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STIRRING UP THE JAMESON/AHMAD DEBATE: "NATIONAL ALLEGORY" THROUGH A CULTURAL REALIST PERSPECTIVE

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Esta Dissertação foi julgada adequada para obtenção do Título de "Mestre em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários", e aprovada em sua forma final pelo Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

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I dedicate this step to my mother Lúcia,
who has walked with me until here;
and to my love Maria Luíza,
with whom I intend to walk from here on out.

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Had we but world enough, and time...

I'd be delighted to acknowledge and thank in the depth and extent proper to match all that I have received from those around me in my life and in the course of this research.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;[1]*...*

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[1] From the poem "To his Coy Mistress", by Andrew Marvell.

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PREFACE

This research has a history of its own that precedes my acceptance as a researcher of the PGI programme. My purpose with this preface is to convey a sense of this history in the hope that this contributes in situating to my readers the motivations – or determining factors – that made me seek this "road less travelled by."

My father (*in memoriam*) was a professor at this University and he introduced me to left politics from an early age. Always driven by a critical thrust that was based on a call for ethical engagement with the world, he used to talk about science as an emancipatory, knowledge construction activity. This way, he taught me to pursue critical knowledge. As I've mentioned, he was a leftist militant, so he used to passionately defend that the primary role of our national intellectuals was to resist the political and cultural dominance of the US. My father was an anti-(US)imperialist. Then I joined the enemy and took up the English undergraduate course at this University.

Throughout my undergraduate course I felt quite motivated towards the study of literature and, in special, of literary theory. I found some of our professors' classes–such as José Roberto O'Shea's, Sérgio Bellei's, and Eliana Ávila's–greatly inspiring, and I used to complain we didn't have as many literature classes as we had linguistics and language classes (and no offense meant to those whose hearts beat harder with those disciplines, but I still defend that our undergraduate curriculum could be greatly improved were we to add some more classes on literature and on literary theory, after all, literature is language at its best). I was lucky enough though to become a member of PET-Letras, under the advisory of professor Fábio Luis Lopes da Silva. As a member of that group I had the opportunity of getting more involved with the university and it was with that group and with Professor Fábio that I started seriously reflecting on what it meant to study in a public university situated at the world's periphery.

In 2007 I took part of our university's exchange programme with the University of Essex. There I was fascinated by professor's David Musselwhite (*in memoriam*) lectures in the Enlightenment and Approaches to Text courses, which made me grow even fonder of theoretical studies in literature.

Having experienced all of this, when I concluded my undergraduate course in the end of 2009 I felt this urge to seek further study. That's why, in the second term of 2010, I decided to audit a graduate class professor Eliana Ávila was teaching – Caribbean Cultural

Studies. It was a blow, a good one. It was in that class that I first got in touch with the Jameson/Ahmad debate, and it immediately took hold of me, after all, I saw in this debate a perfect staging of a dissatisfaction that had long been provoking me: is there no hope for theory? Has theory utterly lost its worth and function? Isn't it possible, even in a postmodern globalized world, to construe theory towards transformative, emancipatory endeavours? At the same time, I felt the strangeness of being the subject of someone's theorisation, I shared of Ahmad's outrage and resentment: "how dare you theorise me?" "how dare you treat me like your civilizational Other?"

The issue was so enticing to me, so closely related to reflections, queries, and dissatisfactions that had long been intriguing me that I decided to dedicate to it a couple of years, and I was happy enough to have my project accepted by the PGI Programme, under the advisory of professor Eliana Ávila.

All of this means that there is a lot of my father—professor Airody Pinheiro dos Santos—in this. And there is also a lot of the professors I have mentioned in this accomplishment: Eliana Ávila; Fábio Lopes; Bellei; O'Shea; Musselwhite; and others. This thesis is the result of their teachings combined with my disquiet.

ABSTRACT

The main argument of this thesis is that the Jameson/Ahmad debate—articulated mainly around the universalism/particularism discussion—can be read from a cultural realist perspective, and that such a reading provides new possibilities for political engagement in postmodernism. The responses to the Jameson/Ahmad debate throughout the years have developed from an initial resistance to Jameson's conceptions—as they were seen as rigid concepts that endorsed macroconstructs—progressively towards an opening up for their polysemic potential, in particular in regards to the concept of "national allegory." With this research I seek to advance the debate a step further in this direction, suggesting that it is both possible and proficuous to read the debate through cultural realist lens, that is, considering the reality effects of macroconstructs. Such employment of the macroconstruct, then, far from endorsing it, constitutes the possibility for a political engagement with these reality effects.

Keywords: "national allegory," cultural realism, Fredric Jameson, Aijaz Ahmad.

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RESUMO

O argumento central desta dissertação é de que o debate entre Jameson e Ahmad – articulado principalmente em termos da discussão universalismo/particularismo – pode ser lido a partir da perspectiva do realismo cultural, e que essa leitura proposta permite que emerjam novas possibilidades de engajamento político no pós-modernismo. As reações ao debate entre Jameson e Ahmad ao longo dos anos partiram de uma resistência inicial à proposta de Jameson – conforme seus conceitos foram inicialmente interpretados como estruturas rígidas que endossavam macroconstruções – progressivamente em direção a uma abertura para uma potencial polissemia desses conceitos, em especial em relação ao conceito de "alegoria nacional". Busco com esta pesquisa levar o debate um passo adiante nessa direção, sugerindo tanto a possibilidade quanto a proficuidade de se ler o debate através da perspectiva do realismo cultural, isso é, considerando os efeitos reais das macroconstruções. O emprego das macroconstruções, portanto, longe de as endossarem, constitui a possibilidade de um engajamento político com seus efeitos reais.

Palavras-chave: "alegoria nacional"; realismo cultural; Fredric Jameson; Aijaz Ahmad

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1 – CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The debate that was started by Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad on the pages of the periodical *Social Text* in the years of 1986 and 1987 is open to this date and has resonated in the works of other critics and theorists, having also been developed further in the later works of both theorists aforementioned. The controversy was incited mainly by Jameson´s statement that "all third-world texts are necessarily [. . .] to be read as [. . .] national allegories[2]" (69). Jameson's argument was countered by Ahmad, on the grounds that it incurred in a rhetoric of otherness, something that is, according to Ahmad, incongruous with the attitude of a theorist of Marxist inclination. As Ahmad puts it, Jameson "haste[s] in totalising historical phenomena in terms of binary oppositions" and, in doing so, he overlooks what Marxism sees as a fundamental movement in society: the existence of forces contrary to the hegemony (8). The critic points out that such a problematic method in Jameson's text renders a limiting perspective on Third World literatures. Ahmad defends that texts are produced by irreducible ideological conditions and that, although it is possible to build generalisations, these have to be put into perspective, since texts cannot be easily said to fit one category or another (23). Since then, a number of theorists have joined either—or even alternative—side(s) of the debate in a prolific discussion on the interrelationship of a literary piece and its cultural environment.

This research concerns postcolonial literary theory and literature, since the topic of the debate is the literatures of Third World countries in relation to—and as compounding elements of—their nations. My perspective on the theoretical propositions here approached is concerned with the effects of colonialism in the so-called Third World countries.

1.1 – A remark on the concept of the "Third World"

At this point, a remark on the concept of "Third World" becomes necessary and has to be advanced. This remark imposes itself due to the

[2] Considering the perspective of cultural materialism, which sees textual meanings necessarily materialized through the discursive constructions that constitute them, my aim is to develop a close reading of Jameson's argument in the light of the very controversy to which it led (in other words, through the very debate which it engendered and in which it is now imbricated). This is why my introduction to his argument shall be limited to quoting the statement which incited the controversy.

significance and pertinence of much of the criticism that has been raised against the term, which requires a forward clarification of why and how this term is to be deployed throughout this research. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, refers critically to the origin of the expression, denouncing the intellectual failure in raising an episteme suitable to the "third option" that was being brought up in global politics after WW2:

> The initial attempt in the Bandung Conference (1955) to establish a third way—neither with the Eastern nor within the Western bloc—in the world system, in response to the seemingly new world order established after the Second World War, was not accompanied by a commensurate intellectual effort. The only idioms deployed for the nurturing of this nascent Third World in the cultural field belonged then to positions emerging from resistance within the supposedly "old" world order—antiimperialism and/or nationalism. (*Reader* 1996: 280)

Besides the problematic origin of the term "Third World", its use has also performed what KumKum Sangari and others have argued to be a reductive, homogenizing effect on the ways communities tagged with this term are envisioned. Paraphrasing Sangari, Eliana Ávila underlines that "the indiscriminate use of the term has performed the effect of homogenizing specific places and thus containing their peoples within discursively erected boundaries" (119)[3]. Thus, acknowledging the problematic implications of the expression "Third World," I opt to use it critically, as a means of exploring and exposing such a mechanism[4].

1.2 – Review of literature

I have mentioned that throughout the twenty-seven years that separate us from Jameson's polemic article and Ahmad's response to it, much literature has been written on the subject. I will briefly present some of the most relevant contributions to the debate, following a chronological principle of organisation, since I am especially concerned with tracing the developments of the debate.

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[3] It should be noted that Ahmad's critique of Jameson's article follows in these same lines, as he points out that Jameson reduces the variability and value of the Third World literatures in order to provide a homogenous image of them.

[4] For other studies of the concept of "Third World," see Remi Bachand, and Robert Young.

Jean Franco, a British professor who pioneered Latin American cultural studies in the UK, writing in 1989, recognises that the novel has been appropriated by the intelligentsia to work out imaginary solutions to real problems faced by new national formations, but she does not agree that “national allegory” characterises Third World literature “for not only is ‘the nation’ a complex and much contested term but in recent Latin American criticism, it is no longer the inevitable framework for either political or cultural projects” (204). Besides that, as the author highlights, no particular genre—let alone the “national allegory”—has been privileged in Latin America, which is actually characterised by a hybridisation of genres. Considering these premises, Franco seeks to investigate the pertinence of the term “national allegory” and whether it “can be any longer usefully applied to a literature in which nation is either a contested term or something like the Cheshire cat’s grin—a mere reminder of a vanished body” (205).

Franco argues that, although the national project has been problematized and discussed in Latin American literatures, it has done so in more complex ways than the concept of “national allegory” can account for. The very feeling of an absence of a reality corresponding to the concept of a nation pervaded these literatures, expressing the general sense that “[i]ndividual and collective identity, social and family life were like shells from which life had disappeared. . . . What they enact is the unfinished and impossible project of the modernizing state” (205). Through a rich reading of various Latin American texts, Franco shows that “national allegory fails to describe adequately the simultaneous dissolution of the idea of the nation and the continuous persistence of national concerns” (211) pointing that the inscription of these literatures under either the concept of the “national allegory” or as postmodern is insufficient to deal with their complexities, which demand “readings informed by cultural and political history” (209).

Indeed the cases of Latin America independencies, and, as a consequence, of our literatures, are different from those on which Jameson builds his theory, as we can see in this passage

> My examples below, then, will be primarily African and Chinese; however, the special case of Latin America must be noted in passing. Latin America offers yet a third kind of development-one involving an even earlier destruction of imperial systems now projected by collective memory back into the archaic or tribal. Thus the earlier nominal conquests of independence open

> them at once to a kind of indirect economic penetration and control-something Africa and Asia will come to experience only more recently with decolonization in the 1950s and 60s. (Jameson, 69)

The complexity to which Franco makes reference, therefore, is related to the processes that led to the Latin American earlier nominal conquests, implicating an insertion of capitalism different from that which Jameson deploys in his general theory. Considering that, as argued by Jameson, the scope of the Latin American and African national independences aimed exclusively at the national autonomy, which entails the problem vastly commented on that no new consciousness is developed if independence is given rather than taken, it is only logical that this will reflect in the literatures from these regions. Although Jameson cannot be faulted for having overlooked this difference, as he indeed mentioned it, Franco's observation that Jameson's generalising theory failed at describing[5] Latin American literatures constituted a sharp and pertinent criticism to Jameson.

Michael Sprinker, an American scholar and left-wing activist, writing in 1993, welcomes Jameson's initiative of constructing "the bases upon which to incorporate the study of nonmetropolitan literatures and cultures into comparative literature, literatures and cultures that hitherto have generally been neglected in the West" (4). Sprinker contends that Jameson's response to this issue is to establish a connection between "Third World literature and national allegory" (4), but this response, Sprinker argues, is quite problematical. Although the three authors Sprinker investigates—Fredric Jameson, Aijaz Ahmad, and Edward Said—share a conviction that "over the past two centuries in world history, the existence and trajectory of virtually every nationalism have been significantly inflected by European imperialism's global system" (4), Jameson's proposal is especially problematic due to four reasons listed by Sprinker (some of which in accordance to Ahmad's response): first, the characterization of First World culture as being "ineluctably postmodern" in conflation with the assertion that its political valence belongs to the realm of the unconscious is reductive; second, several films contradict the premise that First World allegorical

[5] At this early point of the development of the debate, the focus was on the ontological dynamic entailed in Jameson's formulation. As I show in this research, two other dynamics—a hermeneutical and a metacritical one—are later foregrounded. At this point, however, it is important to state the terms in which the debate was first installed since my aim here is to trace its development from the beginning.

forms are “so utterly unconscious of their potential transcoding into political readings”; third, Sprinker defends that “what Jameson identifies as older, residual ideologies governing Third World cultures [. . .] are far from being completely effaced in First World cultural practices and norms”; finally, materialism cannot be ascribed as the “natural form of ‘situational consciousness’” exclusive of the Third World, since it is also experienced among the poor and the homeless people of the First World as well (6-8).

