SEEING THROUGH NGOs: POVERTY, VISUALITY AND THE FIRST AND
THIRD WORLDS

by

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Abstract

Poverty alleviation, both at home and abroad, is a major preoccupation of socially aware and ethically motivated individuals in Canada. Examining the work of Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work explicitly towards this goal, I explore the ways that discourses surrounding poverty alleviation are influenced by the dominant imaginative geographies of separate First and Third Worlds. I examine recent public relations material distributed by Canadian-based NGOs, both those that target Third World poverty (working in the field of “development”) and those that focus on domestic poverty. I explore the dominant visualities employed by these organizations when they represent poverty in their fundraising and publicity material, and investigate the way that these representations reflect (and occasionally challenge) prevailing understandings of the First and Third Worlds as fundamentally separate and internally coherent geographies. Judith Butler (2004) theorizes the United States’ experience of suffering and vulnerability on September 11, 2001 as a moment that offered a clear choice between two possible responses: “[D]o we now seek to restore [First World complacency] as a way of healing from this wound? Or do we allow the challenge to First World complacency to stand and begin to build a different politics on this basis?” (p. 7-8) My thesis will explore a parallel question in the context of a different kind of suffering and vulnerability: that that arises from poverty (experienced differently – but experienced nonetheless) in nations of the First World as well as nations of the Third.
Preface

This research received approval from UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate Number H10-01645.
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for my friends

I am nowhere without you.
Chapter 1: Poverty, Visuality and a World Divided

Poverty alleviation, both at home and abroad, is a major preoccupation of socially aware and ethically motivated individuals in Canada. By examining the work of Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work explicitly towards this goal, I explore the ways that discourses surrounding poverty alleviation are influenced by the dominant imaginative geographies of separate First and Third Worlds. I examine recent fundraising and publicity material distributed by Canadian-based NGOs, both those that target Third World poverty (working in the field of “development”) and those that focus on domestic poverty. I explore the dominant visualities employed by these organizations when they represent poverty to their potential donors, and investigate the way that these representations reflect (and occasionally challenge) prevailing understandings of the First and Third World as fundamentally different (and by implication, internally coherent) geographies.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter lays the groundwork for those that follow through a discussion of some of the questions that led me to undertake this research, followed by an overview of my methodology. I then proceed through a broad literature review of several areas of existing literature, which I hope to bring together in my work. This is followed by a lengthy note on terminology and categorization, which includes both a philosophical discussion of these concepts and a more grounded explanation of the specific terms and categories that I work with most extensively. Next, I provide three loose genealogies – of attitudes toward poverty, the First/Third World divide and NGO involvement in anti-poverty work – acknowledging the importance of historical as well as geographical context. Chapter 1 concludes with a discussion of the importance of poverty alleviation and visuality to Canadian politics and society as well as to geopolitics more
broadly. My groundwork laid, Chapter 2 begins with an exploration of Escobar (1995)’s concept of developmentalism and its relevance to contemporary development theory and practice. I then outline three specifically contemporary trends in development discourse, as it circulates among North American publics: popularization, neoliberalization, and a tendency toward globalism. Finally, Chapter 2 ends with a case study that illustrates the relevance of my research questions and provides a rich starting point for initiating a conversation about the ways First and Third World poverty are represented by NGOs in fundraising and publicity material. This conversation between First and Third World NGO visualities of poverty is initiated in earnest in Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 takes up its ethical, political and social implications.

I take as axiomatic that the ideas and practices of development originated in the crucible of colonialism, and that the First and Third Worlds resonate strongly with categories forged in this era. Wainwright (2008) argues that colonialism has called for hegemonic commitments to the way we see the world: divided and opposed between Europe/colony and the rest/metropole. The problem is not only that our worldliness is bifurcated, but that this bifurcation reflects one view, and in a way that is represented as a universal one. In this operation, hegemony is doubly geographical: it is constituted on the basis of spatial relations, and such relations become hegemonic as geographies are naturalized and sedimented as common sense through political and cultural practices (p. 17).

The division between the First and Third Worlds has indeed achieved the status of common sense: its geographical hegemony is virtually uncontested in mainstream discourse.

Although the United Nations Statistics Division argues that placing nations into these categories is no more than a “statistical convenience,” these classifications have a significant material influence in contemporary global interactions. From my modest starting point examining representations of poverty by NGOs, I hope to gain insight into the discursive and
material work that the First/Third World imaginary does in our contemporary world. I hope to make some remarks about what possibilities being classified as First World or as Third World open up or close off for different people and different places, and the way that this bifurcation ends up conditioning the way that people’s voices and ultimately people’s lives are valued and the rights that are accorded to them.

1.1 Poverty, Places and Puzzlement

Although poverty and its alleviation both at home and abroad are objects of concern for many Canadian individuals and institutions, a wide gulf divides the way this poverty is typically thought about, talked about and acted upon in these two locations. The foreign poverty that most concerns Canadians is located in the ‘undeveloped’ nations of the so-called Third World;¹ when this poverty enters our consciousness, it comes coded in the language of global development. Poverty in Canada (or in other ‘First World’ countries), by contrast, does not come so tidily wrapped up in its own discrete lexicon: it sometimes comes in the vocabulary of charitable giving, of welfare state policies, of affordable housing, of a struggling economy or of addiction and crime. These different lenses through which First World poverty is understood have one striking thing in common: they are decidedly not the language of global development.

Over the course of academic and nonacademic involvement in projects related to both Third and First World poverty, I developed a sense of confusion about my personal difficulties in thinking of the two as related. I began trying to think of them against this

¹ This term – and its correlate the “First World” – are used deliberately, self-consciously and not unproblematically. For a full discussion see 1.4 What’s in a Name: Lengthy Notes on Terminology and Categorization, p. 20.
bifurcated grain, across the gulf between them, and found myself profoundly challenged by the task. What began as an idle thought experiment quickly became a sense of profound bafflement: *why was this so difficult?* On what grounds did my mind stubbornly insist on seeing these two as entirely separate from one another? This sense of bafflement eventually became this thesis.

In a paper only four pages in length, Jones (2000) posed a similar set of questions to those that have come to preoccupy me:

*Why do we talk mainly about ‘doing development’ ‘over there’ in the ‘Third World’ and not in the inner-cities of the West? [...] And, why is it that you rarely hear someone say ‘I’m doing development/I’m developing/I’m involved in a development project in . . . Liverpool’ or any other British city? Yet [...] the ‘Third World’ does not solely have a monopoly on poverty and exclusion (p. 237).*

While Jones issued a call for these questions to be comprehensively addressed in academic literature, it seems his call fell on (mostly) deaf ears, and his own research took him in other directions. His questions still linger, and I hope to take up their challenge here.

It is my own entanglement in the imaginative geographies of the Third and First Worlds that forms my starting point; as such, the realm of representation, grounded in a Canadian context, seemed a logical place to begin. Those who live with poverty hang between visibility and invisibility: at times they are rendered hyper-visible through frequent media and non-profit attention, but this visibility is highly circumscribed in various ways. The nature of this circumscribed visibility has been previously examined in the case of both First and Third World poverty (see for example Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001; Cameron & Haanstra, 2008; Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2008; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Dogra, 2007; Gilens, 1996; Jefferess, 2002; Kendall, 2005; Lidchi, 1999; Lissner, 1981; Plewes & Stuart, 2006; Rafter, 2003). Attempts to put the representations of First and
Third World poverty into conversation with one another, however, are almost entirely lacking in existing literature. Unlike those whose work examines either representations of First World poverty or of Third World poverty, it is my intention to learn from the relationship between them, to anatomize their similarities and differences, and to observe what happens when they intermingle or brush up against one another in unexpected ways.

My decision to focus my study on NGOs is an acknowledgement of the immense importance of these organizations in poverty alleviation work today, and the increasing percentage of poverty alleviation funds that are channeled through them (Bebbington, 2004; Chege, 1999; Mitland, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; O’Reilly, 2010; Salamon et al, 1999; Tvedt, 2006;). During the 1980s, state retrenchment in both the Third and First Worlds became the order of the day. Not only did this decrease government capacity to administer welfare and other poverty alleviation programs, it also increased the prevalence of poverty itself. In the gap left by cuts in state programming grew a wide variety of NGOs, taking on a bigger role as program implementers and knowledge generators than ever before (Mitland, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; Salamon et al, 1999). Many NGOs moved from the fringes of poverty alleviation work to the mainstream, increasingly partnering with more traditional major players like national governments and multinational organizations (Mitland, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007). In 1948, for example, only 41 NGOs worldwide were given consultative status by the United Nations Economic and Social Council; today, more than 1300 NGOs hold this status. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees alone has between 400 and 500 NGO partners (Chege, 1999).

There is a broad mainstream consensus that NGOs possess a ‘comparative advantage’ over states in development work (Tvedt, 2006). Much has been made of the corruption of
Third World governments, which many argue makes them unqualified to work with Western actors in development partnerships; comparatively little attention, it should be noted, is paid to corruption within these non-governmental organizations (Chege, 1999). Enthusiasm for the growing role of NGOs comes from those with neoliberal sympathies, supportive of service provision by private organizations rather than governments. And while NGOs are not homogenous and operate at all points on the political spectrum, the growing dominance of neoliberalism and the availability of funds for organizations willing to fit themselves into this order (in an increasingly competitive fundraising environment) provide incentives for NGOs to tailor their practices to these ideological currents (Edwards, 1999; Mitland, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007).

Comparing NGO representations of poverty in the Third and First Worlds illuminates the way poverty alleviation is discursively divided along geographical lines. The extent to which this discursive divide is reflected in the material practices of poverty alleviation would require a great deal of further study. It is, however, reasonable to speculate that to the extent that the imaginative geographies of separate First and Third Worlds influence the way that most Canadians think, there is at least some correlation between the two. By obscuring the commonalities between anti-poverty struggles in Canada and the Third World, this bifurcated visuality of philanthropy closes off, or at least makes more difficult, the creation of relationships of solidarity across the First/Third World divide by discouraging Canadians from seeing themselves as in any way similar to, or having anything in common with, those who live in the Third World.
1.2 Methodology

Rose (2001) calls for a critical visual methodology: that is, an approach that thinks about the visual in terms of the cultural significance, social practices and power relations in which it is embedded; and that means thinking about the power relations that produce, are articulated through, and can be challenged by, ways of seeing and imaging (p. 3).

It is just such an approach that I aspire to here. Broadly, I hope to contribute to the idea that the discursive divide between the First and Third Worlds should be examined and problematized; more specifically, I argue that representations of poverty by NGOs are divided in the form they take depending on whether this poverty is in the First World or in the Third World. NGO fundraising and publicity material, an area where the First and Third World imaginary is particularly discernable, provides a productive site at which to begin to unpack the way this imaginary exerts influence, and to speculate on some of its material effects. While some of my conclusions can be generalized beyond the realm of NGO fundraising representations, I have tried to keep in mind the very specific context in which this particular sub-category of representations is created and circulated.

Non-governmental poverty alleviation organizations address their marketing and public relations material to a very specific public (potential donors) for a very specific purpose (to solicit donations). Of course, this material is viewed by and exerts influence over a diverse array of people; in imagining an archetypal intended audience, however, these NGOs undoubtedly have in mind the affluent citizens of the First World. A variety of factors play a role in how any given individual responds to a particular image: in addition to personal life experiences, age, gender, race, class and culture all affect how images are perceived (Poole, 1997). Rose (2001) notes the importance of “not only […] how images look, but how they are looked at” (p. 11). Those who consume non-governmental representations of
poverty are not homogenous; indeed, some of these viewers may in fact have grown up in so-called developing countries while others will themselves identify as members of the First World poor. These particularities mean that “not all audiences will be able or willing to respond to the way of seeing invited by a particular image and its particular practices of display” (Rose, 2001, p. 15). Images invite particular ways of seeing more strongly than others, however (Rose, 2001). While reading these images through the eyes of counter-publics would be a valuable project (Smith & Yanacopoulos, 2004), I choose to begin by reading these images through the eyes of their intended audience – affluent, mostly white Canadians – to explore the ways of seeing they invite most purposefully. To abstract from the specificities of a particular viewer is an inherently problematic maneuver; nonetheless it is one without which I cannot proceed.

The identity of this imagined archetypal potential donor overlaps significantly with my own: it was my profound embeddedness within the ways of thinking produced by this imagery that led me to ask these questions in the first place. “No one,” Said (2003) observes, “has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life.” A white, middle class Canadian reaching adulthood in the first decade of the 21st century, I am one of Ananya Roy (2010)’s millennial generation, for whom poverty, particularly that in the Third World, is ever- and omnipresent in the visual realm. I have grown up in an age of World Vision advertisements on television, Save the Children flyers in the mail and Plan International sidebars on Facebook, as a member of a social class that grants prestige to young people who volunteer in orphanages or refugee camps overseas, or (less glamorously) in soup kitchens or homeless shelters at home. Much of this prestige is in the form of admiration and respect; it also, however, takes material form through scholarships and
community service awards. I am of the financially privileged and philanthropically inclined socioeconomic strata that can afford and is inclined to support NGO operations through donations of time and money. As someone who has grown up immersed in the kinds of NGO images that I examine here, I find myself deeply marked by these representations that position the Third and First Worlds as fundamentally separate and internally coherent geographies.

