

# PREFACE

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THIS BOOK grew out of a sense of puzzlement: the fact that for many years the industrialized nations of North America and Europe were supposed to be the indubitable models for the societies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the so-called Third World, and that these societies must catch up with the industrialized countries, perhaps even become like them. This belief is still held today in many quarters. Development was and continues to be—although less convincingly so as the years go by and its promises go unfulfilled—the magic formula. The presumed ineluctability of this notion—and, for the most part, its unquestioned desirability—was most puzzling to me. This work arose out of the need to explain this situation, namely, the creation of a Third World and the dream of development, both of which have been an integral part of the socioeconomic, cultural, and political life of the post–World War II period.

The overall approach taken in the book can be described as poststructuralist. More precisely, the approach is discursive, in the sense that it stems from the recognition of the importance of the dynamics of discourse and power to any study of culture. But there is much more than an analysis of discourse and practice; I also attempt to contribute to the development of a framework for the cultural critique of economics as a foundational structure of modernity, including the formulation of a culture-based political economy. In addition, I include a detailed examination of the emergence of peasants, women, and the environment as clients of the development apparatus in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, I incorporate throughout the text accounts of Third World scholars, many of whom tell stories that are less mediated by the needs of the U.S. and European academy.

The approach is also anthropological. As Stuart Hall said, “If culture happens to be what seizes your soul, you will have to recognize that you will always be working in an area of displacement.” The analysis in this book is cultural in the anthropological sense but also in the sense of cultural studies. It may be situated among current attempts to advance anthropology and cultural studies as critical, intellectual, and political projects.

As the title of the book suggests, development and even the Third World may be in the process of being unmade. This is happening not so much because the Second World (the socialist economies of Europe) is gone and the Holy Trinity of the post–World War II era is finally collapsing on its own but because of development’s failure and the increasing opposition to it by popular groups in the Third World. The voices that are calling for an end to development are becoming more numerous and audible. This book can be seen as part of this effort; I also hope that it will be part of the task of imagining and fostering alternatives.

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terms of conventional economic and development indicators) to make it in the big city so that his children could “get ahead” and become modern.

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# Encountering Development

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