Having pointed out these problems in Jameson’s text, Sprinker starts analysing the possible consequences of Ahmad’s critique to contemporary cultural studies, based on three levels: “(1) the level of political and social theory (the three worlds), (2) the level of empirical cultural description (postmodernism vs. national allegory), (3) the level of cultural politics and ideology” (9). Sprinker then brings Said and his notion of *orientalism* into the discussion, criticising also Ahmad’s opposition to this theory in the latter’s overall attempt to criticise the Three Worlds theory.

Imre Szeman, a Canadian professor of Cultural Studies, writing in 2001, corroborates Jameson's point-of-view, reinterpreting it in an attempt to free it from misreadings[6], arguing that the concept of "national allegory" introduces a "model for a properly materialist approach to postcolonial texts and contexts" (804). Szeman believes Jameson's claim is that postcolonial texts "necessarily and directly [speak] to and of the overdetermined situation of the struggles for national independence and cultural autonomy in the context of imperialism and its aftermath" (808). That would indeed result, according to Szeman, in a different relation between the public and the private spheres, which would give way to what Jameson terms "national allegory," that is, a concept that "points to the ways in which the

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[6] Although “misreading” may impart the notion (which I am fighting to counter with this research) that there is only one “right” reading, one that reaches an essential truth of the text, Szeman makes a point that such “misreadings” were intentional and instrumental in the definition, by antagonism, of method in postcolonial studies, which were nascent upon Jameson’s publication. “In hindsight, it appears that almost without exception critics of Jameson’s essay have *willfully misread it*. [. . .] As one of the first responses to postcolonial literary studies from a major critic outside the field, the publication of Jameson’s essay in the mid-1980s provided postcolonial critics with a flashpoint around which to articulate general criticisms of dominant views of North-South relations expressed within even supposedly critical political theories (like Marxism). It also provided a self-definitional opportunity for postcolonial studies. [. . .] While criticisms of Jameson’s views may have thus been useful or productive in their own way, they have nevertheless tended to obscure and misconstrue a sophisticated attempt to make sense of the relationship of literature to politics in the decolonizing world” (804; emphasis added).

psychological points to the political and the trauma of subalternity finds itself 'projected outwards' (allegorically) into the 'cultural'" (810). Szeman's reading of Jameson's concept of "national allegory" as the cultural projection of psychological and political dimensions implies a cultural realist approach, which is further discussed on chapter II.

Julie McGonegal, a Canadian researcher, writing in 2005, identifies the postcolonial "overall and at times self-contradictory distrust of totality and teleology of any kind" and the "belief that allegory is an irretrievably and essentially primitive form of narration" as the two greatest sources of criticism to Jameson's basic thesis. Regarding the first of these, McGonegal highlights the limitations that the field of postcolonial studies imposes on itself when it rejects generalisations of any sort, even of general assertions such as Jameson's, which results in "a certain guardedness against any potential incursion of Eurocentrism into its own discursive structures" (252). If this tendency (to reject all generalities) is set aside for a moment, one can look into the metacritical force of Jameson's proposition, one that considers the fact that Third World texts are always-already-read as national allegories. This condition translates the fact that the structural differences between "those parts of the world that did the colonising and those that were subjected to it" are "maintained and reproduced by a First World literary criticism that remains blithely unaware, for the most part, of the ways its own historical and social conditions impart various givens to the interpretive situation" (253).

McGonegal's understanding of Jameson's concept highlights its metacritical force, endorsing the proposition that his is a conscious attempt at self-critically dealing with the prefigured positions occupied by the First World reader of Third World texts. McGonegal notes in the exegesis of Jameson's work the recurrence of the notion of the always-already-read text, pointing out that never before had this concept been met with such virulent opposition as when it was employed to understanding the hermeneutics of Third World texts. This notion seeks to describe the process whereby one gets in touch with a text: considering the impossibility of unmediated access to the Other, this mediation is necessarily informed by an "anterior set of signs that pre-exist in the cultural realm" (254), that is, this mediation is necessarily allegorical: third-world texts are always-already-read as the representative images of their nations.

Besides that, McGonegal is careful in analysing the specific use of the term "allegory" by Jameson, dissociating it from more traditional and limiting views. Jameson's concept can only be

interpreted as limiting if this resignification of allegory is ignored. According to McGonegal, "national allegories allow for the possibility of disrupting limiting systems of reference, and they do so by introducing noncontingent and contradictory meanings that expose the breaks and gaps in colonialist logic" (261).

Margaret Hillenbrand, a British scholar specialised in Chinese cultural and literary studies, writing in 2006, analyses the history of criticism on Jameson's concept of national allegory and favours his take on the subject. According to the author, in order to comprehend Jameson's text, one must take into account his special conceptualisation of the term *allegory*: "[. . .] [Jameson's] notion of allegory as a mode that operates through fluidity, rather than fixity, of form is key [. . .]" (637). Hillenbrand sees this concept as a manifestation of postmodernity, and then investigates the presence of such a characteristic in Taiwanese postmodern literature. In the final remarks of the article, Hillenbrand mentions that it is precisely the split (postmodern) nature of *allegory* that was present in the texts she analysed:

> Indeed, what Taiwan's national allegories offer the reader is precisely this: a split mode of narrative that precludes any final, fixed, or coercive meanings but simultaneously holds out the possibility that new kinds of subjectivity can be imagined through the evocation of lost, hidden, or taboo pasts. (658)

Brian Larkin, an American anthropology professor specialised in African studies and the media, writing in 2009, revisits the Jameson/Ahmad debate in order to discuss the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and its worldwide reception. The film has suffered attacks from nationalists concerned with the image of India it projected to the world, since it depicted a miserable nation. The very existence of that concern, Larkin argues, means that cultural texts do speak for the nation, in the line of Jameson's argumentation. It was this sort of concern that—in reaction to the worldwide success of an earlier film, *Pather Panchali* (1955), which also exhibited a miserable India—motivated the government to pass regulations establishing that "before any State Government sends films . . . abroad for exhibition, the State Government should ascertain the film's suitability from the point of view of external publicity" (Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy *apud* Larkin 167). Such a concern, manifested strongly in government cultural policies and in nationalist attacks on the films, shows what Larkin

believes to constitute a particularity of allegory: that it "is not always a feature immanent to a text but is something texts have placed upon them through the act of circulation across cultural difference" (164-5).

Acceding that Ahmad does make some "compelling points," Larkin highlights that he misses "the basic question Jameson raises: what is the relation between cultural forms and nationalism?" As the critic sees it, "[o]ne can reject Jameson's totalizing summation ('all Third World texts') while still interrogating the close imbrication of nationalism, literature, and film" (165-6). According to Larkin, although Jameson does not focus on the dynamics of the circulation of cultural texts, this dynamic is central to his argument, since it is in the mediation necessarily entailed in the contact with cultural difference that national allegory takes place. This has to do with the "Other reader" that Jameson identifies standing, in a position of noncoincidence, between the First World reader and the Third World text. According to Larkin,

> [Jameson's] argument here rests on a radical form of alterity that is reflexive in that the haunting presence of this second reader is ultimately the recognition of cultural, religious, political, and social difference. Jameson's analysis is grounded in the difficulty of translation across difference, and it is in that precise encounter that the force of national allegory is released. (166)

Larkin concludes that this somewhat neglected development from the Jameson/Ahmad debate may usefully inform the debate on the "difficulty in analyzing the traffic of cultural forms across national boundaries" (167).

Some authors—such as McGonegal, and Larkin—defend that national allegory implies a hermeneutic process rather than an immanent feature of the Third World literatures, a process that takes place when they are read from a Western, First World, perspective. This notion—which suggests an inquiry on how Jameson's project of an intervention in the USA humanities curricula can be materialised through the reading of such strange texts if it is indeed the reading, and not the Other, that is in question—is further discussed on section 3.1 of this thesis.

Authors who are ready to reassess the meaning of Jameson's concept of "national allegory," such as Szeman and Hillenbrand, seem to be more prone to accepting his general proposition. Indeed Jameson's insistence on a totalizing perspective is easily susceptible to "be mistaken as a Eurocentric, universalist claim *par excellence*", unless one does not consider totality as constituting a "possibility of

metacommentary—not as a second step in interpretation but as a condition of interpretation *per se*" (Szeman 805). As we could see in the development of the responses to the debate, there is a growing tendency towards a need to see Jameson's proposition as one that, although not endorsing the totalities he is operating with, criticises them from the inside. The critical realist perspective that is employed in this research represents a step forward in that direction.

1.3 – Research questions

This research was motivated by a call to read the Jameson/Ahmad controversy in ways that are attentive to the specific meanings taken on by the concept of "national allegory" within the context of each participant's contribution to the debate.

Assuming that Jameson's and Ahmad's viewpoints are coherent within each of their discourses, the ensuing questions emerged from the outset in face of the debate: How can each of these viewpoints contribute to the field of Postcolonial Studies? In what ways do these critics' different viewpoints intersect, interrupt, and/or clash with each other? What are the meanings that come up once we consider the polysemic potential of Jameson's use of the concept of "national allegory"? These questions guided the initial steps of the research, entailing two initial hypotheses: first, that Jameson's argument does not reduce the agency[7] of Third World literatures to the effects of their national representations; second, that this understanding can be supported by Jameson's aforementioned essay as well as by much of the response to the debate. Assuming these hypotheses were correct, I wished to be able to argue for the polysemic potential of the term "national allegory" as constructed throughout the debate and its critical resonances.

1.4 – Theoretical framework: Cultural Realism

The main perspective from which I look at the controversy at hand is that of Cultural Realism. While acknowledging the hegemonic power of cultural representations, this perspective refuses deterministic defeatism in face of the impossibility of accessing truth or reality—an

[7] Following Butler's lesson that conceives that, "[t]o be implicated in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that the "I" opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 83).

impossibility with which it deals more effectively. In other words, cultural materialism invests in the possibilities of agency[8] by dealing with truth-effects and reality-effects instead of essentialist notions of truth and reality. This is the sense in which Linda Alcoff and Satya Mohanty argue for the need to reconsider identity politics towards undoing the closure poised against the term "identity" by postmodernist critics:

> Although agreeing with some of the anti-essentialist critiques of identity that have been working to denaturalize identity categories, we argue against the conclusion that identities are merely fictions imposed from above. We contend that identities can be no less real for being socially and historically situated, and for being relational, dynamic, and, at times, ideological entrapments. Moreover, we believe that identity-based knowledge can achieve objectivity, not by the (unachievable) ideal of the disinterested, passive observer, but through a more workable approach to inquiry that aims to accurately describe the features of our complex, shared world. (6)

This is the theoretical perspective that informs this research. In two senses is this theoretical lens relevant to the present study: 1-Jameson's concept of "national allegory" seems to be one that considers the effective factuality—rather than the essentiality—of an observable phenomenon in the literatures he is purportedly describing; 2-the debate itself can be understood as a cultural materialization of performative meanings[9].

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[8] Agency can be generally described as a subject's capability of resisting social impositions through conscious acts. Even though the notion of agency was developed mainly by Michel Foucault, I approach it through the cultural materialist's further development of the concept, since this is really the most pertinent notion for the work here proposed. The cultural materialist perspective adds to the definition of agency the understanding that the subject who resists is imbricated in the very own power relations they are questioning. As Butler puts it, this understanding of agency is "directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (*assujetissement*) is precisely that *the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms*. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate *agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power*, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* xxiii; emphasis added).

[9] "In the first instance, performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act," but, rather, as the *reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names*" (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* xii; emphasis added).

I want to argue that the concept "national allegory" can be understood in terms of the Hegelian view which, according to Alcoff, "locates the source of identity outside the 'core' or internal self" (Alcoff, *Reclaiming* 329). Much like the description given by Alcoff of the debate between the critics of the concept of "identity" and the postpositivist realists who are directing a new perspective on this category[10], here too what matters—if my hypotheses are correct—is not the factuality but the reality-effects of "national allegory".

As to the fact that the debate itself performatively materialises meanings, it is important to notice that this controversy is a discursive construction and that, as such, it is an ongoing process of resignifying the very terms it deploys. Following this understanding, no attempts are made at reaching "true" or "intended" meanings nor are there given prior authority on any of the terms composing the controversy. Hence the importance of an analysis of the polysemic potential of the term "allegory" as it is seized by different critics in this debate. Considering this perspective, my analysis follows the development of the most relevant concepts involved in the debate as they are initially proposed by a critic; then as they are refuted by opposing voices; then as they are reasserted or reformulated in reaction to the criticisms to it; and, finally, as they appear in the voices of other participants of the debate.

[10] "Both might agree that in a certain sense identities are real, insofar as they have real effects and correlate to real experiences, but they surely disagree over whether identities are politically healthy or reliable sources of truth" (Alcoff, *Afraid* 334).