With this focus on the way that the Third World is represented in and to the people of the First World, I do not at all explore the myriad of ways in which individuals and organizations from the Third World continue to represent and make themselves known in their communities and internationally. This lacuna leaves me vulnerable to criticisms from those like Poole (1997) who argue that “it is necessary to abandon that theoretical discourse which sees ‘the gaze’ - and hence the act of seeing – as a singular or one-sided instrument of domination and control” (p. 7). In a similar vein, Sparke (2007) reminds us that “the cartographic cover-ups and carve ups of the Global South have never succeeded in obliterating the efforts of the colonized to map back and reterritorialize their human geographies by representing them in other more grounded, embodied and accountable ways” (p. 118). I do not in any way seek to deny the existence of these counter-geographies. But despite the crucial nature of recognizing the ability of the people of the Third World to articulate “these heterogeneous human geographies of the Global South […] in the face of the anemic geographies” (Sparke, 2007, p. 119) often offered by First World NGOs, my research focuses on the voices most clearly heard by Canadians. Save perhaps the media, no voices are as loud than those of major NGOs.
To apply a scientific metaphor to a thoroughly unscientific project, the concept of poverty and the medium of non-governmental organization advertisements function as my control variables. Through this comparative perspective, I enlist critical work done separately on representations of poverty in either the First World or the Third World and use it in new interpretive ways to explore the nature of the binary that justifies their separation in the first place. It has long been established that “modernity produces its own other, verso to recto, as a way of at once producing and privileging itself” (Gregory, 2004, p. 4). The particular form of affluent modernity embodied by the Western middle class produces and privileges itself as natural, normal and – crucially – as benevolent and benign through the production of “the poor” as a certain kind of discursive entity (overlapping but not coincident with more material definitions of poverty). The production of this socioeconomically othered entity is crosscut by the production of a geographically othered entity: the middle class First World subject produces its own other in a manner bifurcated by the imaginaries of the First and Third Worlds. A comparative approach to representations of poverty across this binary allows us to see these two interrelated processes by which the First World middle class is constituted as normal through the simultaneous production of two of “its contrasting image[s], idea[s], personalit[ies], experience[s]” (Said, 2003, p. 2).

The fieldwork on which this thesis will be based consists primarily of analysis of contemporary NGO advertisements, with a few forays into the realm of the historical. I limit myself to examining the representations of poverty used by Canadian non-governmental organizations in fundraising and publicity material designed for distribution in Canada. My focus has been on the use of visual imagery, although the words accompanying them have been considered as well where appropriate. Campbell (2007) reminds us that “all media are
mixed and the meaning of the image is gravely affected by the text (the article, headlines, caption, other stories and advertisements) that surround its presentation to the public” (p. 372). With the exception of the mainly textual case study discussed in Chapter 2, however, the advertisements examined all have a strong visual component.

I contacted a variety of Canadian non-governmental organizations over the summer and fall of 2010, including Save the Children Canada, Oxfam Canada, CARE Canada, United Way of the Lower Mainland and Raise the Roof, hoping to access archives of past and current public relations and fundraising material. I selected these organizations due to their prominence in the visual economy of poverty alleviation NGO advertising in Canada. Raise the Roof directed me to material that was available online and preferred not to have me make a site visit to their offices. The United Way of the Lower Mainland provided hard copies of their current advertising material, but did not have archives of past campaigns available. Save the Children Canada, Oxfam Canada and CARE Canada all invited me to visit their head offices (Save the Children Canada in Toronto; Oxfam Canada and CARE Canada in Ottawa) and look through archival material they had on file. While formal interviews were not part of my research, I was able to have several ad hoc interviews with employees of Oxfam Canada and CARE Canada during my visits to their offices, and I make brief reference to these conversations in my thesis.² Material taken from several other organizations’ advertisements (The Salvation Army, Union Gospel Mission and Covenant House) were included at a later stage based on their noted prominence in Vancouver and Toronto, the two major Canadian cities in which I spent significant amounts of time while working on this project. By carefully noting organizations whose advertisements were most

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² Anticipating the opportunity for such casual interviews, I obtained ethics approval from the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board prior to conducting my organization visits.
prominent in my day-to-day life (posted in public places such as on buses and bulletin boards, in print material like newspapers and magazines, and online in banner and sidebar advertisements), I was able to select a reasonable sample of the organizations whose visual material is the most visible to Canadians on a regular basis.

Having selected which organizations to include, I then amassed as much sample public relations material as I could from each organization. The amount available varied considerably amongst the organizations: some of them took pains to save copies of past fundraising material, while others choose not to keep such records. Although there is of course variation amongst each organization’s advertisements, it was clear that they bore certain “family resemblances” (Ferguson, 1994, p. 260). My conclusions are based on a survey of all the fundraising material that was available to me; I have selected only a small portion of this material to reproduce in my thesis. The figures included were chosen to typify broader trends I observed in the material. Despite the prevalence of these family resemblances, I did come across a handful of ‘black sheep” advertisements even from the mainstream organizations, advertisements which were not consistent with the general trends I was observing. I include some of these in my discussion of alternatives to the dominant advertising styles near the end of Chapter 4, as examples of actually-existing unconventional styles of advertising. By discussing these advertisements in a separate section from their more prevalent relatives, I do not meant to suggest that the alternative advertisements are any less a part of the corpus of public relations material existing today. Rather, I want to emphasize that these advertisements do coexist with more conventional ones, less prevalent but no less in existence. They are a testament to the complexity of the representations I seek
to understand, and a reminder that every discourse is messy, slippery and full of interruptions.

Like any good research project, my thesis raised as many questions than it answered. Each of the advertising campaigns I examined, for example, has a history of conception, production, circulation and reception whose exploration would offer insight into the particular discursive work each of these images was intended to do, as well as the work they actually did. The dearth of previous scholarly work comparing non-governmental activities around the First/Third World divide, however, required that I address more general issues before more specific and complex ones could be explored. I provide a framework for badly needed future work in this area, a foundation on which myself and others can build.

1.3 A Messy Synthesis: Wrestling with Existing Literature

The scholarly foundation of this work is located between several different bodies of literature. A comprehensive literature review has not been attempted; indeed, because of the breadth of material on which I have drawn such a review would itself be thesis-length. In taking a broad approach I admittedly sacrifice a great deal of depth. My aim, however, is to make a case for the value of bringing these diverse bodies of scholarship into conversation, and to this end breadth necessarily remains my priority. I will begin by taking a brief look at the field of critical development studies and post-development theory. This literature will be introduced in this section; the bulk of my engagement with it, however, will take place in Chapter 2. The second body of literature that I intend to deploy is the somewhat anemic work on representations of First World poverty in Canada. Although (in my experience) a frequent topic of conversation amongst both poor and non-poor anti-poverty activists in
Vancouver (and I daresay elsewhere in Canada as well), existing academic literature on this topic seems primarily oriented to media rather than non-governmental representations and to an American rather than Canadian context. I intend to bring these two literatures together through the theoretical infrastructure offered by work on imaginative geographies and visuality. In this section I provide a brief outline of these three literatures.

“Development practices,” Wainwright (2008) argues, “have proven especially effective in producing […] becoming-spaces of ‘Europe’ and its others” (p. 25). For this reason, development and post-development studies provide a framework for critically approaching the discourses and exchanges that circulate between the broad geographies of First and Third Worlds. These fields are well represented in geography; indeed, Glassman (2010) comments that critical development geography is “burgeoning.” In addition to being a crucial body of work for attempting to unpack the Third and First World divide, critical development studies is a field in which the importance of representations have long been taken seriously. Since the proliferation of so-called “development pornography” – long predating but becoming the subject of widespread criticism during the Ethiopian famine of the mid-1980s – the use of images of the so-called Third World by both NGOs and the media has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in this field. While taking Arturo Escobar’s critics from both inside and outside geography seriously (see for example Corbridge, 2007; Glassman, 2010), his work – and the work of Michel Foucault and Edward Said that underpins it – continue to provide a vital general framework for “encountering” development discourse (see Escobar, 1995). While Gidwani (2002) emphasizes that development heterodoxies exist alongside the orthodox discourses that Escobar and other post-

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3 His use of ‘Europe’ here is geographically inclusive, stretching to include Europe’s settler societies that together form the traditional understanding of the Third World.
development theorists critique (which “revise, re-imagine, or reject development orthodoxy without discarding the placeholder concept of ‘development’” (p. 5)), I maintain my focus on development as it is understood by mainstream Canadian publics, an understanding dominated by development orthodoxy.

While non-governmental representations of Third World poverty have been discussed quite extensively as part of development studies literature, NGO representations of First World poverty do not receive much academic attention. In discussions of representations of First World poverty, it is media representations that tend to be emphasized (see for example Kendall, 2005; Rafter, 2003). While images are a taken-for-granted aspect of development NGO fundraising material, they are far from a given when it comes to NGOs who work with First World poverty, and as a result are much less studied. This being said, however, making note of previous work on media representations of poverty is useful insofar as it provides insight into the broader visual terrain on which NGO representations operate. Indeed, different forms of representations and meanings circulate between media and NGO representations of poverty, sometimes contesting and at other times reinforcing one another. Those viewing NGO images consciously or unconsciously consider them in light of other representations of poverty to which they have been exposed, regardless of the specific source of these representations.

Iyengar (1990) and Clawson and Rakyua (2000) demonstrate the significant influence of the framing of news stories on how people assign responsibility for poverty – whether it lies with structural or social forces or with the decisions made by individuals – and that these opinions influence political support for various poverty-related initiatives. Bullock, Wyche and Williams (2001) take a broader look at media representations to explore the way they
perpetuate the idea of the middle class as the American normal and the poor as deviant ‘outsiders’ (see also Clawson & Rakuya, 2000). Unfortunately for my purposes, much of this work has been done in the context of the United States; because of the many differences between the extent and nature of poverty in Canada I hesitate to translate claims across the forty-ninth parallel. In the American context, for example, there has been extensive work on the relationship between racism and attitudes toward poverty in the United States, particularly in light of the perception (and in some areas, the reality) that most poor people are black (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001; Gilens, 1996; Quadagno, 1994). This emphasis on black, mostly urban poverty simultaneously obscures the existence of both white poverty and rural poverty (Books, 1997; Newman, 1999). It is clear that although racism and poverty are linked in Canada as well, racial dynamics in this country are very different from those in the United States, and intersect with poverty in very different ways. Rafter (2003) is one of the few authors to deal explicitly with Canadian representations of poverty: in her MA thesis she attempts to explore some of the issues tackled by American authors in a specifically Canadian context. While her findings are ambivalent and speculative at best, she does note significant differences between media coverage of poverty in Canada as compared to those previously noted in the United States, particularly in terms of Canada’s tradition of more generous government service provision and different dynamics around the intersection of race and poverty.

The final foundational body of literature I wish to introduce is that of representation, imaginative geographies and visuality. Representation, according to Hall (1997), “is the production of meaning of the concepts in our minds through language. It is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people
or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events.” Rather than depicting either the ‘real’ or the ‘imaginary,’ however, the representations of poverty I will be discussing here blend the two in complicated ways. Crucially, representations “do not describe a pre-existent reality, but constitute what counts and is valued as reality” (Dubow, 2009, p. 645); visuality id a “culturally constructed way of seeing” (Rose, 2009, p. 801). Through the circulation of representations that come to be taken as truth, Said (2003) argued, “the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here” (p. 55). In the process, not only is the other made known across distance and difference, but the self, the unmarked entity considered to be “normal”, is rendered ever more defined: “there is no doubt,” says Said (2003), “that imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (p. 55). According to Gregory (2004), “distance – like difference – is not an absolute, fixed and given, but is set in motion and made meaningful through cultural practices” (p. 18). This play of distance and difference is clearly operational in the creation of imaginative geographies both of First and of Third World poverty.

Affluent Canadians come to understand and to know poverty through the way it is represented in the media, in art, in popular culture, through formal education and of course through NGO representations, in addition to any firsthand encounters they might experience either with poor individuals in Canada or in the Third World. Crucially, imaginative geographies condition the way individuals experience such firsthand encounters; to paraphrase Said (2003), people who live in poverty, in either the Third or First World, are not free subjects of thought or action. This is not to say that preexisting ideas unilaterally determine what can be said about ‘the poor’, but that “it is the whole network of interests
inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity is in question” (p. 3). “Things seen for the first time,” Said says, become seen as “versions of a previously known thing” (p. 58-59). While imaginative geographies of poverty are given substance in a variety of ways, my focus will be on the way that they manifest through the visual, and the way that imagery is bound up with relations of power, enabling (or disabling) particular political and ethical possibilities. By taking seriously the “radical ‘non-innocence’ of representation” (Gregory, 2009), the effects of such culturally constructed ways of seeing can be critically examined.

