

The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form: Cold War, Decolonization and Third World Print Cultures

Francesca Orsini, Neelam Srivastava and Laetitia Zecchini (Eds.)
OpenBook Publishers, 2022
ISBN: 978-1-80064-188-4

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For those familiar with or trained in postcolonial approaches to literary analysis, the post-World War II era which ushered in the decolonization of many European colonies around the world is often studied under the concept of the nation. Questions of a national culture, national language and identity took precedence in newly independent nations, and so the literary works of this period have been examined as expressions of or reactions to the nation-building project. Yet, Asia and Africa's decolonization from the 1940s up to the 1960s, which has produced some of the most recognizable figures in postcolonial studies – Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire for instance – and the conditions in which they worked and struggled seems to have fallen by the wayside over the years. The essays in *The form of ideology and the ideology of form: Cold War, decolonization and Third World print cultures* however, address this gap by examining the literary activities and exchanges underpinning decolonizing and revolutionary movements of the mid-twentieth century, offering fresh perspectives on the literary production of a critical moment in history. Cold War literary studies has been steadily gaining momentum in recent years (see for example *The Palgrave handbook of Cold War literature*, edited by Andrew Hammond and *At penpoint: African literatures, postcolonial studies, and the Cold War* by Monica Popescu – both published in 2020) and this new publication adds to the growing field.

In this book, the positive connotations and possibilities of the term 'Third World', which has for a long time been a byword for underdevelopment and the lesser status of nations located in Asia, Africa and Latin America, are revived. According to the editors:

Third World is effectively a term invented in the West, and it carried connotations of dependency and the residual legacy of colonization. However, in the era of the anticolonial liberation movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, it came to take on a positive and militant meaning, building on an existing political and cultural body of thought that sought to enfranchise itself from Eurocentric theories of self-determination and equality... (Orsini et al., 2022, p. 17)

This essential point decentres the view that the peoples of the Third World were dependent on the First World (the 'free' world led by the United States of America) or the Second World (the communist bloc led by the USSR and China) to make their own futures after the formal end of colonialism. Instead, as many of the chapters in this book show, the writers, intellectuals, editors,

publishers and readers of travelogues, short stories, essays, novels and magazines produced in multiple locations in the Third World were engaged in making their own narratives independent of the contesting ideologies propelling the Cold War. For instance, Laetitia Zecchini's chapter explores how Indian writers active in the Indian PEN and/or the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF) formulated their own interpretations of the struggle for freedom, including cultural freedom from either side of the Cold War, despite both organizations' alignment with the liberal ideals of the First World.

One of the outcomes of the Cold War is the forging of solidarities among decolonizing nations across continents, which is reflected in the diverse array of literary and non-literary writing in multiple languages featured in these essays – works in Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Mandarin and Spanish, among others. Magazines such as *Tricontinental* and *Présence Africaine* played a significant role in disseminating the ideas of Third World intellectuals, writers and leaders to an international and multilingual readership including those in Europe, as Neelam Srivastava's chapter explains; these magazines' role were supported by the labour of translation, as Francesca Orsini's survey of short stories from around the world published in Hindi-language magazines of the Cold War era discusses at length. What comes across in such essays as Srivastava's, Orsini's and Jia Yan's (on fraternal travelogues by Indian and Chinese writers in the 1950s) is the struggle to build a new world based on mutual co-operation, anti-colonialism and non-alignment with the superpowers; literary production and print culture in this context were not for leisure but constituted a commitment to these ideals.

A chapter on the 1961 novel *Barg el-Lil* by Tunisian author Bachir Khreyif caught my attention due partly to its subject-matter: a historical novel featuring a Black slave, in fact “the first Arabic novel to have a black slave as protagonist” (Goikolea-Amiano, 2022, p. 242). Itzea Goikolea-Amiano's reading of *Barg el-Lil* expertly connects the narrative, set in sixteenth-century Tunis with decolonizing Tunisia in the twentieth century, highlighting the novel's solidarities between characters of different ‘races’ and for women oppressed by patriarchal societies as a response to the politics of the times.

The essays featured in *The form of ideology and the ideology of form* would be of interest to those working on Cold War literature, history and politics; for readers and scholars used to working mainly with Anglophone literature from a postcolonial perspective such as myself, this book is a challenge due to my unfamiliarity with many of the contexts and literary landscapes featured. It requires me to move out of a postcolonial framework that still retains a Eurocentric view of the world and of history (with English as the main language of thought and expression). Nonetheless, coming from a country (Malaysia) in a region that experienced “a very hot [Cold] war” (Chua, 2008, p. 232), reading these essays resurrected events and figures briefly learned in history classes but which are never really open for mature dialogue due to the dominance of the state's narrative on Malaya's (later Malaysia) communist insurgency. Much prospective work remains to recover voices and narratives from Southeast Asia's anti-colonial movements and involvement in the Cold War. In this sense, this book may inspire future work on Cold War literature of the region with its linguistic diversity and complex history of the ideological and political struggles of the era.

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