2 – CHAPTER II:
The Jameson/Ahmad debate and its historical contexts

2.1 – The USA scenario

"Our civilization cannot effectively be maintained where it still flourishes, or be restored where it has been crushed, without the revival of the central, continuous, and perennial culture of the Western world." William Bennet, the chairperson of a study group commissioned to assess the state of the learning in the humanities in the US higher education, opens his report with this quote by Walter Lippmann. The "Report on the Humanities in Higher Education," issued by the National Endowment for the Humanities in the year of 1984, manifested a concern with the course the humanities were taking in an age of transformation, proposing curricular reform. The tone of the appeal for such a reform is given away, if not by the title of the report itself, by the aforecited epigraph: the old call (repeated endlessly through the ages) for the value of ourselves; the belief that Western civilisation is in danger and that its salvation depends on the strengthening of Western culture.

Among the issues that disturbed the study group was the identification that "the humanities, and particularly the study of Western civilization, have lost their central place in the undergraduate curriculum." Based on this diagnosis and defending the principle that the "study of the humanities and Western civilization must take its place at the heart of the college curriculum", the group recommended four knowledges as "essential to a college education," of which I highlight the following: "A careful reading of several masterworks of English, American, and European literature" (2, 4, 13, 13).

It is worth investigating by now whether the humanities were indeed drifting away from the curriculums or simply changing in aspect. For, although Bennett's definition of "humanities" sounds quite encompassing—"the best that has been said, thought, written, and otherwise expressed about the *human experience*[11]" (5; emphasis

[11] It should be noted that Bennett borrowed this notion from Matthew Arnold, who, in the "Praface" to his book *Culture and Anarchy* famously said: "The whole scope of the essay is to recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a

added)—his understanding of what comes to constitute a "human experience" worthy of the title of "humanities" is doubtlessly very restricted, indeed limited to the "English, American, and European" traditions (13). The rise and establishment of cultural studies in the US challenged that ethnocentric assumption, menacing the traditional view of the humanities. It was this old view, not the humanities, that was under threat then. Both the problems the study group identified—revolving around the "decline" in the humanities in the US—and the problematic premises and suggestions they present—problematic because they are restricted to a call for a traditional(ly) ethnocentric understanding of the humanities—reveal the state of the humanities in the US in the second half of the 80s, setting the (US) national scenario of Jameson's article that initiates the debate here studied.

The academic journal *Social Text* had been launched just a few years before that, in 1979, and was in part responsible for establishing—or rather, for making sense of—the academic environment addressed by Bennett's study group. Refusing the labels of "cultural studies"[12] and of "interdisciplinarity"[13] precisely because these imply what they were

stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically" (5). As professor Bellei pointed out during the public defence of this thesis, recalling Marx, history repeats itself, and indeed it seems that Arnold advanced, over a hundred years ago, the issues and concerns that are related to the development of Cultural Studies and that, therefore, surround the debate here studied, that is, the fear that one culture is on the verge of dispersion, which is seen by conservatives as something dangerous.

[12] "Social Text is still habitually described as a journal of "cultural studies." But it is worth remembering that in St. Cloud, that phrase was a resonant neologism, an attempt to point to an inchoate space of investigation, rather than a declaration of any sort of direct link between the currents that led to the journal and the scholarship that was developing at the time at the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in England. As Jameson puts it bluntly, Social Text 'was founded as a Marxist journal. . . . We really had no access to the work coming out of Birmingham. They didn't have a journal and so we just got rumors about what they were doing.' Brenkman likewise notes that although 'in retrospect the journal did quite a lot to establish and give a shape to cultural studies in the US,' at the time of its founding the editors were not 'particularly thinking in terms of trying to create a field or a new kind of discipline in the academy.' [. . .] Even among those who joined later in the 1980s, there is a consensus that 'cultural studies' was not at the center of the journal's concerns, nor the most accurate term to describe the mix of elements it brought together" (Edwards and McCarthy, 2009: 7).

[13] "Our position is that the valuable interpretive and theoretical work done in these various schools or traditions is often accompanied by a strategic containment or delimitation of the field being interrogated. This strategy of containment, however different it may be in each case, generally takes the form of suppressing or repressing history and historical perspective. It is this which the Marxist framework seeks to restore. For us, the vitality of dialectical thinking lies in its power to rehistoricize methods and positions and resituate them in the immense life

resisting—i.e., that the cultural is apart from the political, and that disciplines should first be thought of as individually restricted areas that should at a later point be brought together—*Social Text* had been catalysing and channelling critical thought and theory, integrating culture and politics, having, by 1986, become a powerful medium for cultural political interventions of the left in the US.

In that year, at its 15th issue, the journal appeared to be the suitable means for the publication of Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," an essay he "intended as an intervention into a 'first-world' literary and critical situation" (Response: 26). The essay proved to be quite polemic, having generated immediate response by Aijaz Ahmad through the article "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory" (published just two issues later, in the 17th edition of the periodical). Ahmad's response remains one of the most powerful critiques to Jameson's essay until today. It was addressed by Jameson in his two-page "Brief Response" in the same issue it was published. The controversy, initiated twenty-seven years ago, still provokes critical response (cf. section 1.2 of this thesis), what evidences that the discussion remains timely and suggests that the concepts and issues it deals with have been continually reassessed and ressignified throughout the years. In what follows, I pursue a close reading of these core texts.

2.2 – Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism"

The debate starts with Jameson's essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (Autumn, 1986), where he proposes—on what one can generally describe as a quite hypothetical essay—a framework for reading Third World texts from the first-world, something he terms "a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature" (88). In this text, Jameson employs the concept of "national allegory" to allude to what he believes to be the necessary presence of a political dimension in the libidinal investment of Third World texts. In Jameson's words, "[in third-world texts,] psychology, or more specifically, libidinal investment, is to be read in primarily political and social terms" (72). Such a political dimension, Jameson argues, was overcome in the first-world by the fiction of the centred subject, which

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history of human society from its tribal origins to multinational consumer capitalism and beyond" (Aronowitz, Brenkman, and Jameson, 1979: 3).

is set apart from the social dimension. Jameson defends that the contact with such "alien" texts can redeem the political consciousness of the first-world public and intellectuals.

Conceding that a critique of the humanities was pertinent but startled by Mr Bennet's ("our titular leader") "embarrassing solution" to the problems identified in the humanities—"yet another impoverished and ethnocentric Graeco-Judaic 'great books list' of the civilization of the West"—Jameson points that it is indeed an appropriate moment to reassess that tradition in the elaboration of the humanities curricula, but going through its "shambles and ruins" instead (67). Jameson's aim with this essay is to attempt a theorisation hypothesis on the Third World literatures in order to reassess the "great (Western) books list" tradition.

Jameson, who had once affirmed "always historicise," opts to begin this text with a non-historicist approach, a choice that may seem to counter his inclinations, but which is instrumental to his objectives in this text, as I wish to show. According to him, such an approach would challenge "our imprisonment in the present of postmodernism and call for a reinvention of the radical difference of *our own* cultural past and its now seemingly old-fashioned situations and novelties" (66; emphasis in the original). But Jameson's purpose in this text is quite another: his object of inquiry is not the "us" of his discourse, but what he delimits as some sort of "other," the Third World and its literature. Jameson defends this "rhetoric of otherness" (to borrow Ahmad's wording) is excusable because his is an attempt to revalue the other, or rather, to identify in this other some quality long lost in the history of his "us." This quality is, notably, the political dimension of literary productions. This is, however, just in passing and in the preliminary stages of the reasoning he develops. By the end of the essay he is historicising this Other.

Indeed one of Jameson's objectives with this essay is "to ask whether [nationalism] is all that bad in the end" (65). According to the critic, nationalism is responsible for connecting the private to the political in the Third World, and this sort of engagement is—sadly, in Jameson's opinion—absent from the first-world intellectual and cultural scenes. This premise grounds Jameson's aim at stressing the importance and interest of Third World literatures (68). The critic, in this initial stage of his argument, characterises Third World literatures as "unmodern," "socially realistic," and "outmoded" (65, 66, 66), building a case that this is how these literatures are perceived by a first-world audience, what would, on a superficial analysis, help explain a certain resistance of the first-world reader to engage with such texts.

Jameson, however, goes deeper than that. For the American critic, first-world readers' resistance to Third World texts has to do with the fact that these writings "come before us . . . as though already read." Because of this, Jameson goes on to explain, "[w]e sense, between ourselves and this alien text, the presence of another reader, of the Other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naive, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share" (66). Jameson suggests that the impact on the first-world reader of this encounter with the "Other reader" would be that of forcing them to face—and, to a great extent, to "give up"—the illusion of the postmodern self, something first-world readers prefer not to do.

One cannot forget, however that the always-already-read is a recurrent concept in Jameson's writings, having he previously argued that

> texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions. This presupposition then dictates the use of a method (which I have elsewhere termed the 'metacommentary') according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it. Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code. (*Unconscious*, 9-10)

If the concept of the always-already-read is a constant in Jameson's works, what makes it different here, when applied to understanding Third World literatures, if never before had the concept been faced with such harsh criticism? The always-already-read stands for a kind of mediation, and one could argue that it is a necessary mediation. I tackle this issue further on section 3.1 of this thesis, but for now let us say in passing that Jameson's always-already-read is a crucial concept to understanding his proposition in this essay because it stands for a sort of preconceived set of images[14] that end up materialising the realities it purportedly describes, in a view that is consistent with that of cultural

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[14] When talking about Third World literatures, Jameson talks about this preconceived set of images in terms of "allegory."

realism because the Third World text becomes, in this case, the materialization—or the mediation—of the Third World itself. Of course Jameson is rather bringing this issue—which is concealed along the myth of the postmodern First World fractured self and its view of its Other, the Third World and its unmodern centred self[15]—to a conscious level rather than merely corroborating or even describing it.

In one of Ahmad's most stringent attacks on Jameson, he denounces how Jameson seems to have forgotten that descriptions are so ideologically charged that one cannot intend to "merely describe" something without concealing their motivations and ideologies (Ahmad *Rhetoric* 6). But isn't this description one that speaks more of the construction of the description itself rather than corroborating it? I mean, is not Jameson focusing on how such perception is built and believed in? After all, Jameson does repeat, time and again, that Third World literatures are "perceived" as, "are to be read as."

After having thus delineated the hypothesis that grounds the basic proposition of the essay (regarding the interest and value of Third World texts, that is, their potential of challenging the myth of the centred self, thus resituating politically the First World postmodern subject), Jameson quickly addresses the problem with the term "third-world," showing to be sensitive to the problematic generalisation perpetrated through the concept "third-world." Despite that, he uses the term because he does not "see any comparable expression that articulates, as this one does, the fundamental breaks between the capitalist first-world, the socialist bloc of the second world, and a range of other countries which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism." Indeed, he dismisses the issue far too superficially, asserting simply that he is "using the term 'third-world' in an essentially descriptive sense," (67) ignoring altogether the criticism to naive conceptions on description that overlook the fact that they are always invariably ideologically charged. Ahmad later makes use of this conceptual weakness in Jameson's essay to accuse him of deliberately concealing his own ideology (Ahmad; *Rethoric;* 6).

After having hastily and apparently naively dismissed the issue, disclaiming responsibility for his use of the term "third-world," Jameson argues that the scenario of the humanities in the US then—which I have delineated above, on section 2.1—required the reassertion of Third World literature, without, however, falling into William Bennett's "embarrassing solution: yet another impoverished and ethnocentric

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[15] See ensuing section for more on Jameson's elaboration on postmodernism.

Graeco-Judaic 'great books list' of the civilization of the West" (67). Jameson defends that, in the new perspective he is attempting to throw on world literature, some specific engagement with Third World literature is necessary, announcing this to be the subject of his essay. Although Jameson's premises in the construction of the hypothesis he proposes in this essay certainly give room to much criticism[16], I wish, for now, to analyse his theoretical endeavour in terms of his claimed objectives.

It is important to notice that Jameson's insightful and daring hypothesis is quite tentative. Throughout the essay, despite eventual assertiveness, Jameson leaves it clear that his theorisation here is incipient and certainly deserving of further elaboration. The most remarkable instance of this appears just before he starts effectively building his case, and I quote it in its full extent because it constitutes Jameson's acknowledgement of the flows immanent to his methodological choices:

> It would be presumptuous to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature, given the enormous variety both of national cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories in each of those areas. *All of this, then, is provisional* and intended both to suggest specific perspectives for research and to convey a sense of the interest and value of these clearly neglected literatures for people formed by the values and stereotypes of a first-world culture. (68; emphasis added)

Of course, the provisional aspect of his essay does not excuse the misrepresentation and reductionism Jameson incurs at some points, but what he is asserting here is that his essay is in no way a "final word" on the subject. Indeed it has been pointed out that this is not his first attempt in that direction either. Szeman traces back the development of Jameson's concept of "national allegory" and finds its origins in the 1979 book *Fables of Aggression* (Szeman 814). Ahmad himself acknowledges that it is important and valid to attempt to theorise totalities, given however that constituent determinations be situated and historicised (Ahmad 22). I believe that is what Jameson does when

[16] For instance, Jameson's insistence on a rhetoric of otherness, and his definition of what comes to constitute the third-world—"countries that have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism" (67), which some interpret as situating the Third World as merely subjects of history. These issues have indeed been criticised and the engagement with this criticism is part mainly of section 2.4 of this thesis.

announcing that he is concerned with the literatures produced in regions that have "suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism" (5), since the experience of colonialism is, no doubt, at least part of the constituent determinations of these countries, and one on which Jameson focuses the totalisation he is proposing.