McClintock (1995) argues that it was the emergence of photography in the second half of the 19th century that enabled Enlightenment scientists and philosophers to “unroll over the earth a single ‘great Map of Mankind,’ and cast a single, European, male authority over the whole of the planet.” This project was initially inhibited by the lack of technological capacity to map and catalog the earth’s surface: “the promoters of the global project sorely lacked the technical capacity to formally reproduce the optical ‘truth’ of nature as well as the economic capacity to distribute this truth for global consumption” (p. 34). The invention and proliferation of commodity spectacle in general and photography in particular filled this gap (McClintock, 1995). The importance of photography in geopolitics continues today: “it is one of the principal ways in which news from distant places is brought home, constructing the notion of ‘home’ in the process,” and shoring up “the dichotomies of West/East, civilized/barbaric, North/South and developed/underdeveloped” (Campbell, 2007, p. 358). To Campbell’s argument, I would add that visual imagery is also crucial for the politics of inequality and difference in a national context, despite it not being as geographically distant.
Poole (1997) observes, “Visual images fascinate us. They compel us to look at them, especially when the material they show us is unfamiliar or strange. This is particularly true of photography and photographic-based images, […] which exert a peculiarly powerful hold on our imaginations” (p. 17). This process of viewing, however, is not an isolated one: “the social nature of vision comes into play, since both the seemingly individual act of seeing and the more obvious social act of representing occur in historically specific networks of social relations” (Poole, 1997, p. 7). Following Poole (1997) and Campbell (2007), I employ the concept of a visual economy as an analytic through which to understand the way images function in contemporary society. Poole describes the concept as follows:

In a general sense, the word ‘economy’ suggests that the field of vision is organized in some systematic way. It also clearly suggests that this organization has as much to do with social relationships, inequality, and power as with shared meanings and community. In the more specific sense of a political economy, it also suggests that this organization bears some – not necessarily direct – relationship to the political and class structure of society as well as to the production and exchange of the material goods or commodities that form the life blood of modernity. Finally, the concept of visual economy allows us to think more clearly about the global […] channels through which images (and discourses about images) have flowed […] (p. 8).

Understanding representations of poverty in the First and Third Worlds as being part of a visual economy means being attentive to the ways in which these images are produced, circulated and interpreted by the Canadian middle class through preexisting relations of power and culturally- and class-specific ways of seeing. In unpacking such relations of visuality, it is necessary to remain attentive to what images do as they circulate, rather than to focus narrowly on their iconography (Poole, 1997). “The issue these images pose, then,” says Campbell (2007), “is not one of accuracy or appropriateness. It is a question of what they do, how they function, and the impact of this operation” (p. 379).
1.4 What’s in a Name: Lengthy Notes on Terminology and Categorization

Beneath the particulars of my research – the specific questions to which I hope to provide some answers – lies a fundamental interest in categories. The categories through which we make sense of the world – as Foucault (2002) eloquently puts it, how we choose to “tame the wild profusion of existing things” (p. xvi) – influence the way we engage with and come to understand our surroundings. Following Escobar (1995), I argue that “[l]abels are by no means neutral; they embody concrete relationships of power and influence the categories with which we think and act” (p. 109). As Bowker and Star (1999) observe, many of the classificatory schemes in which we take part are ordinarily invisible: it is only when they break down or become objects of contention that their presence is noticeable. In this section my purpose is two-fold: to self-consciously make visible some of the most contested categories of which I make use in my thesis, and to lay the groundwork to subsequently trouble and destabilize them. It is a delicate task to deploy such categories for their use-value while remaining attentive to the potential consequences of their uncritical reinscription.

Bowker and Star (1999) observe, “Remarkably for such a central part of our lives, we stand for the most part in formal ignorance of the social and moral order created by these invisible, potent entities [categories]. Their impact is indisputable, and […] inescapable.” While it would be impossible to account for the impact of each of the categories on which my analysis depends, I have tried to take up Bowker and Star’s suggestion to find “tools for seeing the invisible” (p. 5) – that is, for seeing the processes by which these categories are rendered invisible, self-evident and inevitable. I have tried to remain attentive to the way that “[e]ach standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences another” (p. 5), and I strive to be cautious about the points of views I choose to valorize and silence. I
see the process of categorization not as inherently bad; although “we shall never succeed in
defining a stable relation of contained to container” (Foucault, 2002, p. xviii), these
containers provide invaluable analytical tools and enable vital ethical and political ends.
While an uninterrogated division between wealth and poverty and rigid definitions of their
classification is unquestionably hazardous, it also enables a discussion of inequality and
exploitation that it is hard to imagine having without the analysis those categories enable.
My own research both invokes and seeks to problematize particular categories – categories
that, despite their problems, do enable us to ask crucial questions about (post)coloniality and
power. The three products of categorization that I would particularly like to make visible are
the idea of poverty (and wealth, its counterpart), development both as a theoretical concept
and material practice, and of course, the geographical bifurcation of the world into the two
categories that I have chosen to refer to as the Third and First Worlds.

John Hatch, the founder of the charitable microfinance organization FINCA
International, comments that “Poverty is like pornography – you know it when you see it”
(quoted in Roy, 2010, p. 89). While tongue-in-cheek, Hatch’s statement captures something
important about the slippery nature of defining poverty. Poverty is considered to be easily
recognizable (see Rafter, 2003) but far more difficult to decisively delineate. This “know-it-
when-you-see-it” quality to poverty makes interrogating the relationship between poverty
and its visual representations a particularly crucial project. Much of the (Canadian) cultural
meaning of this term comes to us through visuality, be it in the form of media representation,
non-governmental organization materials, or in-person encounters with the most visible
elements of the “poor” such as homeless people or panhandlers in Canadian cities or abroad.
The link between poverty and the visual also makes it particularly easy for particular types of poverty to become invisible, if they are not readily seeable or frequently represented.

It is not my purpose to attempt to define poverty: I take as a given that some sort of recognizable entity called poverty exists as an influential cultural category whose discursive function can be examined without the establishment of a concrete definition. This being said, I do want to make at least a cursory attempt at outlining some of the debates regarding what exactly poverty means. By devoting some time to making visible the uncertainty and slipperiness surrounding the concept, I hope to avoid contributing uncritically to its stabilization, or at least to atone for any part I may unavoidably end up playing in this process.

Defining poverty is a manifestly political act, and different definitions reflect the myriad of positions taken by different individuals and groups on how poverty’s causes should be understood as well as how it should be dealt with. These definitions typically fall somewhere on a spectrum between the two extremes of absolute and relative poverty. In its narrowest interpretation, absolute poverty is understood as the inability to meet one’s basic biological needs, a standard that varies relatively little across different geographical and social contexts. Relative poverty, on the other hand, understands the comparative poverty of some as being related to the comparative wealth of others; this understanding of poverty is closely related to the concept of inequality. Most mainstream definitions of poverty are composed of some combination of these two perspectives: there is widespread recognition that there should be at least some variability in categorizing poverty in diverse times and spaces. In addition to lack of ability to meet basic needs and relative lack of resources vis-à-
vis others in one’s community, poverty is often associated with lack of rights, political
powerlessness, minimal access to services and resources and human insecurity.

The United Nations defines poverty as follows:

Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation
of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively
in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a
school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one’s food
or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity,
powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities.
It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile
environments, without access to clean water or sanitation (quoted in Gordon, 2005).

This definition is both encompassing and vague, leaving much open to interpretation. While
acknowledging a biological understanding of poverty (feeding and clothing a family), it
leaves room for an expansive relativist approach with its reference to the “capacity to
participate effectively in society.” The tools necessary for such effective participation surely
vary significantly by social context. Opponents of relativist definitions of poverty are critical
of poverty standards in wealthy nations that consider ‘luxuries’ like a vehicle or internet
access to be basic needs. While relativist definitions are not without their problems, there are
very real ways in which social participation requires different tools in different geographical
and cultural contexts. In a large Canadian city, for example, the ability to maintain social
expectations of hygiene and appropriate workplace attire are absolutely necessary for
employment; in environments where agriculture remains the primary livelihood such factors
are likely to be less of a concern.

Economic and social aspects of poverty are deeply entwined with one another:
accumulation of monetary wealth and other resources often brings social power and prestige,
while lack of social power (for example, because of various forms of discrimination) can be a
contributing factor to material poverty. These factors interact in complex and often self-
reinforcing cycles: while there are individuals in all parts of the world who work their own way out of poverty, such class-jumping is generally extremely difficult, even in countries like Canada and the United States that pride themselves on allowing for social mobility. Economic and social aspects of poverty are further entangled with cultural meanings of ‘poverty.’ Social associations with poverty are widely variable across time and space: in early Christian societies, for example, poverty was seen as a holy condition, while in affluent contemporary societies poverty is frequently associated with laziness, disease or substance abuse. Regardless of the particular material conditions of lives lived in poverty, the symbolic space occupied by ‘the poor’ plays an important role in dictating how these individuals will be treated, which in turn feeds back into these material conditions.

At the international scale, it is increasingly common to hear of poverty discussed in the language of ‘global poverty’. This is typically accompanied by invocations of international poverty lines such as the ubiquitous dollar-a-day. This represents perhaps the clearest and most widespread contemporary manifestation of absolute understandings of poverty. While playing an important role in drawing attention to the plight of the very poorest people in the world, this approach to understanding poverty is problematic, even when invoked with the best of intentions. One has only to look at cost-of-living and homelessness statistics for any major North American city to see an example of the sort of thing that a dollar-a-day focus obscures. The middle and upper classes of the Third World are also lost from view. Although in aggregated absolute terms the so-called First World is substantially wealthier than the Third, social polarization in both regions is significant, leading to commensurable pockets of poverty and wealth. Indeed, “[m]any ‘Third World’
countries, cities, suburbs and enclaves within them, boast similar, if not better, services and higher economic per capita than many ‘First World’ nation-states” (Jones, 2000, p. 239)

Canada itself has never had an official poverty line or an official definition of poverty. From an official standpoint poverty is approximated through several different Low Income Cut-offs (LICOs), used either separately or together (Zhang, 2010). Frequently official discussions about LICOs in Canada deal with low-income individuals and families as what Zhang (2010) refers to as a “the headcount” (p. 6), with neither more nuanced qualitative nor quantitative discussion taking place; for this reason there is a danger of these measures resulting in an overly simplistic and skeletal understanding of the nature and extent of poverty in Canada. Indeed, Statistics Canada makes it clear that these LICOs are not intended to measure poverty:

Media, researchers and policy-makers interested in measures of low income are typically concerned with the extent to which individuals in the population are living in poverty. Unfortunately, defining poverty is far from straightforward. The underlying difficulty is that poverty is a question of social consensus, defined for a given point in time and in the context of a given country. Decisions on what defines poverty are subjective and ultimately arbitrary. Given this, Statistics Canada has always referred to the low income lines as indicators of the extent to which some Canadians are less well-off than others based solely on income and as such, are low income and not poverty measures (Statistics Canada, 2010, p. 6).

While discussions and debates in Canada regarding how poverty should be defined form an important part of public debate and weigh heavily on policy-making decisions, non-governmental organization fundraising material relies not on any such hard and fast definition of poverty. Rather, in seeking to provoke an affective response in their intended audience, NGOs rely more heavily on an intuitive understanding of poverty such as that espoused by Hatch (“you know it when you see it”). Such material relies on an audience that knows poverty when they see it, and indeed in attempting to anticipate what this poverty
looks like (re)produce particular visual definitions, which for my purposes are far more
crucial than debates over the mechanics of LICOs.

Defining poverty cross-culturally, as do Canadian-based NGOs that work in the Third
World, presents a particular problem. There is a tendency to conflate non-Western lifestyles
or lack of access to mass-produced consumer goods as poverty in a way that problematically
posits this lifestyle as the gold standard against which other lifestyles should be judged.
Particularly in the case of NGO fundraising material that is distributed amongst a largely
non-critical audience, this ethnocentrism is pervasive. Gidwani (2002), however, is critical
of those like Sen (1981, quoted in Gidwani, 2002 p. 9-10) who argue that “poverty, like
beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.” “To propose that ‘poverty,’ ‘hunger,’
‘malnourishment,’ or ‘destitution’ are socially constructed and relational elements in a
discourse is one thing,” he argues; “to suggest that they are mainly or solely ‘cultural’
categories […] is quite another.” Indeed, although many aspects of dominant Western
understandings of Third World poverty are deeply intertwined with notions of the superiority
of the Western capitalist lifestyle, Gidwani’s point – “that there is a material core [to poverty]
that exceeds language and culture” (p. 9-10) – is well-taken.

