] See Elie Kedourie (ed), Nationalism in Asia and Africa (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970).

their previous condition of "subalternity,"[37] they embarked on a practice of reconstituting the self.[38] The designation "Third World" provided an appropriate venue for this task. Those who had embarked on a journey to seek a more "authentic" identity could now form new institutes, journals, conferences and coalitions which would empower them to nurture the cause of unity. It is in this type of atmosphere that the Bandung Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Arab League, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Organization of Islamic States and Organization of African States were formed.

The success of "Third Worldist" movements in challenging and in many cases defeating colonialist and imperialist powers assured them the legitimate support and sympathy of progressive forces throughout the world. Unfortunately, however, almost all these independent revolutionary states failed to lay the foundations for a democratic and egalitarian society. Instead they soon degenerated into autocratic, corrupt and economically non-viable states ruled by a new class of elites who had ample appetite for monopolizing the political power.

We are convinced that the whole paradigm of "Third Worldism" has now become obsolete. The bounds of solidarity that emerged among "Third World" states as a result of their shared experience of colonial subjugation, liminality and peripheral existence in world affairs has now been drastically weakened. The fact that we no longer live in the era of colonialism, means that Western imperial hegemony, in large measures, is taking different forms than the old

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[37] Following Gramsci, Fredric Jameson has come to define "subalternity" as "the feelings of mental inferiority and habits of subservience and obedience which necessarily and structurally develop in situations of domination." Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," p. 76.

[38] See Homi K. Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition," in Remaking History, eds. Barbara Kruger and Phil Mariani (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989): 137.

gunboat diplomacy. In other words, with the penetration of capitalism and the culture of modernity to all parts of the "Third World," imperial hegemony manifests itself more through economic means and cultural artifacts than through military occupation and physical intimidation.[39] This reversion to more subtle forms of hegemony has brought along new "Third Worldist" movements which intend to fight Western "cultural imperialism" through challenging some of its most axiomatic doctrines such as secularism, humanism and modernism. The rise of political and socio-religious movements, particularly in the Middle East, signifies an important shift in the discursive repertoire of these movements as marked by an ever increasing hostility toward Western political and cultural domination.

By looking at the history of the non-Western world as the mirror image of Western colonialist and imperialist experience, the discourse of "Third Worldism" has managed to perpetuate a rather monolithic and mythological view of the "Third World" self and the Western Other. By refusing to let go of the symbolism, institutional paraphernalia and battle cries of the anti-colonial era, "Third World" nationalist leaders and intellectual elites would like to wrap themselves in the mantle of the glorious past during which all social classes shared a common belief in unity as a way of getting rid of the "foreign masters." This rather potent and convenient means of mass mobilization, however, can lead to a confusing reading of history as people are discouraged from transcending their colonial agony and reflecting on their history, which often goes far beyond the bounds of the last few centuries.

In short, we think that the idea of the "Third World" has exhausted its once powerful

[39] This is perhaps more true in light of recent events leading to the disappearance of the Soviet Block from the world's geo-political scene.

potential. It is no longer a solid and progressive spring board for resistance and struggle against colonialist and imperialist subjugation. More significantly, it has little to offer in the way of a political or cultural alternative to the already existing realities of the Western world. The finest prototype of the "Third World" experience (i.e., China, Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria and Nicaragua) have all in one way or another become discredited. Indeed, for the proponents of "Third Worldism," all that was solid has melted into air.