Jameson starts building his hypothesis with an initial distinction set as a basic premise of his general theory of Third World literature: that none of the cultures of Third World countries "can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism" (68). Of course, one could point out that no culture is indeed anthropologically independent or autonomous, but the point Jameson is making here is that the great conflict generated upon the transition of the mode of production of these countries towards what is named "modernisation"—and which is indeed another name for American imperialism—has a powerful cultural impact. Since capitalism did not develop in these countries but was rather imposed onto previous modes of production on the event of colonialism and imperialism "We"—that is, the capitalist first-world—"are constitutive forces powerfully at work on the remains of older cultures in our general world capitalist system" (68).

As Jameson points out, one of the strong characteristics of the capitalist culture is the "deep cultural conviction" of the existence of a split between the individual and the social, between the psychological and the political (69). In the Third World, Jameson argues, the relations between these categories are entirely different, they are not split. At this point, Ahmad's intervention suggests that it is only logical, if one believes the Third World is defined by having suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism, that the artificial penetration of capitalism in these cultures would implicate the penetration, also, of such a strong capitalist cultural conviction—especially the Third World intellectuals, generally educated in Western schools of thought, as Ahmad points out (*Rethoric* 12-3). Jameson, however, does consider this aspect, when arguing that in Third World countries, upon the insertion of capitalism and its characteristic split between the private and the public gets in conflict with the culture that remains. This remaining culture is perceived as a sort of resistance, since it necessarily battles with the imposing culture. Its reassertion is, necessarily, the reassertion of the collectivity, which is materialised in terms of the Nation. The conflict between the traditional mode of thought and the capitalist mode of thought is implicated in the scenario Jameson is dealing with.

The fact that the Third World intellectual necessarily has to deal with this embattlement makes it necessary that their practice be also political. In other words, because the nations in the periphery are in formation, as it is a process, we are permanently traumatised. This trauma, then, becomes the central issue, but a social issue, a historical issue, and not a psychological one, an issue that is dealt with through political allegories. Jameson asserts that "in the Third World situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual" (74). In face of this embattlement between the capitalist culture that is inserted and the traditional culture of the Third World that resists to this insertion "no political solutions seem present or visible on the historical horizon" (75), and the "literary manifestation of this political problem is the possibility of narrative closure" (75-6). In this sense 'national allegory" comes to function as a yet unrealised project of nation:

> The matter of narrative closure, then, and of the relationship of a narrative text to futurity and to some collective project yet to come, is not, merely a formal or literary-critical issue. . . . I want to suggest that it is only at this price, by way of a complex play of simultaneous and antithetical messages, that the narrative text is able to open up a concrete perspective on the real future. (77)

This narrative closure that "open[s] up a concrete perspective on the real future" is what Jameson believes should be read as national allegory. Ahmad argues that, by affirming that "all third-world texts..." Jameson is either incurring in a fallacy (describing Third World literatures inaccurately) or in the Law of the Father (being prescriptive, saying these literatures should be as he is describing or else he will not acknowledge them as Third World literatures). In face of this, one should be attentive to the hermeneutic aspect of Jameson's proposition: as McGonegal interestingly points out, Jameson talks in terms of how Third World literatures are read by a First World public. Szeman, referring to the concept of national allegory as a mode of interpretation, questions why would Jameson "have generated a neologism that cannot help but invite confusion" (813-4). Jameson however made sure to advance that "allegory," as does symbol, implies one-to-one correspondences, but that, in the case of "allegory," these correspondences are fluidic, forever shifting (73). Nation is here, therefore, the name of a collective futurity project. Allegory is here the way this project is received and interpreted culturally.

It is also important to notice that Jameson's essay targeted the intellectuals in the US. He announces: "as this whole talk aims implicitly at suggesting a new conception of the humanities in American education today, it is appropriate to add that the study of the role of the intellectual as such ought to be a key component in any such proposals" (75). He defends that the First World intellectual should step outside the myth of the individual subject so as to be able to engage politically as Third World intellectuals do. The initial resistance to these texts are but an evidence of the need to face this difference in order to be able to break with the political sterility of intellectuality. This is what Jameson hopes may be achieved with the inclusion of Third World literatures in the curriculums of the humanities.

Jameson recalls Edward Said, acknowledging that, in building his general theory, he is performing a "strategy of otherness." He, however, prefers to perform such strategy since he sees no alternative without falling "into some general liberal and humanistic value" (77). Ahmad later tackles this issue, pointing out there are alternatives that should not escape a Marxist scholar. He affirms thus that "[w]hat gives the world its unity . . . is not a humanist ideology but the ferocious struggle of capital and labour which is now strictly and fundamentally global in character" (Ahmad 10). Interestingly, it is this struggle and its reverberation in the cultural level that Jameson is addressing in his theory. If both theorists are concerned with the same issue through the same theoretical lens, the cause of their divergence seems to be that each of these Marxist scholars have different perspectives on reading that struggle: Ahmad proposes the understanding of the present on the basis of the past, whereas Jameson proposes the understanding of the present on the basis of the future, in the form of the futurity project of a collectivity. This is why Jameson affirms that

> 'culture' . . . is by no means the final term at which one stops. One must imagine such cultural structures and attitudes as having been themselves, in the beginning, vital responses to infrastructural realities (economic and geographic, for example), as attempts to resolve more fundamental contradictions-attempts which then outlive the situations for which they were devised, and survive, in reified forms, as 'cultural patterns.' Those patterns themselves then become part of the objective situation confronted by later generations, and, . . . having once been part of the

> solution to a dilemma, then become part of the new problem. (76-7)

With that in mind, Jameson suggests that cultural—or national—identity, when invoked by a Third World writer, must be examined against the "concrete historical situation" in order to determine the "political consequences of the strategic use of this concept" (78). This is a more complex understanding of nationalism.

In order to delineate the specific character of Third World national allegories, Jameson points out that Western literature also presents some instances of "national allegory," but they present two of what Jameson terms "structural differences" in relation to the national allegories of the Third World. The first one is that, in Western literature, Jameson argues, the presence of national allegories reconfirms the political/individual split. Second, in the First World, allegory of that kind is unconscious and must therefore be deciphered, whereas Third World allegories are "conscious and overt" (79-80). Besides that, Jameson acknowledges that auto-referentiality is something similar to "national allegory" in Western literature, but it also presents a difference which Jameson believes is better understood in terms of the situational consciousness—a term Jameson prefers to materialism.

Jameson draws his understanding of situational consciousness from Hegel's Master-slave dialectics, according to which "only the slave knows what reality and the resistance of matter really are; only the slave can attain some true materialistic consciousness of his situation, since it is precisely to that that he is condemned. The Master, however, is condemned to idealism" (Jameson 85). In the global scenario, Jameson argues, the US is in the position of the Master, doomed to ignorance of the social totality concealed by a host of fragmented subjectivities, whereas the "third-world culture . . . must be situational and materialist despite itself" (85). In the final footnote to his essay, Jameson clarifies that what he here terms "national allegory" is a form of "mapping of the totality" (87-8).

In reading the essay that initiated the debate, one cannot help but noticing the highly hypothetical intention of Jameson's article as a whole, as he states, from the start, that "[a]ll of this . . . is provisional." I would like to argue that this hypothetical character of his essay indicates that this attempt of "offer[ing] some general theory of what is often called third-world literature" (68) is a part of what we could term a work-in-progress. This aspect gains particular relevance with Jameson's statement, in the last endnote of "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," that relates the basic proposition of his essay

to a previous text ("Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"). "National allegory," Jameson argues, is but an instance of the mapping of the social totality as he delineated in that previous text and the essay on Third World Literature "forms a pendant to the essay on postmodernism" (87-8). This correlation is of the most relevance and, as Ahmad puts it, is part of an "ambitious undertaking which pervades the entire text" (3). In face of the conclusion that the essay that constitutes the focus of the present study is part of an ongoing theoretical development, I now pursue a close reading of Jameson's essay on Postmodernism, since it is central to this study, as I will show in the ensuing section.

2.3 – Jameson's "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"

The final footnote of Jameson's article refers back to his famous essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," published in 1984. This footnote, although coming late in the text, unequivocally situates the entire argument of his text within the scope of that previous article, as he affirms that "the present essay . . . forms a pendant to the essay on postmodernism . . . ." The connection between the two articles comes through the concept of "national allegory," central to the essay on third-world literatures, and that is precisely an instance of what he had articulated in the previous text as "cognitive mapping," as we shall see in this section. In Jameson's words, "[w]hat is here called "national allegory" is clearly a form of just such mapping of the totality" (87-88). Given the substantial relevance of that previous text for the analysis at hand, a close reading of it becomes necessary to inform this research.

In that text, Jameson analyses the effects of third-wave capitalism—which is at times praised as post-industrial and is at times criticised for its superficiality—on culture, arguing that postmodernism is a cultural dominant. The text is divided into six parts, where Jameson characterises the most distinctive features of postmodernism, proposing an aesthetic that is fit for the new social and spatial configuration, an aesthetic that he terms "cognitive mapping."

The article opens with a general account of postmodernism and how it is perceived, emphasizing the widespread feeling of rupture that is translated in the commonplace expression "the end of ___." Although postmodernism has reached all art forms, Jameson defends that it is

more "dramatically visible" in architecture, where the clash between high-modernism and postmodernism raises more heated critical discussions. For him, postmodernism translates into a sort of aesthetic populism in architecture, a manifestation of "one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms . . .: namely, the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture." Thus, this break is characteristic of the new type of society characterised by multinational capitalism, the so-called "post-industrial society" (54).

Jameson then stresses that this article intends to offer a periodising hypothesis, recognising postmodernism as a cultural dominant. He claims that postmodernism differs from modernism mainly because it is institutionalised, which results in commissioning and consequent commodification of the arts, with architecture being the art form which is closest to the economy. In this relation to economy, Jameson emphasises that American postmodernism is the other side of worldwide exploration and domination. Thus, the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is this relation to the economic order, which makes the two moments bear different meanings and social functions (56-7). Jameson is careful in assessing the risks of proposing totalising conceptions and justifies his intent, affirming that, although totality projects tend to paralyse critical capacity—in face of a certain inevitability they seem to imply—his proposition aims at generating a possible means to reflect on the possibility of "any radical cultural politics today" (57).

Once that remark is made, the author delineates the main features characteristic of postmodernism as follows: a new depthlessness both in contemporary theory and in the culture of the image (simulacrum), which bears as a consequence the weakening of historicity—implicating schizophrenic relationship structures—, a new emotional ground tone (intensities)—that is responsible for the "postmodern (hysterical) sublime"—, and a new relationship to technology (57-8). In what follows I present a brief explanation of each of these features, as Jameson's take on postmodernism is of utmost importance for his article on Third World literatures.

Analysing two works of art that have become epitomic of their periods—namely, Van Gogh's "Peasant Shoes," typical of high-modernism, and Andy Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes," characteristic of postmodernism—Jameson exemplifies how this new depthlessness is manifested in the arts. In modern art, there is an evocation of the real-material world, requiring an interpretive action to reach its latent

meaning, whereas postmodern art does not evoke anything, since it does not speak to us, functioning in the content-level of the fetish. This strong contrast allows Jameson to affirm that "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense—[is] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms" (60). This feature bears two consequences: what Jameson terms the "waning of affect" and the "euphoria and self-anihilation".

The waning of affect is identified, symptomatically, in the widespread critique of hermeneutic, which is, according to Jameson, a "depth model." The author identifies four other depth models that have suffered the attack of postmodern criticism:

> the dialectical one of essence and appearance . . . ; the Freudian model of latent and manifest . . . ; the existential model of authenticity and inauthenticity . . . ; and finally, latest in time, the great semiotic opposition between signifier and signified . . . . [H]ere too depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces (what is often called intertextuality is in that sense no longer a matter of depth)." This depthlessness, Jameson affirms, "can be experienced physically and literally. (61-2)

Regarding euphoria and self-anihilation, Jameson points to a "shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology [that] can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject[, characteristic of modernism,] is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject" (63). This phenomenon translates the theme of the "'death' of the subject itself = the end of the autonomous bourgeois monad or ego or individual—and the accompanying stress, whether as some new moral ideal or as empirical description, on the decentring of that formerly centred subject or psyche," resulting in a loss of what used to accompany the notion of that subject, such as personal style (64). Another possible characterisation of the waning of affect, Jameson argues, is the primacy of categories of space rather than of time in our daily life.

As a consequence of the elements just discussed—the dissolution of the bourgeoisie individual subject and, along with it, the disappearance of the personal style—the practice of pastiche is widespread. Pastiche, according to Jameson, is "blank parody," since it is an imitation of dead styles, like parody, but devoid of any of the parody's ulterior motives. Since personal style no longer exists, the imitation of the past is the only resource available. Because of this, one verifies a spread of historicism, defined by architecture historians as

"the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the 'neo'" (64-5). Jameson reappropriates Plato's conception of the simulacrum—"the identical copy for which no original has ever existed"—to account for this new society where the image itself replaces the world, which influences our relationship to the historical time, affecting the construction of our collective future as a consequence (65-6). The simulacrum—the culture of the image characteristic of a society in which the image itself replaces the world—affects our relationship to historical time, affecting the construction of our collective future. In the ensuing paragraph, pastiche is shown to influence the waning of historicity as well, since it replaces real history with the "history of aesthetic styles."