One of the observations that initiated this project was that while Third World poverty
is frequently discussed in the language of development, First World poverty is almost never
understood through this lens (see Jones, 2000). The concept of development has over time
acquired an “aura of self-evidence”, causing many to forget that it was “constructed within a
increasingly difficult to find any way to talk about large parts of the world except in these
terms” (p. xiii). Development describes a process according to which the categorization of
nations as developed or developing is made possible. The precise nature of this process is often vague: it “carries multiple and radically divergent meanings” (Wainwright, 2008, p. 6). A lengthy discussion of the term’s etymological origins and changing usage in Western thought is provided by Wainwright (2008) and Rist (1997), but for my purposes a briefer examination will suffice. Regardless of how one defines development, its meaning remains firmly tied to the space of the Third World. While in its most general sense – a process of improvement – development surely need not be geographically limited, in practice it – and its associated lexicon – is typically used to discuss this region alone.

Development’s various current definitions can be placed on a spectrum between two quite different conceptions. Understood economically, it refers to a transformation process leading toward a modern, industrial, capitalist economy; with focus placed on the social, it is a concept associated specifically with poverty reduction and increased quality of life. The space between these two meanings is negotiated differently by different actors: they are each emphasized to varying degrees, synthesized in various ways, and too often problematically conflated (Ferguson 1994). The way ‘development’ functions as a floating signifier is one of the characteristics that make it so important to scrutinize: it has come to stand for, in all their vague diversity, “the sum of virtuous human aspirations” (Rist, 1997 p. 10). The slipperiness of its definition has over the years allowed many different individuals and groups to invoke its conceptual power for their own purposes and in support of their own interests. Indeed, “development has proven influential partly because it is so highly adaptive and contingent” (Sidaway 2007, p. 349). It has been embraced by those in former colonies associated with

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4 On a global level, “‘development’ has justified practices that effectively boil down to the global extension of the market” (Rist 1997 p. vii).
national liberation and revolutionary movements, and equally as readily by US-led interests concerned with economic modernization and the spread of multinational capitalism (Rist, 1997; Sidaway, 2007).

Through its associations with biological growth, an organic and inevitable process, development discourse obscures its own creation by naturalizing its history (Rist, 1997). Especially powerful is development’s enduring association with ‘good,’ with progress and moving forward. In its opposition to negative concepts like backwardness and regression, development becomes a kind of Trojan horse, stuffed not with Greek soldiers but rather with whatever program for social change a particular actor sees as desirable. Rist (1997) eloquently puts it this way:

The strength of ‘development’ discourse comes from its power to seduce, in every sense of the term: to charm, to please, to fascinate, to set dreaming, but also to abuse, to turn away from the truth, to deceive. How could one possibly resist the idea that there is a way of eliminating the poverty by which one is so troubled? How dare one think, at the same time, that the cure might worsen the ill which one wishes to combat? Already Ulysses, to avoid giving in to the Sirens’ song, had to plug his companions’ ears and tie himself to the mast of his ship. Such is the opening price to be paid, if one is to emerge victorious from the test of lucidly examining the history of ‘development’ (p. 1).

In Wainwright (2008)’s words, “development emerged as a global alibi for the imperial extension of specifically Western modes of economy, spatiality and being”: when First World countries are coded as ‘developed,’ this overwhelmingly positive connotation bleeds into understandings of First World ways of life. If these nations have undergone development and development is desirable, then by implication the way of life of people in these nations is desirable and worthy of imitation. In this way a vague sense of “becoming more like us” becomes bound up with the way that development is commonly understood in Canada. In the realm of development NGO fundraising, the concept of development is
deployed with every bit of slipperiness that can be mustered. The mechanics of the work
done by these organizations is rarely explored in detail in public relations material, nor is
their particular philosophy on what constitutes desirable social change made clear; rather,
they aim to invoke a general sense of improved happiness and well-being as the result of
their work.

While the concept of development remains largely uncriticized by the Canadian
mainstream, within academic literature it is subject to significant scrutiny. There is
widespread acknowledgement of its origins in the civilizing mission of colonialism and the
way that its appealing connotations become an effective conduit for long-standing relations
of power and exploitation. In this critical academic literature, “the general answer [to the
question of what is development] that has been provided is that ‘development’ is a discursive
formation exported via global institutions in the mid-twentieth century, extending from
centers of power through the Global South via development projects” (Wainwright, 2008).
There is significant debate, however, about whether or not development as a term and
concept should be rejected or reworked. Both Wainwright (2008) and Gidwani (2002) feel
that those postdevelopment scholars who argue for an outright rejection of the development
project treat it too much as a monolithic entity: heterodox development practices exist, they
suggest, and it is in taking these seriously and expanding them under the continued heading
of development that poverty alleviation can move forward. “On one hand,” Wainwright
(2008) argues, “‘development’ is a site of great epistemic violence; on the other,
development remains absolutely necessary for us – since it is, in Spivak’s words, ‘the
dominant global denomination of responsibility’” (p. 11). Gidwani and other critics of post-
development worry that too keen an interest in the dis-invention of development will lead to
an impasse in addressing the very real social and economic problems that exist in poor
countries. Wainwright (2008) goes so far as to say, “We live in a world where billions of
people do not have sufficient food and clean water. Rejecting ‘development’ – the
hegemonic denomination for our responsibility – is neither morally possible nor desirable”
(p. 11, for a similar sentiment see Corbridge, 2007). Rist (1997) articulates the same concern
in somewhat more pedestrian language: “there are those who have given unstintingly of
themselves to improve the lot of others, sometimes with real success, and who fear that by
proclaiming the end of ‘development’ one simply contributes to a further reduction in the aid
so desperately needed by the poorer countries” (p. vii-viii).

While we do indeed live in a world where billions of people do not have sufficient
food and clean water, it seems overly simplistic to argue that without the concept of
development there is no way for us to articulate our responsibility to address these problems.
Indeed, one of my initial observations was precisely that some people – those who live in the
First World – are not the target of development, even if they too should be included within
any denomination of ‘our’ responsibility. By critically approaching representations of
poverty from a perspective that explores the way that the First/Third World binary structures
understandings of social and economic problems, I hope to offer an approach to the
destabilization and fragmentation of development discourse that avoids losing sight of, or
sacrificing the ability to, respond to the very real need, in countries throughout the world, of
progressive social change. There is a need to be attentive to development discourse’s role in
solidifying the divide between the First and Third Worlds, and following from this to
consider the implications of our dominant global denomination of responsibility being
articulated in a language that applies unevenly to geographies across the globe.
The final issue of terminology and categorization that I wish to address is that of the \textit{bifurcation} of the world into two categories, referred to variously as developed and developing countries, the Global North and Global South, and the First and Third Worlds (along with other less common variations on these themes), as well as the reasons people choose to use one set of terms over another. While on a discursive level these pairs of terms refer to roughly the same two categories, each comes with its own etymological baggage.

Each of these category pairs is born out of a particular way of understanding the staggering inequality that exists in the world today. Each implies particular things about this inequality, about both its causes and its solutions. While not the only imaginary that divides the world into two distinct parts, the concepts of the First and Third Worlds are certainly among the most apparent and durable of the axes along which “language has intersected space” (Foucault, 2002, p. xix).

The exact contents of these categories are the subject of a great deal of disagreement amongst organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank: there is debate about which countries go where, about how to classify South Africa or the nations of the former Yugoslavia. Different governments and supranational organizations define them differently, each placing a slightly different list of nations under their respective headings. On a technical level, categorizing nations generally involves a quantitative assessment of “development” such as GDP per capital or the Human Development Index (HDI), and an arbitrary numerical cut-off dividing Third World countries from First. While the United Nations claims that these metrics are no more than “statistical convenience”, the imaginaries of the First and the Third Worlds have a significant influence in contemporary global interactions. These two broad geographical imaginaries, taken together, have come to
dominate the way many people from all parts of the world come to know it. While on a discursive level these categories display significant coherence, it does not require a much closer inspection to reveal the dramatic heterogeneity amongst the nations tethered together under the heading of the Third World. Indeed, Pletsch (1981) argues, “With the possible exception of the political categories of left and right, the scheme of the three worlds\(^5\) is perhaps the most primitive system of classification in our social scientific discourse. One wonders now how it could have assumed such authority” (p. 565).

Sparke (2007) speaks of the importance of “critiquing the maps that have routinely represented the heterogeneous spaces of the Global South in the interests of colonial and neocolonial control.” He says,

These maps of control include all the instrumental cartographies, moral topographies, and imaginative geographies that have provided the practice guides and promotional props for colonial practice from the times of ‘Terra Nullius,’ ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Heart of Darkness’ to such contemporary conceits as ‘the Axis of Evil,’ ‘the Clash of Civilizations,’ and, that gleeful globalist gloss on contemporary capitalism, ‘the Level Playing Field.’ All these geographical visions have in different ways overwritten and obscured the huge heterogeneity of the Global South, replacing it with pernicious ‘New World’ declarations, ‘Us-Them’ oppositions and ‘West is Best’ assumptions (p. 117-118).

This is not to say that these countries do not ‘hold together’ at all. Many of them share a history of European colonization, although the details of this history vary between local contexts and according to the particular techniques of a given colonizer. Based on national measures of GDP per capita, these countries are indeed ‘poor,’ and measuring average incomes and drawing attention to nations where they are extremely low is an important technique of making global inequality visible. In addition, the categorization is self-reinforcing: countries typically classified as “Third World” can now add shared experiences

\(^5\) Pletsch was writing, clearly, before the Soviet-dominated Second World ceased to exist.
as targets of development to their list of unifying traits, a shared identity as “development problems” (White, 2002, p. 412).

While these are all important commonalities, in its mainstream usage the term “Third World” tends to be decoupled from these shared experiences: it becomes inappropriately ambitious, holding the vast diversity between and within nations together so tightly as to crowd out understandings of the diversity and complexity of their realities. Third World countries become explainable and knowable, through the language of mainstream Canadian development discourse, as simply ‘poor.’ White (2002) observes, “The developing world’ that [is made] ‘speakable’ and ‘writable’ is a residual category, apparently geographical, but in practice a catch-all term, comprising societies which are highly spatially and culturally diverse, whose unity lies in being ‘not the West’” (p. 412). In its definition as ‘not the West’, the Third World gains not only coherence of its own but also produces a homogenizing effect on the countries of the West itself: “Frantz Fanon put the point succinctly: ‘Europe is literally the creation of the Third World’. And vice versa, it must be added. Apparently discrete entities in world politics – such as colonies, states, national societies and cultures – are produced out of fields of mutually constitutive relations” (Barkawi, 2004, p. 124). The Third and First World, like the metropole and the colony, comprise a “single analytic field” (Cooper & Stoler, 1997, quoted in Barkawai, 2004).

At various times over the past century, the unity that comes from being ‘not the West’ has provided a source of strength for these nations, particularly following the end of formal European colonization during the middle decades of the twenty-first century. During the

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6 The Third World as a space of poverty is one of multiple complex and intersecting discourses that circulate around these regions in the Canadian mainstream – others include the exoticizing touristic narrative, or that of security threats and barbaric violence. It is poverty, however, that forms the dominant characteristic of this region as it is constructed specifically through the lens of development.
Cold War, identifying as part of the Third World, non-aligned with either the capitalist First World or communist Second World provided an identity through which to mobilize Bandung-era optimism regarding the potential for true Third World independence (Jones, 2000). Indeed, even as I seek to trouble these categories I take seriously the way that identifying as part of the developing world “offers new ways of situating self and nation that can contest, as well as confirm, Western dominance” (White, 2002, p. 413). I do hope, however, to explore the possibility of other ways of contesting Western dominance that don’t rely on enrolling within this hegemonic form (White, 2002). While recognizing the initial positive connotations of ‘Third World,’ Jones (2002) argues that “today, popular imagery of the ‘Third World’ is now so conflated with famine, warfare, anarchy and a distinct lack of development – all seemingly used to justify European intervention – that the term ‘Third World’ inevitably biases how we think and act towards it” (p. 238). Reclaiming an empowering Third World identity is certainly one way forward from this; I hope to make visible some possible alternatives.