The historical recovery of the past is also influenced by the culture of the simulacrum, what affects the construction of collective futurity projects as well. This relation to the image in its recovery of the past is yet another difference between modern and postmodern culture: if the modern nostalgia consisted of an aesthetic retrieval of the past, the postmodern nostalgia is manifested through an "ideology of the 'generation'" which installs a nostalgia of a collective past, replacing 'real history' with the "history of aesthetic styles" (66-7). The two elements, the pastiche and the simulacrum are, therefore, symptoms of the postmodern waning of historicity, resulting in the

> evident existential fact of life that there no longer does seem to be any organic relationship between the American history we learn from the schoolbooks and the lived experience of the current multinational, high-rise, stagflated city of the newspapers and of our own daily life. (69)

Jameson defends that such non-correspondence between "real" history and the reified aesthetic history causes a *déja-vu* effect, marked by what Freudian long ago termed the return of the repressed.

The waning of historicity is present even in the sentence level, in what Jameson identifies as the loss of the radical past.

> This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only 'represent' our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes 'pop history'). Cultural production is thereby driven back inside a mental space which is no longer that of the old monadic subject, but rather that of some degraded collective 'objective spirit': it can no

> longer gaze directly on some putative real world, at some reconstruction of a past history which was once itself a present; rather, as in Plato's cave, it must trace our mental images of that past upon its confining walls. If there is any realism left here, therefore, it is a 'realism' which is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement, and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. (71)

This introjection into the mental structure of postmodernism through language is of utmost relevance for the argument Jameson later develops in the "Third World Literature" since it understands signification as no longer entailing a relation to a material world, but to simulacra. As he argues in the later article, cultures that are not dominated by the postmodern cultural dominant signify differently.

In the third section of the article, Jameson draws an aesthetic model from Lacan's account of schizophrenia—the "breakdown of the signifying chain"—to suggest that the crisis in historicity, manifested in all levels previously described, imparts a reduction to an "experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (72). In the cultural text, this schizophrenia appears as "something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation" (73). In this world of signifiers, radical difference installs itself, requiring that the postmodernist viewer captures the whole of the isolated and radically different parts, through a mechanism Jameson names collage. The generalisation of the schizophrenic procedure allows for a shift of affect, substituting the intensity of euphoria for the intensities of anxiety and alienation (74-5).

The above formulations are particularly relevant for the text on Third World literatures in a twofold dimension: a) as Jameson sees it, Third World texts unavoidably bear a relation to the material world itself, that is, Third World texts are not mediated by the image culture in the process Jameson is here describing as simulacrum; b) Third World texts are, however, received by the US public as these images, that is, as well as US history has become a style of nostalgia through simulacrum and pastiche, Third World text is only accessed by the First World public allegorically. Although this process grounds the schizophrenia and the particular instances of affect/intensity here described, it is also the cause of the excruciating feeling of lack of

reference. In the later text on Third World literatures, Jameson presents "national allegory" as a viable solution for this loss of reference, a means of socially mapping one's position in the global scenario. In this sense, one can read Jameson's conception not as an affirmation that Third World texts lack something in relation to US texts, but as the suggestion that the US culture has lost its own self-referential mirror, substituting it for a mirroring of mirrors in a manner that, although imparting some degree of affect and intensity, has deprived the First World of the factual possibility of political engagement. The cultural dominant of Postmodernism operates in the First World by limiting its possible contact with the Third World, so that it can only be accessed by the simulacra of the Third World, that is, by the image the First World has of the Third World (a copy of which there is no original), something Jameson terms "national allegory".

The body, and, consequently, society itself, is yet another category that is influenced by postmodernism and its characteristics. In a formulation Jameson will name "camp or 'hysterical' sublime" (77), he conceptualises the effect of postmodernism in our relationship to Nature itself, arguing that it has also been eclipsed. As Jameson puts it, "[t]he other of our society is in that sense no longer Nature at all, as it was in precapitalist societies, but something else which we must now identify" (77). This brings a new relationship to technology as well: Jameson follows Ernest Mendel's outline of three "quantum leaps in the evolution of machinery under capital", each introducing a dialectical expansion (77). Rejecting the expression "postindustrial" Jameson characterises the present day stage of capital as "multinational capital," consisting of the "purest form of capital yet to have emerged, a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (78). This technological stage, differently from the preceding ones, holds a representational challenge, since it cannot be embodied in a single image (such as a turbine or pipes, which could serve as representations of the previous eras). In an ingenious interpretation of this unrepresentability, Jameson suggests that

> our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating, not so much in its own right, but because it seems to offer some

> privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp—namely the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself. (79-80)

The postmodern sublime can only be adequately theorised within this greater notion, which Jameson names the "apotheosis of capitalism."

Built space also presents the characteristics of postmodernism, and Jameson defends that "we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace" (80). Constructions such as the Bonaventura Hotel—which Jameson analyses as an exponent of postmodern architecture—are built as a sort of miniature city, a whole world unrelated to the city surrounding it. It is also built in a way that imposes and limits the narratological possibilities of the subject within it. This mutation in physical space succeeds in

> transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment . . . can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects (83-4).

The final section of the article entails a proposition to counter the most perilous consequence of his main argument—i.e. that postmodernism is the cultural dominant of the late capitalist development, characterised by a generalised sense of both physical and social disconnection/alienation/loss that paralyses the possibilities of political engagement—calling thus for a reopening for the possibility of political engagement and change through the suggestion of a means—namely, the cognitive mapping—for the individual and collectivities to resituate themselves in relation to the totality, even when inhabiting the postmodern hyperspace. This is the most relevant section of the article for the sake of this research, since here Jameson conceptualises the cognitive mapping, a concept that was in his later writing further developed into the concept of "national allegory—"the form of

cognitive mapping that is specific to the Third-World situation[17]—in the latter article.

In this section, Jameson stresses that postmodernism is a historical rather than a stylistic category, affirming that understanding it otherwise is to make a "category-mistake." The stylistic notion of postmodernism is restricted to the realm of "moral judgements," and Jameson rejects both the positive and the negative moral judgements[18] that are possible through that sort of reasoning. Yet he claims that we are "so deeply immersed in postmodernist space . . . that the luxury of old-fashioned ideological critique . . . becomes unavailable" (85-86). It is in face of this unavailability that it becomes imperative to propose a "genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present of time in History." This is, however, to be performed in the difficult fashion proposed by Marx to assess capitalism: "to think this development positively and negatively all at once" (86).

The effort required to think like that suggests two immediate questions, which Jameson articulates as follows:

> Can we in fact identify some 'moment of truth' within the more evident 'moments of falsehood' of postmodern culture? And, even if we can do so, is there not something ultimately paralysing in the dialectical view of historical development proposed above; does it not tend to demobilize us and to surrender us to passivity and helplessness, by systematically obliterating possibilities of action under the impenetrable fog of historical inevitability? (86)

In order to tackle those issues, Jameson first reflects on the "mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism, which includes a momentous modification of its social function" (86). One of the consequences of postmodernism is what Jameson terms an "explosion" of the sphere of culture, an explosion that dissolves the autonomous sphere of culture, as opposed to the semi-autonomy that culture seemed to enjoy before the advent of postmodernism, when it existed "above the practical world of the existent" (87). This explosion entails a "prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the

[17] The Third-World situation is, according to Jameson, that of a conflict between more traditional modes of production and the insertion of capitalism already in its late form (cf. *Literature*).

[18] The positive ones, Jameson explains, are comprised of a "celebration of this aesthetic new world," and the negative ones refer to the "essential triviality" that would be characteristic of the period from an aesthetic viewpoint.

point at which everything in our social life . . . can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and as yet untheorized sense" (87).

Another consequence is the extinction of the possibility of achieving critical distance, something that used to form the basis of our conceptions of cultural politics. According to Jameson, "distance in general (including 'critical distance' in particular) has very precisely been abolished in the new space of postmodernism. We are submerged in its henceforth filled and suffused volumes to the point where our now postmodern bodies are bereft of spatial coordinates and practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distantiation" (87). As a result of that abolition of critical distance we observe that all cultural forms of political intervention and of cultural resistance are "all somehow secretly disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it" (87).

The postmodern reconfiguration of space presents a "genuine historical (and socio-economic) reality," one that calls for its own forms of representation, in what Jameson sees as "new forms of realism (or at least of the mimesis of reality)" (88). Like all art forms, postmodern realism can be analysed as representing their social reality or as distracting and diverting from it. Regarding that reality itself, Jameson calls for a double reading of it, in the sake of the dialectic thinking he is defending. This new reality "demands the invention and elaboration of an internationalism of a radically new type" (88).

Before moving on to proposing a "possible form of a new radical cultural politics," Jameson makes an aesthetic proviso: a defence of the pedagogical and didactic functions of art. The cultural model he proposes "foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture" (89). Besides that, the model he is proposing is appropriate to our own situation, as delineated in the previous sections of the article. Given that space is the fundamental category in postmodern culture, the cultural model proposed has to be fundamentally space-related. Jameson then proposes the aesthetic of the "cognitive mapping," based in Kevin Lynch's lesson in *The Image of the City*, which Jameson brings into a convergence with Althusser's (and Lacan's) redefinition of ideology, reaching an original conception on the relationship between the individual and the totality surrounding them.

Lynch's work teaches that

> the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either

> their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves . . . . Disalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place, and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories. (89)

Although Lynch's proposition is restricted to the city itself, Jameson projects it "outwards onto some of the larger national and global spaces," provoking a convergence of Lynch's theory with the

> Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as 'the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence'. Surely this is exactly what the cognitive map is called upon to do, in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of the city's structure as a whole. (90)

A second development that Jameson derives from Lynch's work is the notion that, as well as, in the development of the science and art of cartography, the advent of new instruments—such as the compass—and calculations—such as triangulation—has brought about new possibilities of cartographic thought, so it "becomes clear that there can be scientific progress, or better still, a dialectical advance, in the various historical moments of map-making" (90).

The Althusserian definition of ideology brings two implications to Jameson theorisation: first, the possibility of thinking cartographically in terms of social space, since "we all necessarily also cognitively map our individual social relationship to local, national and international class realities[19]"; second, the suggestion of a methodological enrichment through the remobilization of and old and still valuable Marxian distinction between science and ideology, according to which the ideology is thought of as a bridge over the gap between the existential and the realm of abstract knowledge, between existential experience and scientific knowledge, "somehow inventing a way of articulating those

[19] Ahmad accuses Jameson of not considering, in the latter text on Third World literatures, the issue of class. But Jameson's proposition here is indeed related to how the subject can trace their position in a mappable social global space.

two distinct dimensions with each other" (91). The Marxian-Althusserian understanding of science and ideology correspond to the Lacanian Real and Imaginary, respectively. Althusser has, however, left aside the third realm of Lacan's system, that of the Symbolic. Jameson's cognitive mapping is related to that realm. The article closes with the delineation of the aesthetic of cognitive mapping, calling for the need "to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and to invent radically new forms in order to do it justice" in a way that considers the present day physical and social postmodern space, taking its problematics into account and achieving a "breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (92). This concern bases Jameson's proposition of the "national allegory" in the ensuing publication, something he proposes as a means to regaining that capacity.

2.3.1 – From the symbolical to the allegorical

Perhaps one of the greatest issues in the relationship between the two texts is how and why what is thought of as symbolic in the first text becomes allegorical in the second text. If the "national allegory" is an instance of the "cognitive mapping," just what is the particularity—aesthetic or social—of this specific type of mapping in relation to the original formulation? In "Postmodernism," Jameson lucubrates on the relation of the cultural dominant of postmodernism to economy: the difference between First and Third World has to do, then, with the state and development of the economies of these regions. In his "Brief Response," Jameson synthesises the issue: regarding the term "first world" it "is based . . . on the fact that American bankers hold the levels of the world system" (27). I believe the different stances occupied by the First and the Third Worlds in the global economic order may be the grounds for the shift from symbol—in the "Postmodernism" text—to allegory—in the "Third-World Literature" text. Since the Third World has not lived the fiction of the bourgeois monad ego but, due to the insertion of late capitalism, is exposed to the myth of the fractured self, a cultural tension between the traditional subject in the cultural order and the fractured self in the economic order sets the context of a superstructural embattlement that is perceived allegorically.

2.4 – Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'"

Despite the fact that Jameson acknowledges to be incurring in a "strategy of otherness" through an operation of differentiation—which he prefers to the alternative of "falling back into some general liberal and humanistic universalism" (Jameson 77)—it is mainly on those grounds that Aijaz Ahmad, in the essay "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'" (Autumn, 1987), accuses him of projecting a reductionist view on the Third World and its culture: "[a]s for the specificity of cultural difference, Jameson's theoretical conception tends, I believe, in the opposite direction, namely, that of homogenisation. Difference between the first world and the third is absolutised as an Otherness . . ." (Ahmad *Rethoric* 10). Ahmad performs a thorough scrutiny of Jameson's article, proposing, in order to counter Jameson's "cognitive aesthetics of the third-world literature" (Jameson *Literature* 88), that "[l]iterary texts are produced in highly differentiated, usually very over-determined contexts of competing ideological and cultural clusters, so that any particular text of any complexity shall always have to be placed within the cluster that gives it its energy and form, before it is totalised into a universal category" (Ahmad *Rethoric* 23). Ahmad's text was published on the 17th issue of Social Text, and Jameson's two-page "Brief Response" to it, where Jameson addresses some of Ahmad's most pertinent statements, came in that same issue.

Aijaz Ahmad has for many years been a chief critic of the Three Worlds Theory. Since this theory is a premise Jameson takes for granted as the basis of his theory, Ahmad's response to Jameson's essay is greatly based on his misgivings to this theory as a whole. He, thus, affirms that to claim the Third World "as a basis for producing theoretical knowledge, which presumes a certain rigor in constructing the objects of one's knowledge, is to misconstrue not only the phrase itself but even the world to which it refers" (4). The problem with the referred misconstruction is, mainly, the reductionism it performs, and, according to Ahmad, third-world literature simply cannot be constructed as a "coherent object of theoretical knowledge" (4).

Jameson indeed showed to have little to say on the subject, since in his essay he dismissed the issue by simply acknowledging that the term did imply a great level of reduction but that he was "using the term

'third world' in an essentially descriptive sense, and objections to it do not strike me as especially relevant to the argument I am making" (Jameson *Literature* 67). Ahmad however makes a point that "'description' is never ideologically or cognitively neutral" and that it is indeed a tool for ideological domination (6).

When analysing the object Jameson is purportedly describing, Ahmad finds a great inconsistency: the first and the third-worlds are defined by their production systems, whereas the Third World is defined by an experience imposed on them. From this view, the Third World is merely a subject of history, not its agent. Furthermore, Ahmad adds, Jameson's proposition is empirically ungrounded—India, Ahmad reminds us, is quite capitalist, for instance. Ahmad defends that the Three Worlds Theory defines the Third World as that which has experienced colonialism. From that perspective, nationalism would be the only ideology possible and, as a consequence of that, "national allegory" would be the only narrative possible.

Besides that, Ahmad points out some inconsistencies in Jameson's argument as a whole. The first one is that Jameson generalises in one sense—describing the Third World as the first-world's Other, given that the cultures of the Third World share the experience of colonialism—but does not generalise in another, more appropriate, sense—the experience of the first-world is not generalised. Ahmad thus points out that a) we live not in three worlds, but in one which presents a contradictory unity—the struggle between capitalism and socialism, which is different everywhere; and b) the first-world is the one that indeed shares an experience—that of the cultural logic of late capitalism—whereas the Third World presents an "enormous cultural heterogeneity of social formations" (9-10). It follows from that reasoning that Jameson's proposition is an epistemologically impossible category, since there is no single experience of colonialism. In face of that conclusion, Ahmad affirms that "one is not quite sure whether one is dealing with a fallacy ('all third-world texts are' this or that) or with the Law of the Father (you must write this if you are to be admitted into my theory)" (12).

Jameson oversees yet another important factor, according to Ahmad: upon colonialism, capitalism is inserted in the colonised nation, and, consequently, the capitalist ideology of the individual self (at least in the bourgeoisie) is introduced as well. Thus, Jameson should concede that at least some of the texts from colonised formations are not "national allegory," that is, at least some of them may present the libidinal/political split. I believe Jameson did consider that, though not

reaching into the same conclusion as Ahmad. Jameson puts the issue this way "We"—that is, the first-world—"are constitutive forces powerfully at work on the remains of older cultures in our general world capitalist system" (Jameson *Literature* 68).

The third inconsistency Ahmad points out in Jameson's essay is that Jameson seems to overlook—not to situate—the mode of production of the Third World. He does not characterise the Third World as pre- or non- capitalist. Based on a previous text by Jameson (Marxism and Form) where he draws the same conclusion as in this text, Ahmad infers that Jameson is situating the Third World into the preindustrialised mode of production.

Another important objection Ahmad aims at Jameson's text is a certain confusion between nation and collectivity. If indeed Jameson means collectivity (he sometimes calls it nation, sometimes collectivity, it is hard to know what he is really talking about, as Ahmad puts it) differences between the first and the third-worlds diminish and greater accuracy is accomplished by his proposition (15).

Ahmad also questions Jameson's mechanisms of canonisation, since the American critic describes Third World literatures simply as non-canonical even though they have been widely read and taught in the intellectual circles of the first-world. To give a counterexample to Jameson's theorisation, Ahmad briefly narrates Urdu literary history, concluding that it has always been concerned with other issues rather than narrating the experience of colonialism (15).

Ahmad at last argues that there is no unitary determination—as Jameson seems to defend, since he believes that the sole experience of colonialism defines the literatures of such varying nationalities and experiences. For the Indian critic what we have is, instead, a tension between capitalism and resistances to it and that this tension is characteristic of the Marxist dialectics. The unity of the world is this tension, but this constitutive fact does not operate in the same way everywhere, and literature reflects those differences, given that texts are always overdetermined (23). In conclusion, Ahmad accedes that totality is a fundamental cognitive category, but it has always to be specified and historicised. He then concludes with three affirmations: 1-several ideological conditions produce texts; 2-there is third-world in the first-world; 3-some texts cannot be easily placed within the first, the second, or the third-worlds.

2.5 – Analysis of the debate: "lineages of the present," "archaeologies of the future"

From the outset of his text Jameson announces clearly his objectives, and acknowledges some of the problems that might develop from this initiative: "It would be presumptuous to offer some general theory of what is often called third-world literature, given the enormous variety both of national cultures in the third world and of specific historical trajectories in each of those areas" (68). The fact that Jameson thus seemed both conscious and careful with problems immanent to that theoretical initiative does not prevent Ahmad from arguing against Jameson's totalising initiative. According to the Indian critic "[t]here are fundamental issues . . . which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism" (4). Despite the undeniable pertinence of Ahmad's critique, I would like to point out that some of Jameson's generalisations do not implicate absolute reductions. For instance, at the conclusion of the essay, after having conceptualised "national allegory" and even after his much protested statement (that "all third-world texts... necessarily") Jameson refers, en passant, to the object of his analysis as that which he has "identified as the *primacy* of national allegory in third-world culture" (84; emphasis added). This is an interesting choice of words, one that seems to counter his previous generalising (and polemic statement), since "primacy" indicates a preponderance, not exclusivity. Indeed if he talks in terms of "primacy" he is conceding that there is room for exceptions.

One then turns back to the original statement and finds out it was not so generalising after all:

> All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: *they are to be read as* what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, *particularly when* their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. (Jameson *Literature* 69; emphasis added)

If, as this passage suggests, there are particular instances in which we are to read Third World texts as national allegories, this means that, contrary to what Ahmad sees in Jameson's argument, not all Third World texts are to be read as national allegory:

> The logic of Jameson's own argument (i.e., that the third world is constituted by 'experience of colonialism and imperialism') leads necessarily to

> the conclusion that at least some of the writers of the third world itself must be producing texts characteristic not of the so-called tribal and Asiatic modes but of the capitalist era as such, much in the manner of the so-called first world. But Jameson does not draw that conclusion. (Ahmad *Rethoric* 13)

This passage also reveals that Ahmad's concern develops from his disquiet at Jameson's particular version of the Three Worlds Theory, which Ahmad synthesises thus: "first and second worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism, respectively), whereas the third category—the third world—is defined purely in terms of an 'experience' of externally inserted phenomena[20]" (6). The problem with this definition, Ahmad continues, is that it suspends the Third World outside history—since it is thus portrayed as a mere object of history—, which turns the hypothesis of the national allegory the only viable narrative form. In his words, "if the motivating force for history here is . . . the unitary "experience" of national oppression (if one is merely the object of history, the Hegelian slave) then what else can one narrate but that national oppression?" (8-9).

I believe the greatest dissention between Jameson and Ahmad lies in their diverging understandings of the role the systems of production have in the cultural dynamics they are assessing. For one thing, Ahmad—denouncing Jameson's negligence at situating the Third World according to its production system—hastes in uncovering Jameson's definition by resorting to one of his previous texts, "Marxism and Form" (where Jameson draws, in quite another context, conclusions similar to the ones he does in this essay) to provide the definition he believes Jameson has overlooked. Ahmad then concludes that Jameson situates the Third World within the preindustrial era. Given that, according to Jameson, the split between the private and the public spheres is characteristic of the literatures of capitalist societies, Ahmad concludes that it is because Jameson sees the Third World as preindustrial that he believes Third World literatures do not present that characteristic split. Ahmad then argues that Jameson seems to have overlooked the fact that, upon colonialism, capitalism becomes "a shaping force within those [colonised] formations" in face of which "the separation between the

[20] This criticism pairs with Gayatri Spivak's argument (cf. section 3.2), since she affirms that the effort to construe a third way in global politics was not met with a commensurate intellectual effort. I mention this in order to suggest that Ahmad's denunciation in this respect is part of a greater criticism to the very concept of the "Third World."

public and the private, so characteristic of capitalism, has occurred there as well" (12-3).

Jameson, however, did consider the matter of the production systems in the Third World, though reaching a quite different conclusion. Jameson's thoughts at this point are indeed some of the most original insights of his proposition: his hypothesis is that the insertion of capitalism upon colonialism acts on and affects older structures of production—of which is consisted the life-and-death struggle Jameson mentions—, configuring a different split (perhaps something Ahmad would be readier to acknowledge in the terms of a "tension") in the literatures marked by the experience of colonialism. As Jameson argues, "we ourselves are . . . constitutive forces powerfully at work on the remains of older cultures in our general world capitalist system" (68). Only culture offers a way out of this death struggle, only culture permits a narrative closure to this tension, according to Jameson. In his "Brief Response," Jameson readdressed the issue raised by Ahmad regarding the "mode of production," which he claimed that served then as a "code word" for "cultural situations." Jameson indeed affirms that the basis for his comparison between countries was not the different modes of production but the fact that "American bankers hold the levels of the economy," something he claims not to endorse, but recognises as a "fact of life" (27).

It seems Jameson tends towards a cultural materialist perspective of the issue, he is concerned with the factuality of the phenomenon he is conceptualising. It does not seem to me that the debate is really putting in question the factual existence of the principle Jameson named "national allegory," but whether or not the outcomings provided by this principle are desirable. Ahmad frames his critique of Jameson within Marxism, and what may be mainly brought into question is whether these outcomings are desired from a Marxist perspective. Thus, what seems to matter most in this debate is not the factuality of what Jameson terms "national allegories," but their reality-effects—and, as a consequence of that, whether our efforts (as Marxists) should be directed at fighting to reinforce it or to undermine it. Jameson seems to be fighting to reinforce it (he is actually arguing, not without some nostalgia, that this was a value lost in the first world), whereas Ahmad defends these have to be undermined (narrating the Nation should not be the capital cultural function). The likely cause for this divergence is the

different paradigm each of the debaters have, for, although both are of Marxist inclination, each takes part of a different strand in Marxism[21].

One must however be alert to the fact that, in his attempt to conceptualise "national allegory," Jameson does not draw a one-to-one correspondence between the cultural and the material:

> Our traditional conception of allegory [. . .] is that of an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences: this is, so to speak, a one-dimensional view of this signifying process, which might only be set in motion and complexified were we willing to entertain the more alarming notion that *such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text.* (73; emphasis added)

Considering this more complex understanding of allegory, Jameson's non-essentialist view is ratified, since he sees this relation not as rigid and fixed but as a dynamic one corresponding to how the lived experiences of those parts of the globe conventionally described as Third World are.

Besides that, it is noticeable that the idea of the mastercode is central in Jameson's thought. His basic notion is that whenever one gets in touch with history, one does so through a narrative, since the real is inaccessible. As a consequence of this, all that critics and theorists can do is to discuss such mastercodes, something that Ahmad seems to ignore, since he does not accept the mastercode of the Three Worlds Theory adopted by Jameson. The premise of such a mastercode is that "it is a fact of life" that we do have central cultures and peripheral cultures and that, in a certain sense, peripheral cultures are defined by central cultures[22]. If this premise is accepted, then Jameson's theory is sound and reasonable. This premise, however, is insulting to Ahmad, who refuses to accept it in an exemplary display of the fear of being defined by the Other, a fear Franco wittily termed "postcolonial nightmare." The problem with the refusal to accept Jameson's chosen

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[21] Professor Sergio Bellei points out that "Jameson has been sometimes called a post-marxist theorist, Ahmad believes in more orthodox forms of marxism" (e-mail exchange). In the discussion that followed the publication of Jacques Derridá's *Specters of Marx*, it became progressively clear that Jameson's relational view and project is to turn Marxism relevant today by turning the theory more flexible in order to adapt it to what is going on in the world today.

[22] The reverse is not true, Professor Bellei reminded us during the public defence of this thesis.

mastercode and its basic premise is that the alternative is not politically viable.

Certainly, the choice for a mastercode entails not only the acceptance of its basic premise but also some indulgence with its limitations (for more on this, see section 3), and Jameson is aware of the limitations of the mastercode he is employing, he know that, in a sense, he is being reductive in defining the allegorical as the basic mode of literary production in the Third World, but he accepts this limitation as an inescapable condition to the discussion he is proposing, so much that he advances and refutes most of the criticism that followed. Ahmad's refusal to accept Jameson's chosen mastercode is possibly the reason why his "Brief Response" was indeed so brief, as indeed Jameson had little to respond from within the masternarrative he adopted and he refused to talk from another episteme, for reasons that he had also previously laid out.