As has by this point become clear, I have (after great internal debate) chosen to primarily use the terms Third and First Worlds, although when referencing the work of others who have made different terminological choices I have used developing and developed countries and Global South and Global North interchangeably. There seems to be a general consensus in Canadian public discourse that the terms First and Third Worlds are no longer ‘politically correct’: they have fallen out of favour in non-academic circles, usually replaced with the developed and developing worlds or less often Global North and Global South. It is for this very reason, somewhat counter-intuitively, that I have chosen to use these terms: they draw attention to themselves in a way that I fear “developed” and “developing worlds” do
Freighted with the ideological baggage of development, the way these latter terms have achieved banality threatens to normalize and mask this baggage, quietly reproducing the problematic assumptions that underpin development discourse. While the terms First and Third World are not without their own problems, they draw attention to themselves in a way that the more ‘acceptable’ developed and developing worlds do not. In seeking to make visible the discursive work that goes into shoring up the separation between these two imaginaries I enlist the more self-evident constructedness of these terms. With the collapse of the Soviet-dominated Second World, the numerical idiosyncrasy of pairing the First and Third Worlds has a certain nonsensicality to it that is, I think effective in provoking the kinds of questions I want to ask. Dogra (2007) makes the same choice as I: “My continued use of problematic terms such as ‘Third World’,” she says, “is a small attempt to keep remembering their historical associations” (p. 169). Here she refers to the legacy of colonialism, the historical links between Third World poverty and First World wealth. Beneath these negative historical associations lurks a latent revolutionary potential: in one of the earliest recorded uses of the term, French demographer Alfred Sauvy used the idea of the Third World in reference to the French Revolution-era Third Estate, the common class that was to overthrow the clergy and nobles of the First and Second Estates. “[T]hat third world,” he argued, “ignored, exploited, despised like the Third Estate, it too wants to be something” (quoted in Pletsch, 1981, p. 571).

The terms Global North and Global South have become increasingly popular in recent years, particularly in academic circles. Academics who use these terms are quick to defend them against the charges of geographical determinism to which they are so clearly open. Sparke (2007) argues, for example, that “the Global South needs to be invoked as an open-
ended and inclusive category: not a fixed territory or geo-strategic bloc, but rather a
congeries of human geographies that are place-specific and space-making” (p. 123). He
argues for an understanding of Global North and South that allows for seeing pockets of the
South in the North and North in South as a way of understanding and making visible the
existence of Third World wealth and First World poverty. Despite Sparke’s hope for this
strategy’s potential, however, to a non-academic audience (and frequently to an academic
one) the Global South (just like the Third World or the developing world) remains firmly tied
to a fixed territory. When dealing with mainstream, nonacademic Canadian discourses
around classifying and naming these nations, the implied geographical determinism of the
terms rests uncomfortably with me; it will be difficult, I believe, for Sparke’s “open-ended
and inclusive categories” to filter strongly enough into the mainstream to overcome the
conventional understandings of North and South as geographically fixed.

There is a very real danger that in my attempt to trouble the First and Third World
binary I end up giving them further coherence, simply by naming them (over and over
again!) and speaking of them as discreet entities. This is certainly not my intention – I seek
rather to examine the coherence that they’re already given, to recognize its existence and take
seriously its effects.

1.5 Brief Histories

Discourses around First and Third World poverty as they exist today each have their
own long history. These histories have interacted with one another to varying degrees
throughout time, but have retained their separate existences as two distinct threads. To gain a
more complete understanding of the way these threads have been constituted, both separately
and in conversation with one another, this section will attempt to trace these histories with painfully broad brushstrokes.  

I have selected the Middle Ages as the starting time for this short inquiry, England as the place. Because of its future colonial relationship with the settler societies of Canada and the United States and the strong cultural influences that continue to move amongst these nations to this day, England (and later Britain) is a natural starting point. This being said, during the early part of this history Christian hegemony lent a significant degree of coherence to western European worldviews. At no time was the influence of Christianity more strongly felt than in the medieval period (Geremek, 1994). The inhabitants of medieval Europe did not think much about poverty located in Asia, Africa or the Americas; indeed, most people probably did not think much about these areas at all until European colonialism mapped them into broader European consciousness. Poverty within European society, on the other hand, was thought about a great deal, and the opinions and attitudes that developed during the Middle Ages continue to shape debates about poverty to this day. The complicated ambivalence that makes contemporary attitudes toward poverty so difficult to anatomize has clear antecedents during this period: “the gallows and the almshouse have [always] stood side by side” (Geremek, 1994, p. 8), embodying the complex mix of pity, compassion, condescension, disgust, distrust and fear that continue to characterize dominant approaches (Milton, 2007).

Officially, the Church saw poverty as a virtuous state: it was associated with humility, a central Christian value, and voluntary poverty formed an important part of the lives of the

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7 In future work I would like to provide detailed comparative genealogies of attitudes towards the poor and poverty alleviation in the First and Third Worlds; such a thorough genealogy is, regrettably, far beyond the scope of these thesis.
early mendicant orders. The Church and wealthy laypeople were expected to assist the poor through the distribution of alms (Clark, 2002). Despite this veneration of poverty, however, the poor themselves were not afforded any kind of social or political power: while their condition was perceived as holy their social status remained extremely low (Geremek, 1994). The giver of charity, on the other hand, had their social status enriched through philanthropic participation in the lives of the poor. While such giving was surely motivated in part by genuine compassion, the veneration of almsgiving also functioned to legitimize the existence of the wealth that made it possible (Pullman, 1994). The relationship between wealth and poverty was seen as symbiotic and stable: while almsgiving was intended to assist the poor, its intention was never to eliminate poverty. God created some people to be poor and some to be wealthy (Clark, 1994); while the poor deserved the attention of the rich, inequality was seen as natural. If individuals did not become wealthy, the logic went, there would be no one to assist the poor; without the existence of the poor, the wealthy would not be able to earn salvation through charity (Clark, 2002). Christian doctrine was “concerned, from the moral point of view, mainly with the giver of charity, not with its object” (Geremek, 1994, p. 25).

The practice of dividing the poor into different categories was already well established in the Middle Ages, and many of the same categories continue to cast shadows over understandings of poverty today. Among the most enduring of these categories are the deserving and the undeserving poor. The deserving poor were those whose poverty was not seen to be not their fault, typically including young children as well as those who were elderly, sick or disabled. The undeserving poor, by contrast, were characterized as lazy, dishonest and generally immoral, living parasitically off charity. The working poor, more often than not, were (and continue to be) classed with the “undeserving poor.” Working poor
were kept “outside the range of the ethos of poverty and made […] objects of scorn, distrust and hostility” (Geremek, 1994 p. 72). A combination of theological associations of sloth as sinful and a secular political concern with idleness amongst the masses meant that work became seen as the ‘solution’ to the undeserving poor. By the latter part of the thirteenth century, upper class anxiety about able-bodied idleness increased, as more and more individuals joined the ranks of the able-bodied poor in the face of land shortages and decreasing wages. Idle people were seen as a potential threat to public order, a preoccupation of rural administrators and central governments alike. The 1349 Labourers’ Ordinance in England made work mandatory for all those who were physically capable of doing so, and similar policies soon developed in many other parts of Europe (Geremek, 1994). Such legislation was frequently paired with restrictions on gleaning, as well as the criminalization of giving alms to able-bodied beggars (Clark, 2002). These measures anticipate contemporary social policies that likewise treat refusal to work as a crime (Geremek, 1994).

Through the stigmatization of the undeserving poor, a politically useful discursive category became available to those in power. The poor came to be seen as fundamentally “vice-ridden” and as vectors of disease (Milton, 2007), and problems of poverty were seen as inseparable from issues of degeneracy and character reform (Nally, 2008). The perceived deviance of the poor became bound up with the deviance associated with sex workers and nomadic people, and municipalities were able to regulate the movements and activities of all these people in the name of public health and morality (Geremek, 1994). In the late 1300s the English government extended the definition of “beggar” to include servants and laborers
asking for higher wages, thus mobilizing the negative associations with this term in the interest of preserving class power (Clark, 2002).

Layered on top of this enduring medieval architecture were the ideas of the 17th and 18th century European Enlightenment. This period brought a new emphasis on individual human beings as rational actors in control of their own destinies. All men were seen as created equal; inequality was the natural outcome of some individuals working harder and with greater skill than others to accrue material wealth. “Equality of opportunity and not of condition” became – and remains – the mantra of liberalism (Rafter, 2003, p. 6). The convenience of this sentiment for an ascendant industrial capitalism is clear. The importance of labour to the capitalist system and the need for the development of a docile working class only deepened long-standing associations between poverty and laziness. Poverty became more deeply understood as personal failure, its primary remedy the selling of one’s labour power (Rafter, 2003). Despite narratives that posited capitalist wage labour as the solution to poverty, the broad transition to capitalist social relations in England only caused the ranks of the poor to swell (Geremek, 1994). The English Poor Laws – the system of laws governing state relief in England – had originated in the 1500s as a codification of earlier legislation addressing begging and vagrancy. In 1834 they were dramatically amended to reflect the changing social attitudes with respect to poverty. This so-called New Poor Law was “the first major excursion by the capitalist state into the area of social policy” (Charlton, 2000), a shift from the earlier emphasis on the entitlement of the poor to beg and collect alms to one with a “narrower and increasingly more punitive approach to adult applicants for relief” (Kidd, 1999, p. 8).
Despite this general move away from Christian charity and compassion, many charitable organizations continued to espouse a more entitlement-based understanding of society’s obligations to the poor, particularly the so-called deserving poor. Philanthropy remained fashionable amongst some groups – upper-class ladies, for example – on the margins of increasingly dominant capitalist logics (Charlton, 2000, p. 54). The changing social context, however, meant that it became more difficult for these organizations to convince people that the poor were deserving of relief (Rafter, 2003). These perspectives did not remain unchallenged, however: the rise of working class activism and Marxist movements emphasized the role of structural forces in creating poverty, rather than the individual responsibility approach of classical liberalism (Rose, 1971). As poverty deepened for the working class and working conditions deteriorated, the failure of the existing Poor Laws to successfully manage poverty and capitalism’s propensity to impoverish the many and enrich the few (backed up by empirical studies such as Charles Booth’s famous report on London’s East End in 1889) became difficult for even the most determined to ignore.

Shortly before the height of the Enlightenment, an increasing awareness of the existence of non-Western people and places forever altered the way poverty was thought about in Europe. Beaudoin (2007) cites the acceleration of global interconnectedness beginning around the early 16th century as a crucial turning point. Prior to this time, he argues, poverty was primarily understood as a local phenomenon (see also Rist, 1997). When first trade relationships and later colonialism mapped what we now know as the Third World into European consciousness, philanthropic obligations to help the poor (rooted in Christian doctrine) became bound up with ‘helping’ those in the colonies. Europeans (and subsequently their descendents in settler colonies) were suddenly aware of poverty
differently: poverty inflected with racial, cultural and geographical difference. The longstanding ambivalence with which they approached poverty in their own countries was further complicated by these factors: European definitions of poverty and projects of poverty alleviation during the colonial period became inextricably intertwined with questions of racial and cultural hierarchies (Milton, 2007). Perceptions of what constituted poverty were deeply rooted in Eurocentric understandings of civilized life. This messy amalgam of biological racism, ethnocentrism, colonial domination and benevolent paternalism came in various configurations across widely varying colonial contexts, drawing on early conceptions of development to justify a wide range of colonial practices through the end of formal colonization. In this way, “poverty and its relief bolstered colonial differences made manifest by socio-racial […] categories” (Milton, 2007, p. 10).

While ‘development’ in its current incarnation is less than a century old, its conceptual ancestors stretch back several centuries to this early colonial period. The concept has roots in Western Enlightenment ideas of natural social history and the valorization of progress: “namely, that the ‘development’ of societies, knowledge and wealth corresponds to a ‘natural’ principle with its own source of dynamism, which grounds the possibility of a grand narrative” (Rist, 1997, p. 39). The discursive blurring between concepts of social evolution and Darwin’s new ideas of biological evolution provided a “useful confusion,” allowing the emergent development discourse to gain a certain scientific acceptance, merging seamlessly with the colonial civilizing mission (Rist, 1997, p. 42). The paternalism of European poor relief practices “dovetailed nicely with the underlying principles of a colonial […] society and political culture. […] The poor were obliged to provide the labor and tribute that greased the mills of [both] the colonial economy and the social order” (Milton, 2007, p.
xvii). Through recourse to concepts of the sinfulness of sloth and the deviance of lives lived in poverty, the benevolence of European intervention was confirmed, and colonial projects could be “valorized as ‘progressive’ and ‘humanitarian’” (Nally, 2008, p. 716)

Racially inflected dealings with non-Western poverty came to reflect back on attitudes toward poverty in Europe. As McClintock (1995) argues, “the invention of race in the urban metropoles [of colonial Britain] became central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the ‘dangerous classes’: the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on” (p. 5). Nally (2008) quotes a discussion in British Parliament in 1837 with respect to the Irish Poor Laws (a country with its own history as a colony of England):

The [Poor Law] Union established would thus become like a colony, a kind of centre of civilization, and the Unions collectively might be made important engines for effecting improvements in the condition and habits of the Irish people, in whose clothing, cottages, and domestic economy as well as in their agricultural and other management, there now appears a lamentable deficiency of the faculty happily so common in England (British Parliament, 1837c, 220; quoted in Nally, 2008, p. 725).