Both Jameson and Ahmad are Marxist critics, both contend that final determinations are the outcome of multiple constitutive facts, yet each maintain a different focus: whereas Ahmad believes that any generalisation of the sort proposed by Jameson must first inquire on the ideological conditions that produce texts, Jameson is more concerned with what he terms "situational consciousness," that is, the material experience that is narrated by such texts, which, he believes, provides a possibility of "grasping the social totality" (85). For Ahmad, any attempt at understanding the present and its material contingencies and cultural configurations must take into account the historical developments that shaped them. Jameson, on his turn, seems to be historicising future by attentively looking at the present: for him, the present-day construction and envisionment of the future is telling of the present-day consciousness and material situation. The way we, now, devise our future is telling of ourselves, of our material situation and consciousness. In other words, Ahmad offers a genealogy of the present; Jameson, an archaeology of the future.

3 – CHAPTER III:
"National Allegory" from a cultural realist perspective

The distinction between Jameson's and Ahmad's projects may be fruitfully problematized at yet another level, since it is possible to appropriate Jameson's argument for a critique of privilege, as I hope to show. In this chapter I seek to expand the debate through the contribution of other critics and through the investigation of the polysemic potential of the concept of "national allegory" as it was taken on throughout the debate and its resonances. Such investigation will, hopefully, foreground an enriching new possible reading of Jameson's argument, a reading that sees it as a sort of complicitous critique[23], or, as Jameson might have it, as a metacritical stance. The foregrounding of this novel way of reading Jameson's argument is expected to contribute to the discussion by opening it up, rather than resolving it. The discussion on the postmodernity in Latin America is quite instrumental in this respect and will constitute a relevant section of this chapter.

Confronting Jameson's place of enunciation—that of a First World intellectual, speaking to a First World learned audience regarding university education in the US—with his acknowledgement that he does not

> see how a first-world intellectual can avoid [the operation of the strategy of otherness] without falling back into some general liberal and humanistic universalism: it seems to me that one of our basic political tasks lies precisely in the ceaseless effort to remind the American public of the radical difference of other national situations. (*Literature* 77)

one can conclude that, as this passage evinces, Jameson is doubtlessly concerned with the position and the role of the First World intellectual. He is, definitely, concerned with his own position and political task as

[23] While there is a number of other theoretical concepts that translate similarly the attitude I am describing here—such as Jacques Derridá's "inhabiting the structures," Judith Butler's "contingent foundations," and Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism"—as well as there is consistent and pertinent criticism to it—such as Audre Lorde's declaration that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," and Linda Alcoff's contention that "a claim can only be taken seriously—and thus have its strategic effects—when it is taken as truth in a real and not merely strategic sense" (*Politics*, 323)—I will be working with the concept of "complicitous critique," by Linda Hutcheon, and Jameson's "metacriticim" because of their specific concern with the possibilities of political engagement within postmodernism.

he advances his theory, and he is, arguably, implicating himself in his own criticism. In face of this conclusion, one is led to investigate in what possible ways may Jameson be implicating himself in his own criticism, that is, it becomes imperative to investigate whether Jameson's argument can be productively read as one that criticises metaconstructions—such as "the Third World—" from the inside instead of as one that endorses them.

As I have already argued (cf. section 2.2), Jameson seems to operate on two contrasting methods in a sort of intellectual hybridism: he both criticises orientalism and performs it, he both affirms the need for a historicist approach yet leaves it aside. Surely, this procedure is far from what he had elsewhere characterised as pastiche. His is a posture closer to what Linda Hutcheon's termed "complicitous critique," one "whose mode is resolutely contradictory as well as unavoidably political" (*Politics* 1), since he "speak[s] to a society from within the values and history of that society, while still questioning it" (*Politics* 12). When Jameson coins the expression "national allegory" he operates a number of master narratives (the Third World, the nation), yet his statements carry strong potential commitment to criticise these master narratives from within. According to Caroline Roberto, "Hutcheon endorses that complicitous critique is the feature that makes postmodern art filled with political outcomes, thus leading to a reflexivity that challenges Jameson's critique [of postmodern hybridisation as politically void pastiche]" (*Debate* 27). Jameson is certainly complying with macroconstructs while potentially critical of their limitations, in a truly politicised gesture.

We can see in Jameson the same ethics and motivation that, according to Hutcheon, characterises both feminism and postmodernism: "Both try to **avoid the bad faith of believing they can stand outside ideology**, but both want to **reclaim their right to contest the power of a dominant one, even if from a compromised position**" (*Politics* 23; emphasis added.). Indeed that is what comes out when Jameson outlines the political spirit of the analysis he puts forth in his previous article on Postmodernism (which, as we have already discussed, constituted the basis of his article on Third World literature which initiated the debate here studied): "If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable" (*Postmodernism* 57). Also, this concern appears also when Jameson affirms "I don't see how a first-world intellectual can avoid this

operation [of differentiation] without falling back into some general liberal and humanistic universalism" (*Literature* 77).

According to Hutcheon, postmodern theory is "reluctant to isolate a single major determining factor" (Creed *apud* Hutcheon *Politics* 153) because it cannot do that "without falling into the trap of which it implicitly accuses other ideologies: that of totalization" (*Politics* 153). But that operation is typical of the postmodern subject. Indeed, as Roberto puts it, "[t]he importance of representation in postmodern cultural production is associated with its ability to bring forth the political constructs imbued in representation itself" (*Debate* 22). Such seemingly contradictory initiative sets the inevitable operation of the postmodern subject, and this is no different for the postmodern intellectual, as both theory and criticism are cultural products. It is this sort of intellectual initiative that we see in Jameson, an initiative that follows Hutcheon's contention that "the postmodern does not deny its inevitable implication in [master narratives], but it also wants to use that 'insider' position to 'de-doxify' the 'givens' that 'go without saying' in those grand systems. Thus, it is neither neoconservatively nostalgic nor radically revolutionary; it is unavoidably compromised – and it knows it" (*Politics* 119).

As a consequence of the contingent limitation imposed by the acknowledgement of the imprisionment within language—and, consequently, within ideology—"postmodernism is politically ambivalent for it is doubly coded – both complicitous with and contesting of the cultural dominants within which it operates" (Hutcheon *Politics* 142). As Hutcheon further develops, "[c]omplicity is perhaps necessary (or at least unavoidable) in deconstructive critique (you have to signal – and thereby install – that which you want to subvert), though it also inevitably conditions both the radicality of the kind of critique it can offer and the possibility of suggestive change" (*Politics* 152). As a result of that, "[t]he political confusion surrounding postmodernism is . . . a direct result of its double encoding as both complicity and critique" (*Politics* 153-4). To some critics, however, the announcement of this commitment to criticism from the inside does not excuse the premises on which they are based, and this is possibly what inspires Ahmad to accuse Jameson of concealing his own ideology or of lacking methodological consistence.

3.1 – Metacommentary and the creation of the conditions of criticism

Jameson had by then developed a theory of the metacommentary[24], a method "according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it." In this context, the author continues, "[i]nterpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code." (*Unconscious*, 9-10). Therefore, allegory is a method of interpretation, one that speaks more of the interpreting subject and its context than of the text itself.

Yet, if Jameson's formulation suggests that Third World texts—instead of being ontologically constituted as allegorical of their nations—are rather seen and read as so by the First World reader, then how can Third World literature redeem the First World intellectual, as Jameson seems to be suggesting? One possible way of looking at this problematic is, considering that Jameson, as does Spivak, defend the pedagogical and didactic functions of art (*Postmodernism* 89), take his argument as a suggestion that First World intellectuals can learn something about themselves through the way they approach Third World texts. As a matter of fact, the exercise of thinking about interpretation teaches us something about the situation of interpretation, as Jameson has affirmed elsewhere:

> All thinking about interpretation must sink itself in the strangeness, the unnaturalness, of the hermeneutic situation; or to put it another way, every individual interpretation must include an interpretation of its own existence, must show its own credentials and justify itself: every commentary must be at the same time a metacommentary. (Jameson *Metacommentary* 10)

In other words, a reflection on the hermeneutic situation must necessarily entail a reflection on the interpreting subject. In face of this, it is no surprise that, in order to provide the basis for a reflection on the task of the First World intellectual and call for a strengthening of its political valence, Jameson suggests looking not at Third World texts themselves, but to the way they have been read by the First World. The suggestion that is foregrounded by this reading is that it is possible to learn, from the way they approach Third World texts, to make their own texts strange to themselves, learning to read them politically too.

[24] See *Marxism and Form*, *The Political Unconscious*, and "Metacommentary."

For the viability of such a project, it is worth investigating how the Third World and its literature come to be seen as they are, after all, this possible reading of Jameson's argument is only pertinent in case this strangeness can be achieved to a certain level in relation to home literature. Gramsci, when discussing ideology, affirms that one cannot see what one is not predisposed to see. Identity is then a category that develops from this need, since the contact with something one was not predisposed to see causes a puzzle moment which is resolved through a radical reduction to identity or non-identity[25]. This is how the First World is ready to accept and receive Third World cultural production: it is either a faithful representation of what I already see as the Third World and it is thus readily accepted as its representative[26], or it is something I cannot identify and therefore deny. This is what causes Ahmad's conclusion that "one is not quite sure whether one is dealing with a fallacy ("all third-world texts are" this or that) or with the Law of the Father (you must write this if you are to be admitted into my theory)" (*Rethoric* 12).

The relation between the universalist assumption and the particular is well illustrated by the fact that authors who counter Jameson's proposition, such as Franco and Prasad (as well as Ahmad) have exemplified with the literatures they study to counter Jameson's generalizations (cf. section 1.2). If authors who are ready to reassess the concept of "national allegory" are more inclined to accepting Jameson's propositions, the authors who counter Jameson tend to speak from the particular, thus missing the point of Jameson's proposition altogether: to offer a mapping possibility where the particular can trace its place in the global cultural politics. As I have mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, this research focuses on a specific potential meaning in Jameson's argument that may problematize universalist discourse from within it.

Foregrounding a reading of Jameson through a metacritical lens approximates the debate to the discussion on postmodernism in Latin America[27], since both projects employ a strategic use of macroconstructs, that is, both projects entail the confrontation with the reality effects of discourses. Here is how the perspective of cultural

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[25] The puzzle moment may generate wonder or fear—awe and the sublime.

[26] Also, here is the allegorical sense, it represents what I-the West-expect to see represented as the East, according to Brian Larkin.

[27] Such a discussion is concerned rather with the matter of temporality than with the matter of depth. Interestingly, the connection is even more clear if one considers the fact that Jameson describes the perception of Third World texts by a First World audience as "old."

realism (cf. section1.4) is important in this analysis. Also, here is the limitation that tensions such perspectives, after all, "strategic essentialism" tends to reinforce essentialist discourses.

3.2 – Expanding the debate

Since the discussion on postmodernism in Latin-America has taken on the perspective of cultural materialism in the terms proposed in this research, it proficuously stages the Jameson/Ahmad debate, as I intend to show below. That discussion deals with the paradox of a Latin-America that simultaneously inhabits the postmodern and the belated time—postmodern from our own Latin-American episteme because of the simultaneous presence of old and new structures, and belated from the First World episteme—providing a new perspective on the Jameson/Ahmad debate.

I have so far dealt with two possible dynamics of the mechanism Jameson named "national allegory:" an ontological one, according to which the concept would describe characteristics which are immanent and proper to the Third World text, a view that has motivated most of the (earlier) criticism to Jameson's proposition; and a hermeneutical one, proposing that Third World literature is not allegorical in itself but is rather read as so by the First World reader. I propose now a reading of the Jameson/Ahmad debate from a Latin-American postmodern perspective, where a third dynamic, which I will term metacritical, flourishes. Under that dynamic, "national allegory" is strategically used in an ongoing discourse by intellectuals occupying the "Third World" position as a means of criticising the collective project of nation in, as I will argue here, a quite postmodern fashion. Also under that dynamic, "national allegory" is used by Jameson as a metacritical tool in order to implicate himself—and, by extension, the First World intellectual—in his criticism.

Jean Franco, commenting on Latin American Postmodernity, affirms that

> In such novels, it is precisely the disappearance of the nation, its failure to provide systems of meaning and belief, that undermines referential reading. It is true that they capture the continued resonance of certain historical events, such as the conquest and the impact of succeeding waves of modernisation, visible in the fragmented life-forms they have left in their wake. For this untimeliness is the condition of Latin American modernity, giving one a sense of reliving the past.

> Or it is as if the past can speak in the present tense . . . . The juxtaposition of disparate discourses and the use of pastiche perhaps help explain why U.S. critics so eagerly embrace Latin American novels as postmodern. But incorporation into postmodernism is no more satisfactory than being labelled with Jameson's notion of Third World national allegory. Indeed, the two recuperative gestures seem to be motivated by the same operation of extrapolation. Extrapolation reduces the complexity of intertextual allusions and deprives texts of their own historical relations to prior texts. It implies a view of Latin American literature either in opposition to the metropolis or as part of the metropolis's postmodern repertoire (208-9).