Here, we see clearly the slippages between the colonial civilizing mission and domestic poor relief, as intervention in the lives of Irish poor people is justified through a combination of colonial discourses of cultural superiority and English-style welfare legislation. Charlton (2000) observes of the high age of British colonialism, “Upper-class chaps travelled to the East End of London to do service to the poor between Oxbridge and careers in the City, church, or colonial service. Such activities can easily be seen as running in parallel with their perhaps more intrepid counterparts who journeyed to ‘Darkest Africa’ to take ‘civilization’ to the natives” (p. 54). Roemer (2009) observes that poor areas of London came to be seen as the “domestic orient” (p. 420) and upper-class practices of exploring ethnic neighbourhoods “celebrated London as the empire’s metonymic double” (p. 416). Prejudices against the
lower classes in Britain bled into racial prejudice in the colonies, resulting in those like planter Edward Long who conflated the “African spectacle of female sexual excess” with his perception that “British working-class women inhabit[ed] more naturally than men the dangerous borders of racial and sexual transgression: ‘The lower class women in England,’ he wrote ominously, ‘are remarkably fond of the blacks’” (McClintock, 1995, p. 23).

McClintock (1995) continues:

The rhetoric of race was used to invent distinctions between what we would now call classes. T. H. Huxley compared the East London poor with the Polynesian savage, William Booth chose the African pygmy, and William Barry thought that the slums resembled nothing so much as a slave ship. […] Similarly, the rhetoric of class was used to inscribe minute and subtle distinctions between other races. The Zulu male was regarded as the ‘gentleman’ of the black race, but was seen to display features typical of females of the white race (p. 54-55).

Following formal decolonization in the mid-20th century, the colonialism of the previous centuries became “recast” (White, 2002) as development, an ideology through which colonial knowledges continued after the end of formal colonialism (Wainwright, 2008). A (sometimes) kinder, gentler variation of colonialism’s civilizing mission, development became the “dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us” (Ferguson, 1994), and the formalization of development discourse played a crucial role in the development of a conceptual separation between poverty in the First and Third Worlds. For Third World poverty, the language and practices of development have come to be seen as a panacea – a panacea for making the Third World more closely resemble the First (Rist, 1997, p. 3). In this relational definition, the two Worlds are positioned as opposites: development relies on a “‘great divide’ between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’” (Rist, 1997, p. 21). Indeed, the workings of development far exceed the simple fact of material poverty: like the colonial approaches to poverty alleviation
that preceded it, its understanding of what constitutes poverty is deeply bound up with cultural and racial difference. Within development, people are judged to be poor “in accordance with the Western reference”; their poverty is not considered as existing in a unique social and cultural context with its own particular requirements for social inclusion (Rist, 1997, p. 43).

Contemporary attitudes toward First World poverty likewise bear the marks of paradigms of the past: Rafter (2003) argues that the dominant frameworks through which Canadians understand poverty in Canada today originated in the classical liberalist thought of the Enlightenment. There is a continued tendency to perceive poverty as resulting from lack of hard work or bad decision-making on the part of an individual; by this logic, poor individuals are always already defective human beings, different from “normal” middle class citizens. In this way, poverty becomes associated not only with lack of economic resources but with deviance, and the gap between the middle and upper classes and the poor becomes coloured with social and moral stigma as well as economic lack.

With this brief look into the past I wanted to foreground what might be considered the birth of the First/Third World divide, and to demonstrate some of the early permeability between them. I hoped to gesture towards the way that contemporary overlaps between representations of poverty in the First and Third Worlds, and the gulfs that divide them, are both part of the lineage of these imaginative geographies as they move and morph through time and space. In this extremely brief historical look at attitudes toward poverty ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’ I have tried to hint at the intriguing ways that attitudes toward each ‘type’ of poverty have been constituted both as separate from one anther, but also relationally, in ways that intersect complex geographical processes of othering and racialization.
I now turn briefly to another history: that of non-governmental organizations, the social formation that forms the focus of my inquiry. The term non-governmental organization was established and popularized by the newly-minted United Nations, which in its founding documents specifically grants such organizations the right to participate in UN affairs (Lewis, 2001). Many of these organizations, however, had already existed for decades if not longer; indeed, Charnovitz (1997) comments that the Roman Catholic Church was the earliest internationally active NGO. As Anheier (2005) notes, “local third sector organizations of various kinds worked relatively unnoticed in most societies for generations in the form of religious organizations, community groups and organized self-help ventures in villages and towns.” While it is important to note that NGOs have a history in all parts of the world (see Lewis, 2001), my focus continues to be on those based in a European and North American context. While these groups began by working locally, some were working internationally as early as the late eighteenth century. In addition to the missionary groups active in European colonialism, issue-oriented NGOs developed around a variety of topics, including the abolition of slavery, the pursuit of peace following the Napoleonic Wars, worker solidarity and minority rights. By the early twentieth century these organizations had begun to develop awareness of themselves as a group, as evidenced by the formation of the Union of International Associations in 1907 (Charnovitz, 1997).

Following World War I, NGOs became involved in the new League of Nations. Cooperation with the Red Cross was specifically mentioned in the League’s Covenant, while cooperation with a variety of other humanitarian organizations occurred in a less institutionalized manner. These organizations were often invited to participate in League meetings or given a consulting role in the creation of policy. The League also provided
indirect support to NGOs through such actions as publishing a quarterly bulletin reporting on the activities and policy recommendations of NGOs whose work was related to its own (Chanovitz, 1997; Lewis, 2001). NGOs benefited from the recognition and support of the League of Nations, and their work moved out of the periphery and more into the mainstream. As Chanovitz (1997) puts it, “NGO involvement [with the League of Nations] was not a consistent practice. But it happened enough to warrant expectations for its recurrence” (p. 245). When the United Nations replaced the League of Nations following the end of the Second World War, NGO involvement was written into the new UN Charter, formalizing the role they had already been playing in the League (Chanovitz, 1997). The UN, making specific provision for certain types of citizen groups to observe and participate in UN affairs, helped these organizations to increased prominence. It also formalized the use of the term non-governmental organizations, giving these organizations more coherence as a group than they had had previously. Despite this recognition, prior to the mid-1980s there was minimal official recognition of the role of NGOs in development: major development textbooks published during the 1960s and 1970s make little or no reference to their activities. While they were active in poverty alleviation projects, this involvement was seen as peripheral and separate from that of more ‘official’ actors (Lewis, 2001).

Iriye (1999) suggests that it was the disenchantment with nation-states following the violence of the World Wars that caused the spike in NGO activity in the mid-twentieth century. Lewis (2001) notes that “one of the key problems facing any attempt to discuss any aspect of NGOs is […] that of the impossibility of generalization. The history and origins of NGOs are diverse and can be traced back to a range of complex historical, cultural and political factors in different parts of the world” (p. 52). Throughout history, NGOs formed
for a variety of different reasons in a range of contexts. Many were founded in response to particularly catastrophic historical events by especially driven individuals: the Save the Children Fund was established in 1919 as a response to the trauma of World War I, Oxfam (known then as the Oxford Committee Against Famine) began in 1942 to provide famine relief during the Greek Civil War, and CARE developed in 1946 as part of the movement to provide post-World War II relief to Europe (Lewis, 2001).

While the total number of NGOs increased steadily throughout the twentieth century (Iriye, 1999), the 1990s brought exceptional growth in the number of NGOs active throughout the world, taking part in an extremely broad array of activities (Charnovitz, 1997; Lewis, 2001). In addition, the work of NGOs became perceived as part of the mainstream of development work, rather than taking backstage to projects undertaken by governments and supranational organizations (Lewis, 2001). This may have been in part the result of the increasing presence of the media and of advertising at the end of the twentieth century, providing NGOs more accessible and broad platforms from which to express their views than they had ever had before (Charnovitz, 1997; Lewis, 2001). The link between media, advertising and the growth of the development NGO sector makes my study of NGO advertising imagery particularly germane.

1.6 Placing Poverty Alleviation and Visuality in Contemporary (Geo)Politics

While a comparative analysis of NGO representations of poverty in the First and Third Worlds is interesting for its own sake, ultimately it is the social and political effects of these representations that are my primarily concern. “[V]isuality,” Campbell (2007) argues, “is pivotal to the production of contemporary geopolitics” (p. 358). Emphasizing the
importance of taking the mainstream seriously, Barkawai (2004) observes that geopolitics is not “distinct from the domain of the popular”: “popular memory and citizens’ subjectivities become sites of strategic significance” (p. 115). By simultaneously exploring the effects of representations of Third and First World poverty in Canada, I hope to gain insight not only into the way that discourses of development influence the terrain of the geopolitical but also to speculate about the effects they have at the national scale. Through this refusal to uphold the separation between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, I examine the relationship between the constitution of internal and external others. In a multicultural country with comparatively lenient immigration policies, Third World subjects can no longer be safely confined to ‘their’ own spaces, and the domestic effects of the discourses that produce the Third World are important to explore. The figure of the ‘multicultural’ erodes the comfortable division between the First and Third Worlds – and the influence of representations of Third World poverty travels into the national social sphere.

Campbell (2007) argues that visual representations of conflicts like Darfur are themselves geopolitical, “both manifesting and enabling power relations that distance difference, leaving us with the challenge of how our mediated encounters with others can be better handled” (p. 359). “The visual enactment of Darfur,” he says, “does not just mirror the geopolitical issues that are its subject. Rather, this visual enactment is itself geopolitical – that is, it both manifests and enables power relations through which spatial distances between self/other, civilized/barbaric, North/South, developed/underdeveloped are produced and maintained” (p. 380). He focuses mainly on violent geopolitical conflicts and how they are represented to those at a great geographical distance, largely through news media sources. With similar ultimate goals to Campbell, I hope to explore the power relations that are
enabled – indeed, the (geo)political possibilities that are brought into being – by the visualities associated with humanitarianism and charity. While on the surface far more benign than work that directly connects visuality and war, the visualities that form my focus have serious political and ethical implications of their own. The ‘visual performances’ of poverty that appear in non-governmental organization fundraising material, help to establish conditions of possibility for certain political responses (Campbell, 2007) and become a “significant location for questions of ethics, politics and responsibility” (Mitchell, 2002 in Campbell, 2007).

Sidaway (2007) argues that there is a need to consider “questions about how contemporary economic and political dynamics are being mediated through changing discourses and practices of development” (p. 346). These discourses have enormous implications for global power relations, which are not limited to the realm of international aid. Linkages between the birth of contemporary development policies and the geopolitical calculations of the Cold War have been well established (Duffield, 2005; White, 2002); more recently, Duffield (2005) has argued that development enables “new respectability [for] an interventionary liberal imperialism” (p. 144). Sparke (2007) argues,

[O]he maps of control covering up the Global South have […] been very useful to their cartographers. They have served practically to remake the world anew, justifying imperial violence all over the planet and underpinning political-economic practices that have ranged from the trans-Atlantic trading of Africans, cotton and sugar to the contemporary ‘Highly Indebted Poor Country’ surveillance protocols deployed by the World Bank and the IMF to limit the reach of debt relief (p. 118).

While well-meaning non-governmental representations of the Third World might seem far cry from such material brutality, the ethical frameworks supported by such visual representations enable and feed into just such physical and structural violence. Roy (2010) argues that “imperial occupation and rule takes place not only through war, military might,
and violence but also through humanitarianism, aid and reconstruction” (p. 142). White (2002) goes so far as argue that development, like politics, must be seen as “war by other means” (p. 410). Generally, NGO fundraising representations explicitly avoid visualities that position poverty as a threat, aiming to create sympathy in their audiences and prompt donations. It is the relationship between these sympathetic representations and geopolitics that I wish to explore; while more deeply buried than the links elucidated by Campbell, Sparke and Duffield, I argue that such representations contribute to the ethical framework that enables contemporary geopolitics.

Sparke (2007) argues that “maps that map the Global South as a space of exception outside the bounds of humanity and human rights have remained key to the ideological legitimation and military organization of imperial rule” (p. 118). The imaginative map of the Global South in NGO representations is just such a map, albeit one which is constructed benevolently. Considering this map alongside the parallel mapping of First World poverty provides a highly effective means by which to highlight the way visualities of philanthropy shore up the moral frameworks that enable uneven geographies of ethical responsibility, allowing us to “question and unsettle the presuppositions about space and geography that underlie the hegemonies of an unjust world” (Wainwright, 2008, p. 28). The comparative approach also suggests some concrete possibilities for mapping differently, in ways that enable more just geographies of ethical responsibility across distance.

Duffield (2005) discusses the way that through displacement and migration, the Third World is increasingly making itself felt in the First, not just through the circulation of photographs but now also through the circulation of Third World bodies. Canada has staked a great deal of its national identity on its policy of official multiculturalism; interrogating the
way that philanthropic visual discourse constructs Canadian identity in opposition to Third World identities has not just geopolitical but also domestic implications. The most visible and always on display components of the multicultural mosaic are the people of colour who remain phenotypically tied to the Third World regardless of whether they have ever lived there at all. While the difference in historical context is of course vast, it is not, I think, unreasonable to draw a parallel here with Roemer (2009)’s observations about poor areas of London as a “domestic orient”, rendering the city “the empire’s metonymic double” (p. 416). The formation of the Canadian ‘community’ through both the exclusion of Third World people and places and the multicultural ideal presents a particular paradox. It is untenable to maintain the fiction that Canada’s geopolitical and discursive relationship with the Third World has no effect on the politics of multiculturalism domestically. Foregrounding the relationships between Canada’s management of geopolitical and internal others has much to offer as an avenue through which Canadian racial politics can come to be better elucidated and understood. Such understanding is a vital step towards a more just geopolitical and social reality.
Chapter 2: Developmentalism (Interrupted) and the “Rumor” of the Third World

The development of the First World and the Third World as coherent imaginative geographies was a multifaceted process, incorporating different attitudes toward poverty and how to deal with it, approaches to cultural and racial others, feelings about inequality, and concerns about the ethics of altruism. While the First World and Third World as specific concepts developed in close relation with one another, both were also influenced by ideas and attitudes that predate any kind of coherent understanding of a two-part world. The previous chapter provided some background into how we have arrived at the discursive “scaffolding of modern philanthropy” (Rozario, 2003, p. 419), a scaffolding built around the First and Third Worlds as separate edifices. In this chapter, I will begin unpacking the way this scaffolding functions today. While ultimately I will approach this through a comparative perspective on representations of First and Third World poverty, I begin with and ground my exploration in Third World poverty and the imaginative geographies of development. Jumping too quickly into dealing with both halves at once is too unwieldy an endeavor, and as representations of Third World poverty have been more comprehensively addressed in previous scholarship they provide the most stable foundation on which to ground my analysis.

Gidwani (2002) argues that “[d]evelopment is viewed as an extension of colonialism, backed by an institutional apparatus nearly as hegemonic as colonialism in its control of resources, and perhaps more so in its control of imaginations” (2-3, emphasis added). The importance of representations in development discourse has been reiterated frequently in

\( ^8 \) (Hutnyk 1996)
existing literature. Cameron and Haanstra (2008) argue that “public awareness of the global South in the global North and public attitudes in the global North towards specific development issues are all heavily influenced by the ways in which the global South and development work are represented in Northern popular culture” (p. 1476-1477); these representations “shape public understandings and thus mediate and produce relations between North and South” (p. 1486). Dogra (2007) argues that “INGOs not only ‘do’ development but also influence the ways in which charity and development gets done and theorized” (p. 168). She continues, “NGOs, like other socio-cultural institutions of representations, produce, depict, validate and even institutionalize certain discourses and ideologies often reflected in and through the images they use” (p. 168-169). The immense influence of these representations on both anti-poverty work and geopolitical and economic relations more broadly make them a crucial area for investigation (Smith & Yanacopulos, 2004; see also Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2008; Dogra, 2007).

2.1 Introducing Developmentalism

The concept of the Third World gains coherence and substance through the consistency and structure of its representation. It is only through discourse – a “specific series of representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established, and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible” (Campbell, 2009, p. 166) – that the disparate and diverse regions of ‘Africa,’ ‘Asia’ and ‘Latin America’ coalesce to form a coherent whole. Diverse cities, towns, and countrysides inhabited by a multiplicity of individuals are transformed into “the generic

the exercise of [the power of representation] over the Third World [is] made possible by this discursive homogenization (which entails the erasure of the complexity and diversity of Third World peoples, so that a squatter in Mexico City, a Nepalese peasant, and a Tuareg nomad become equivalent to each other as poor and underdeveloped)… (p. 53).

Escobar offers the term developmentalism, which he uses analogously to Edward Said (2003)’s Orientalism, as a way of describing this imaginative geography through which the Third World comes into being. Developmentalism, he argues, provides an “extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World” (p. 9). The ubiquity of representations that shore up rather than trouble or destabilize developmentalism leads to its ever-increasing durability. First normalized, then naturalized, it becomes difficult for many people to understand the Third World in terms other than those developmentalism offers. Just as Said described the Orient taking shape through its opposition to the Occident, the Third World is – in a myriad of different ways – positioned as radically unlike the First, and at the same time radically like itself. Through visual (and textual) performances, the “plurality and hybridity” of nations of the Third World are reduced to “a single entity marked by an iconography of despair, disaster and disease” (Campbell, 2007, p. 359).

Many Canadians, regardless of whether or not they have reason to formally engage with and reflect on representations of the Third World, no doubt have some understanding of developmentalism’s key characteristics. Particular ways of using words and images to solicit funds for poverty alleviation projects in the Third World have become easily recognizable. However, Smith and Yanacopulos (2004) caution against excessive homogenization of
development visualities, arguing that “[t]he growth of organizations and individuals involved in development, shifting ideas of development and new communications possibilities, present increasingly complex public faces of development.” Dogra (2007) agrees that we often overlook the presence of ‘mixed’ or ambivalent images in our hurry to class images as either ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ (see also CCIC, 2008). She goes on, however, to note that there does exist common undercurrents amongst these representations despite the fact that differences do exist between them. While keeping in mind the concerns of those who caution against excessive generalizations of development representations, I take as axiomatic that these representations share at the very least a certain “family resemblance” (Ferguson, 1994, p. 260).

Today’s dominant modes of representing development are deeply bound up with those that immediately preceded them. For much of the 20th century, non-governmental representations of development were dominated by what is often now referred to as development pornography, or the pornography of poverty (see Benthall, 1993; Dogra, 2007; Lidchi, 1999; Sankore, 2005). These terms refer to graphic images of human suffering designed to evoke strong reactions of guilt and pity in viewers. A Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) report describes the archetypal example as “emaciated children with distended bellies or flies in their eyes, women dressed in rags, queuing for food aid or picking through garbage” (p. 2). In 1981, Danish author and development worker Jørgen Lissner first linked these images to pornography, arguing that this type of representation “exposes something in human life that is as delicate and deeply personal as sexuality, that is, suffering. It puts people's bodies, their misery, their grief and their fear on display with all the details and all the indiscretion that a telescop lens will allow.”
Criticisms of these images continued throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, noting the way they represent people of the Third World as passive, helpless and at times even sub-human (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008; Lissner, 1981; Sankore, 2006). Such representations rendered people of the Third World easy targets for foreign intervention of all kinds – as “objects of colonialism, imperialism, military intervention and humanitarianism” (Campbell, 2007, p. 359).

Following the ubiquity of development pornography during the 1984-1985 Ethiopian famine, many agencies became more self-conscious about their advertising, and voluntary codes suggesting guidelines for publicity images appeared throughout North America and Western Europe (Cameron & Haanstra 2008; Lidchi 1999). As a result, the faces of smiling Third World children (having just been fed, vaccinated, or educated by a First World NGO) have become more common than the formerly dominant images of suffering, a representational regime that Dogra (2007) – drawing on Lidchi (1999) and Smillie (1995) – calls “deliberate positivism.” While generally these new regimes of representation have proven more resistant to mainstream critique than the preceding guilt-inducing images of suffering, critical scholars have been quick to point out that in many crucial ways they represent more of a continuity than a break with development pornography. Rozario (2003) argues that deliberate positivism “depends in part on the phantom spectacles of suffering that are conjured up imaginatively even as they are renounced rhetorically: we won’t show you gruesome pictures” (p. 443).

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9 Despite the decreasing prevalence of pornographic images in NGO advertising today, several studies suggest that the influence of these images still play a significant role in the way First World citizens imagine the Third World. According to Cameron and Haanstra (2008), a 2002 report by the British NGO Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) found that “80% of the British public strongly associates the developing world with doom-laden images of famine, disaster and Western aid...these images are still top of mind and maintain a powerful grip on the British psyche.”
Although the people shown are now smiling rather than frowning, these images continue to “reinforce a paternalistic, charity-based vision of North-South relations.” Like their predecessors, they display little of the historical or political context in which poverty develops, intentionally or unintentionally masking the complicity of wealthy nations in creating the poverty depicted in these images. First World viewers are discouraged from asking tough questions about the circumstances that have led to this poverty and suffering, and their own role in its perpetuation (Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2008; Sankore, 2006). The emphasis on children in these images, deployed in an attempt to awaken nurturing feelings in the potential donor, reinforces the helplessness and lack of agency of the Third World, positioning the First World viewer as the parent and infantilizing the Third World itself alongside the Third World child (Dogra, 2007). Third World people are generally portrayed in rural contexts, divorced from urban settings and ‘modernity’ of any kind (Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2008; Dogra, 2007). Individuals in affluent countries are often shocked to discover that the ‘Third World’ contains, along with starving orphans huddling in refugee camps, ‘modern’ buildings, universities, and middle class citizens who wear brand name clothing and own cars and houses.

When the Third World individuals in these photos come to stand in not for their specific communities but rather for their continent, their race or even for the Third World itself: “[t]he poverty experienced by Asian, African, Latin American and Aboriginal peoples in [developing] countries is represented in an homogenous manner, eliding the political, economic and cultural differences of the experiences of poverty in various locales. A binary relationship is thereby constructed between those who live in the North or developed world and those who live in project countries” (Jefferess, 2002, p. 13-14). Development imagery
reproduces an us/them relationship between those in the image and those who view the
image: the recipient and the donor. This binary develops with a strong racial influence: the
CCIC report observes that “[r]acism may be fueled by images of people in the South as being
‘other’ – separate from ‘us’, objects of pity. When the majority of Northern donors shown in
ads and TV appeals are white, and Southerners being ‘helped’ are people of colour, negative
messages are being conveyed.” Crucially, the report goes on to note that “the persistence of
negative images of Africa may fuel racist attitudes not only towards Africans, but towards
Canadians of African origin” (p. 3).

Developmentalism positions First World culture as normal, thus categorizing those in
the Third World as abnormal and at the same time legitimizing overconsumptive First World
lifestyles. Indeed, while lack of clean water, nourishment and shelter are rightly exposed as
serious problems, Jefferess (2002) suggests that the lack of ‘modern’ consumer culture is
equally presented as a problem: “the distinction between lack of sustenance and the lack of
Canadian understandings of ‘normalcy’ becomes blurred” (p. 13). These representations
reaffirm that solutions to Third World poverty originate with individual donors in the First
World and the work of foreign and international organizations (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008,
“Why do Angelina Jolie and Bono receive overwhelming attention for their work in Africa
while Nwankwo Kanu or Dikembe Mutombo, Africans both, are hardly ever mentioned?”

Supporting the more theoretical and speculative concerns with the dominant images
deployed by development organizations are a number of studies that have attempted to
document their effects empirically. Slovic (2007) (in Canadian Council for International Co-
operation, 2008) suggests that “when it comes to eliciting compassion, the identified
individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer”: in his empirical study, photographs of individual children without any accompanying contextual information were far and away the most effective style of fundraising. On a 2007 survey conducted in Britain on the effects of the famous Make Poverty History campaign (cited in Cameron & Haanstra, 2008), 57% of respondents agreed that ‘The only thing I can do to tackle poverty in poor countries is to give money to charities and appeals.” Other studies have also suggested that dominant regimes of representation have failed to generate interest in and engagement with issues around Third World poverty beyond a narrow concern with donating money to charity (see Edwards, 2001; Smillie, 1999; Van Rooy, 2000). Disturbingly, a 2002 independent research report commissioned by British NGO VSO found that “seventy-four percent of respondents agreed that ‘developing countries depend on the money and knowledge of the West to progress’”.

Many of those involved in the design and deployment of such images are not ignorant of these concerns. Mark Goldring, at the time a chief executive of a major British NGO and former employee of the British Department for International Development (DFID), Oxfam and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (quoted in Cameron & Haanstra, 2008), commented that “We have taken part in an intricate dance that sacrifices the long-term building of a balanced view for the short-term gain of raising funds for or awareness of our work.” Plewes and Stuart (2006) point out that organizations continue to use images of children because they simply raise more money than anything else: “the three largest public fundraising NGOs in Canada are child-sponsorship organizations [which] generate more than ten times as much money from the public as the three top non-sponsorship organizations do” (p. 30). Others defend graphic images of poverty on the grounds that they are truthful and real, and to not represent them at all would be equally problematic. People are indeed living
in horrific situations: they are starving, children are dying of preventable diseases, people are climbing over piles of trash looking for food. “It is the situation that is undignified,” some argue, “not the image” (CCIC, 2008, p. 3).