According to Franco, therefore, the hybridisation of genres, the use of intertextuality, the sense of loss of the signified, the use of pastiche, and a sum of other characteristics make Latin American texts seem "postmodern," but she defends that "just as national allegory fails to describe adequately the simultaneous dissolution of the idea of the nation and the continuous persistence of national concerns, so postmodernism cannot adequately describe those texts that use pastiche and citation not simply as style but as correlatives of the continent's uneasy and unfinished relationship to modernity" (211).

Spivak also joins in the debate. In the chapter "Collectivities" of the book *Death of a Discipline*, she discusses the impact of cultural studies in higher education, proposing a reassessment and restructuring of this field in face of the new scenario created by the presence of liberal multiculturalism in comparative studies. She seems to share of Jameson's concern[28], yet leading to a quite different programme[29]: that "we must, as literature teachers in the classroom, . . . let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so" (26).

[28]"If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity, random difference, a coexistence of a host of distinct forces whose effectivity is undecidable" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 57).

[29] Different because Jameson calls for a totality model on the assumption that some level of certainty is an epistemological necessity, whether Spivak defends undecidability as a value "Insofar as Comparative Literature remains part of the Euro–U.S. cultural dominant, it shares another sort of fear, the fear of undecidability in the subject of humanism" (26).

According to Spivak, collectivity is the basis of both culture and politics, yet it is extremely fragile due to the law of social curvature[30]. However, the irreducibility of the social curvature means, she argues, that it is within the field of the undecidable that politics must take place (27-30). Literature works on that field, as Spivak suggests based on her creative employment of the derridean notion of teleopoisesis[31] in reading Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own." Spivak defends that peripheral literatures ask for such a (transgressive) reading—considering that "[t]he reader and writer are multiple in constituting the unverifiable truth of the text" (42)—and exemplifies this reading by analysing two novels that dialogue with Conrad's "Heart of Darkness." According to her, reading literature as teleopoiesis is an alternative that counters the "mechanical convenience of mapmaking[32]" (31). Spivak's reading model seems to counter Jameson's concept of "national allegory," since that concept "is clearly a form of just such mapping of the totality" (Jameson, *Literature* 88).

What Spivak points out as the advantage of the contact with multicultural texts—that is, an imaginative and creative, meaningful contact with the other—is the lack of which Jameson is diagnosing in the First World reception of Third World texts, and in First World literature as a self-referential means (that is, metacriticism). What Ahmad sees as Jameson's endorsement of macroconstructs can actually be read as Jameson's pointing to how unimaginative First World writings and readings—and thus, how uncreative and therefore politically void—have been, and how urgent and imperative it is to face and overcome such problem.

It is necessary to point that Spivak, as well as Jameson, understands generality as a necessary epistemological means. But not any type of generality, as she distinguishes

> two kinds of generalities. The generality of poiesis depends on its unverifiability; it cannot be tied to a singular 'fact.' There is another kind of generality, which must suppress singularity in order to establish a 'fact.' It is, if you like, the difference between prefiguration and prediction. (44)

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[30] In Spivak's words, "that one cannot access another directly and with a guarantee" (30).

[31] "[T]o affect the distant in a poiesis—an imaginative making—without guarantees, and thus, by definitive predication, reverse its value" (31).

[32] In the first chapter of that same volume Spivak suggests "a philosophy of planning . . . [that] discourages mapmaking literary criticism as an end in itself because diagnostic cartography does not keep the door open to the "to come" (6).

It is, therefore, in the possibility of imagining an otherwise unpredictable futurity project that lays the distinction between the Spivak's derridean teleopoiesis and Jameson's "national allegory."

Besides that, Spivak's proposition at a generality entails a rather different concern from the "old particularism-universalism debate—" one of the axes that polarise the Jameson/Ahmad debate—as it implies the pragmatic need for a certain level of generality, as a possibility of abstraction[33], suggesting that "[w]e cannot and should not reject this impulse toward generalization," keeping it, however, "under erasure, visible as a warning" (46). This implicit criticism to Jameson's mapmaking proposition does not mean she pairs with Ahmad, as she criticises the two theorists for attending to identitarian perspectives (and being thus tied to singular facts):

> Politically correct metropolitan multiculturalists want the world's others to be identitarians; nationalist (Jameson) or class (Ahmad). To undo this binary demand is to suggest that peripheral literature may stage more surprising and unexpected maneuvers toward collectivity. (55-56)

The nodal point of Spivak's intervention in the Jameson/Ahmad debate is, therefore, a criticism at a sort of identitarianism that ignores the law of curvature and does not envisage a more imaginative possibility of reading.

Spivak resorts to "Chinua Achebe's famous comment on *Heart of Darkness*: 'It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry'" to introduce the issue of the uncanny in relation to the Other's text (57). That is particularly relevant to the novel she is analysing—*Season of Migration to the North*—for, as she argues that, in that particular case, "colonialism" is the element that is introduced in the familiar making it uncanny:

> As the novel unfolds, we know that the name of what comes forth to transform this familiar shared humanity of that strange and unfamiliar country called England into a source of fear and anxiety (Angst) may be something called "colonialism." We hark back to the passage by Achebe. (58)

Spivak is however quite careful not to suggest that any particular case accounts for all cases. When proceeding with her reading of the

[33] Spivak argues in favour of gender as a category that allows such a possibility of abstraction, due to the "global commensurability in the field of gender" (46).

two novels, Spivak often notes, whenever she interprets a particular aspect of the narrative, that she is not discussing "characterization or cultural information[34]" (61). This is clearly a criticism to both Jameson and Ahmad, for "Jameson was generalizing from China, as his chief critic, Aijaz Ahmad, was arguing from a species of muscular Marxism, which automatically substitutes class for nationality" (66). Her suggestion is that "[f]or the kind of institutional literary pedagogy I am envisaging, do not accuse—do not excuse—turn around through reading and use remains the imperative" (65).

In short, then, the basis of Spivak's criticism to both Jameson and Ahmad is the sort of generality each of them employs, Jameson's nationalism and Ahmad's class, both presenting an identitarian perspective based on certain particulars, constituting what Spivak terms "performative examples of an unexamined politics of culture" (28), limited to building predictions rather than imaginative prefigurations that call for transgressive readings.

Spivak, however, seems to have missed the polysemic potential of Jameson's concept of "national allegory," even though Spivak herself seems to employ a similar method to describe the periphery of the world as "the Global South." The entire debate seems to be articulated in an opposition of projects analogous to the opposition of projects of cultural materialism in comparison to intersectionality: cultural materialism is concerned with the interpellation of the subject by the macroconstructs, it understands categories as non-essential, but as causing real effects since they interpellate subjects; whereas intersectionality is concerned with the deconstruction of discourses of homogenisation.

Allegory, for Jameson, "is not a one-to-one mapping of a series of equivalences, but 'profoundly discontinuous' and 'a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol" (*Literature*, 73). Jameson's "method of reading provides a framework for accounting for the complex interplay between the psychological, the economic and the political, and the cultural" (McGonegal, "Metacritique", 256).

Jameson's general project is best delineated in his "Foreword" to Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Caliban*:

> We . . . need a new literary and cultural internationalism which involves risks and dangers,

[34] Other instances are: "I am not making a characterological point"(58); and "The narrator is not indexed as representative of a "Third World" collectivity of culture (Jameson) or class (Ahmad)" (63).

> which calls us into question fully as much as it acknowledges the Other, thereby serving as a more adequate and chastening form of self-knowledge. This "internationalism of the national situations" neither reduces the "Third World" to some homogeneous Other of the West, nor does it vacuously celebrate the "astonishing" pluralism of human cultures: rather, by isolating the common situation (capitalism, imperialism, colonialism) shared by very different kinds of societies, it allows their differences to be measured against each other as well as against ourselves. (xi-xii)

I have mentioned (cf. section 2.2) the issue with the hybrid method Jameson adopts in his article: the method used in the preliminary part of his article is orientalism (Ahmad names it a "rhetoric of otherness"), but this is just to show how the Other of the First World—that is, the Third World—is built (or rather discursively materialised). It is this construction that bases the perception (inherent to Mr Bennet's misgivings) of Third World literatures as old-fashioned. Jameson indulges his own employment of the rhetoric of otherness, in the initial stages of his reasoning, as a means of exposing the discursive materialization of the Third World and its literature for a Frist World public which results in a perception of such literatures as old-fashioned and outmoded. In the ensuing part of the essay, Jameson is already historicising and thereby underdoing that perception. Ahmad's misgivings towards Jameson's essay have much to do with that first step: he does not follow Jameson in the ensuing step. For Ahmad, the employment of a rhetoric of otherness invalidates the entire attempt, something he can only do because he does consider Jameson's self-critical initiative.

4 – CHAPTER IV: FINAL REMARKS

As I tried to show in this research, the Jameson/Ahmad debate must be read from a cultural realist perspective because such perspective provides meaningful and enriching readings of the debate. The basis of the debate, the old universalism *versus* particularism conflict, is still on, acquiring, however, new contours, new shades and lights as Cultural Studies and multiculturalism spread and breed roots in Universities and cultures around the globe, in what is perhaps a (positive) (side) effect of the postmodernism Jameson described as a cultural dominant.

The debate has inspired strong reactions, having constituted a background against which the field of Postcolonial Studies was developed. Yet, after that initial stage when Jameson's text served as a kind of scapegoat against which the discipline developed, a growing tendency to reassess and ressignify its fundamental concept—that of Third World's "national allegory"—provided the conditions for the existence of this research, which aims at pushing the debate a little further in that direction, suggesting that the debate may stage even more insightful and provoking endeavours if we are to overcome the usefulness of a scapegoat and read Jameson as a metacritical text, even though he speaks from an ineluctably complicit and compromised position.

Indeed one could ask whether there is—or whether there has ever been—an alternative to that kind of speech that implicates itself in the criticism it advances. The alternative could perhaps be the naivety or bad faith of trusting one can speak from nowhere, that one can abandon their place of enunciation. What is the ethical limit—and what is the ethical imperative—for the problematic yet necessary initiative of being critical of the very conceptions one speaks from? I believe it is a necessary radicalism, a first step towards the criticism of one's own privilege, or, as Jameson puts it, "every individual interpretation must include an interpretation of its own existence, must show its own credentials and justify itself: every commentary must be at the same time a metacommentary."

Jameson has been developing his theory of the need for the hermeneutic initiative to be preceded by the questioning of one's self, of the one who is doing the interpreting. In *Postmodernism*, Jameson described the historical moment of postmodernism as a cultural dominant, leaving to his later article—"Third World Literature"—the task of analysing the consequences brought by such cultural dominant everywhere: in the First World, the idealism of the Master; in the Third

World, the materialism of the slave. His particular twist of the Hegelian dialectics is provided by the recommendation that the First World should abandon that idealism by a recovery of what was lost when the bourgeoise monad ego became the supreme being of postmodern culture and politics, a recovery of a sense of reference and of belonging, which is to be reached by means of a cognitive mapping that allows our differences to be measured against each other (*Brief Response*).

This is why I defend that reading Jameson's propositions as endorsing metaconstructs is to too quickly do away with the possibility of engaging with the criticism to one's own privilege. Read from a cultural realist perspective, Jameson's text speaks of material differences that actually exist in the world and that interpellate individuals and collectivities in ways that generate real effects, such as the selection of Third World texts to circulate in the First World, a selection that is carried out by publishing houses in the First World, as Ahmad pointed out.

The gist of the Jameson/Ahmad debate is the old universalism/particularism debate, where, on the one hand, the need to develop a theory that can to some extent situate the relative position of the individual within that which surpasses them—be it a collectivity, be it the Nation—effectively allowing politics to take place sacrifices the singularity of the particular; and on the other hand, the need to consider the overdetermined position of the particular sacrifices the possibilities of thinking and doing politics. Each of these positions has both limitations and reaches, each implying a different ethics and motivation. It is a matter of choice, a choice that is taken on political and ethical grounds, after all, whereas the universalist claim can be attacked on an ethical level on the grounds that it obliterates its ideologies, and on a political level on the grounds that it is an epistemologically frail position, the particularist claim can also be attacked on an ethical level on the grounds that it neglects the real effects of macroconstructs, and on a political level on the grounds that it provides no framework for taking a political stance.

The discoursive history of the debate—how it has been read—has developed from a strong initial resistance which interpreted Jameson's concepts as rigid structures that endorsed the macroconstructs he was operating—the Nation, the Third World, national allegory—progressively towards responses that, by opening up for the potential polysemy of these concepts, allowed for new readings that provide meaningful contributions to the debate. As well as these early responses—articulated mainly in the lines of Ahmad's arguments—

contributed greatly for the development of Postcolonial Studies, indeed setting its grounds as argued by Szeman, the later, more recent responses can set the grounds for a new take on the greater field of Cultural Studies, a new take that considers the fact of life that macroconstructs, however arbitrary they are, indeed interpellate individuals and collectivities. In other words, macroconstructs generate real effects. Anyone engaged with the pressing need for thinking and doing politics today must consider that fact, or risk falling into the pitfalls of postmodernism, as argued by Alcoff and Mohanty.

The debate has been running for twenty-seven years, and, as I hope to have shown in the research, it will keep on running because the old universalism/particularism debate has been recently influenced by new perspectives coming from cultural studies. It is thus necessary to keep reading the debate because it is a new debate today, since it has materialised the terms it deployed, continually shifting its signifieds, what makes it necessary to keep looking at the debate from new, emerging perspectives. This research aimed at moving the debate a step forward in the direction of the most recent responses to it.

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