Visualities of development (re)produced by NGOs, in short, have profound effects both on the constitution of the Third World as a legitimate and natural-seeming discursive entity as well as on the particular imaginative geographies through which Canadians come to understand it. This (often racialized) us/them binary reinscribed through developmentalism intermingles with the binaries created through discourses of war, conflict and security, themselves already bound up with development through what Duffield (2010) calls the development-security nexus. This nexus has both discursive and material components, including both narratives that posit that increased development leads to increased security and vice versa, as well as the increasing on-the-ground integration of humanitarian and military intervention. Duffield (2001) describes the relationship between development and human security thus:

[O]ut of the crisis of state-based security a new framework has taken shape. This security paradigm is not based upon the accumulation of arms and external political alliances between states, but on changing the conduct of populations within them. Within this new public-private security framework, stability is achieved by activities designed to reduce poverty, satisfy basic needs, strengthen economic sustainability, create representative civil institutions, protect the vulnerable and promote human rights: the name of this largely privatized form of security is development (p. 310).

Being attentive to the interactions and connections involved in the development-security nexus adds a new dimension to the troubling effects of developmentalism. The divide between the benevolent donor and the grateful recipient maps in disturbing ways onto the rational, just military violence of First World armies and the irrational, criminalized and apolitical Third World conflicts into which they intervene (see Gregory, 2010). Indeed, in
the imaginary of military humanism, populated with “gentle soldiers and grateful recipients, actors in what the new US counterinsurgency doctrine describes as ‘armed social work’” (Gregory, 2010, p. 165), the imaginative geographies of development and of military intervention are frighteningly coincident.

2.2 The Contemporary Moment

In this section I explore the particularities of contemporary manifestations of developmentalism, what Roy (2010) calls “millennial development.” Millennial development has far more continuities than ruptures with the iterations of developmentalism that preceded it. This being said, however, three loose trends emerge as particularly significant to the contemporary moment: popularization, neoliberalization, and a tendency toward globalism.

The way that Third World poverty, understood through the lens of development, has become a prominent and fashionable public issue, something that arouses the concern of a broad swath of First World individuals, is the hallmark of the popularization of development, or what Cameron and Haanstra (2008) call “development made sexy” (see also Roy, 2010). The Third World has never been more ‘visible’ to the average citizen of the First World than it is today. In addition to media representations, the vast majority – indeed, nearly all – development NGO fundraising appeals use images (Dogra, 2007, supported by my own fieldwork). Most of these images are photographic, loaded with the assumptions of authenticity and truth that this form implies. This visual proliferation has led to the formation of a cohort of young First World individuals – the millennial generation (Roy, 2010) – who have developed the sense of an ‘intimate’ relationship with Third World
poverty. This sense of intimacy is deepened by the ever-increasing ubiquity and popularity of service learning trips and ‘voluntourism’-style short-term involvement in development projects, along with the popularity of development studies and global poverty courses in First World post-secondary institutions. The increasingly close relationship between First World youth and development work is paralleled by the widespread and visible involvement of celebrities as advocates and as ‘poster children’ (the most ironic of terms!) for organizations working to alleviate Third World poverty. Through these “portals of millennial development” (Roy, 2010, p. 33), a particular picture of the Third World comes intimately into view, constructing the sense of closeness that Roy sees as characteristic of contemporary relationships between affluence in the First World and poverty in the Third.

Rather than attempting to mobilize Western guilt about scarcity in the Third World, millennial development has shifted focus to “a celebration of abundance in the global North” (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1476): photographs of miserable and starving children are rare. Instead, ads that feature First World individuals actively participating in development projects or posing with dark-skinned children – particularly if these individuals are celebrities – shift attention to the Northern self. Even before the donor became an explicitly visible presence in NGO fundraising material, this figure haunted the edges of philanthropic visualities: fundraising imagery has always appealed “to an image of donor identity constructed in relation to the ‘needy’ other, utilizing structures of identification reminiscent of earlier forms of colonial discourse” (Jefferess, 2002, p. 3). Millennial development makes explicit that which was previously merely implied: Northern ‘selves’ possess agency and Southern ‘others’ do not (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1483). In a dual celebration of consumerism and the power of the First World subject over the Third, millennial
development constructs “poverty and the poor as objects through which the sponsor/consumer may find satisfaction and fulfillment” (Jefferess, 2002, p. 4). This is particularly evident in brand-linked poverty alleviation campaigns, Project (Red) perhaps best known amongst them. Paradigmatic of this new flavour of development representation, the Project (Red) campaign announces to the First World consumer, “We are the people we’ve been waiting for” (quoted in Cameron & Haanstra, 2008, p. 1483). Uzodinma Iweala (2007) argues,

This is the West’s new image of itself: a sexy, politically active generation whose preferred means of spreading the word are magazine spreads with celebrities pictured in the foreground, forlorn Africans in the back. […] Africans, real people though we may be, are used as props in the West’s fantasy of itself. And not only do such depictions tend to ignore the West's prominent role in creating many of the unfortunate situations on the continent, they also ignore the incredible work Africans have done and continue to do to fix those problems.

Alongside this celebration of First World wealth is a celebration of the consumerism it enables, and of the ability of the consumer to alleviate poverty through consumption choices. Campaigns like Project (Red) position consumer capitalism as the solution to poverty rather than as one of its causes (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008).

Here popularization bleeds into the second trend of millennial development: neoliberalization. While one contemporary influence among many, “there can be no doubt that neoliberalism holds sway in discourses about development […] today” (Wainwright, 2008, p. 4). Alongside the neoliberal populism embodied in the celebration of consumerism and wealth, millennial development has seen the rise of what Roy (2010) calls the Washington consensus on poverty, or poverty capital: a growing faith in the idea of “pro-poor” markets. Creating markets is seen as a key strategy for poverty alleviation, particularly through the expansion of microcredit and other development programs that encourage
entrepreneurship. A sort of micro-level reimagining of modernization narratives, “the animating truth is the democratization of capital, of the bottom billion gaining access to the instruments of capitalism and for this in turn to be the basis for a new generation of global capital” (Roy, 2010, p. 221). Alongside this trust in the benevolence of market forces is a distrust of state involvement: there is a widespread belief that contemporary development projects are most effectively implemented by private players rather than governments, and state involvement is generally met with suspicion. In this way, “the principles and norms of financial markets become central to the practice of development” (Roy, 2010, p. 56).

O’Reilly (2010) observes, “Within neoliberal notions of empowerment the individual is both the problem and solution to poverty: no longer is poverty a problem for the state, but rather, individuals are responsible for optimizing what resources they possess as individuals and what resources they can access.”

Alongside popularization and neoliberalization, millennial development is marked by the increased globalism of high-profile campaigns in response to poverty: what Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2007) refer to as the dominance of the poverty reduction agenda. “The turn of the century,” says Roy (2010), “has been marked by the emergence of a remarkable global conscience: an awareness of world poverty and the articulation of the will to end poverty. The stark fact that of a world population of 6.7 billion people, 1.4 billion live under the unimaginable conditions of earning less than $1.25 a day, is now common sense” (p. 6). This articulation of poverty through globally aggregated statistics is itself characteristic of this trend. Initiatives like the Millennium Development Goals and Make Poverty History, both extremely visible and well-known campaigns, invoke an imaginary of
specifically global poverty that needs to be eliminated. The focus of poverty alleviation efforts “has shifted from the modernization of national economies to the alleviation of the poverty of the ‘bottom billion’” (Roy, 2010, p. 7). This ‘bottom billion’ conceptualization of poverty has implications for the way we understand First World poverty, an issue that will be taken up in the following chapter.

2.3 Developmentalism Interrupted: A Canadian Case Study

Developmentalism brings a particular picture of the Third World into view, one that defines this region almost exclusively by its poverty. The First World, by contrast, comes to be defined by its wealth. First World poverty and Third World affluence become equally invisible, and in this invisibility the gulf between the First and Third Worlds becomes more firmly established and difficult to cross. The coherence of the development framework is reliant on the erasure of First World poverty; for this reason, applying this framework to an understanding of First World poverty seems a paradoxical project indeed. In this section, I want to examine the messy results of an attempt at just such a project. The developmentalist tropes that Canadians find familiar and comfortable when applied to poverty in the Third World do not sit quite as comfortably when applied to poverty in the First. The case of Save the Children Canada and Thompson, Manitoba, reveals the kind of interruption that occurs when First World poverty is represented through the lens of developmentalism.

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10 These initiatives do, to a significant extent, draw attention to some of the underlying causes of poverty such as global trade rules and Third World debt (Cameron and Haanstra 2008). For organizations like Oxfam, millennial development has brought a strong political advocacy dimension to its work (Dogra 2007), for which it should be commended.
Save the Children Canada (SCC) developed out of the International Save the Children Alliance. The international organization was founded in 1919 by a British woman named Eglantyne Jebb. Jebb came from a well-off family with a tradition of philanthropic endeavors, and after the First World War she began working to provide food for starving children in Austria and Eastern Europe. By the 1930s they were working in 25 countries on four continents. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which Jebb wrote in 1923, would eventually inspire first the League of Nations’ Declaration of Geneva on children’s rights and later the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was granted force as international law in 1990 (*Save the Children: Our past inspires us to believe in the future*, n.d.). The Canadian Save the Children Fund (as it was known at the time) began in 1921, and made its first mission providing relief for children suffering from malnutrition and famine in Russia in the 1920s. In the 1930s they expanded to send aid to children in China, Czechoslovakia and Spain, particularly following the Spanish Civil War. In 1942 the Canadian Save the Children fund focused on children in Britain affected by the bombings of London, and after the war they sent aid to France, Greece and Italy. In 1945 they introduced a child sponsorship program, allowing Canadians to sponsor Yugoslavian refugees living in Sweden. In the 1950s the Fund’s main focus was Asia, particularly the war-torn Korean Peninsula, and in the 1960s and 1970s much of their work took place in Vietnam. In the 1980s and 1990s the organization expanded to work in countries throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America. In 1988, they changed their name to Save the Children Canada (*Save the Children Canada’s history*, n.d.). Today, their vision “is a world where every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation” and their
mission “is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children, and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives” (Save the Children Canada: Who we are, n.d.).

SCC was already a well-established development NGO in the mid-1990s when it decided to devote a modest amount of resources to four programs addressing poverty amongst children in Canada. In a letter dated September 18, 1995 and sent to 6,000 potential donors, Margaret Szwez, SCC’s Manager of Program Funding, sought contributions for two of these four projects, which were to be carried out in the city of Thompson, Manitoba. One was to establish a day care program in an impoverished and underserviced area of the city where “affordable child care [was] virtually non-existent” and the other was to provide funding to the local Boys and Girls Club. The description of Thompson contained in the letter is reproduced below:

There are many cities with large pockets of disadvantaged children. But I want to talk to you about Thompson, Manitoba.

The population of Thompson numbers 22,000 and is comprised of a variety of ethnic groups, including a sizeable number of Aboriginals. Children account for nearly 25% of the total population!

Situated about 500 miles north of Winnipeg, this small mining town is troubled by high rates of violent crime, alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and latch-key children. And with few social services available, many of Thompson’s 5,200 children are extremely vulnerable.

She continues,

Countless children – sometimes as young as six years of age – often roam the streets at lunch time and after school while scores of latch-key kids go home to empty houses.

And later:

Sydney Woollcombe, our Canadian Program Manager, witnessed the positive effects of the Club’s programs during her recent visit to Thompson. In her words: “Many of

11 All documents quoted or referred to in this section are available in the Appendix.
these youngsters come from abusive families. Some of them have been in trouble with the law. But they are not “tough” kids. They are just kids who have never had a chance to be normal. The Boys and Girls Club is giving them that chance and it doesn’t take long to see what a positive effect it’s having on them.”

The letter also includes a picture of some children playing baseball, along with the caption “A simple game of baseball is a major event for members of the Boys and Girls Club.”

This is an unremarkable fundraising letter for a development NGO – unremarkable, that is, if it were describing a Third World location. Through the town’s skewed demographics and remote location it is positioned as firmly outside of the “normal.” Thompson is marked not only as a demographic anomaly but also as a racialized city, “comprised of a variety of ethnic groups, including a sizeable number of Aboriginals.” Social ills are emphasized and positive attributes of the community are not mentioned. As is often the case in NGO representations of the Third World, however, Szwez is sure to emphasize that these problems are not so severe as to be beyond improvement: with the help of the donor, the abused and deprived children of Thompson can become normal kids. The implication here is, of course, that without external intervention they are not normal (“development,” after all, “proceeds by creating abnormalities” (Escobar, 1995, p. 41)).

With the exception of its focus on a Canadian city, Save the Children Canada would have had little reason to see anything out of the ordinary in their newsletter prior to distributing it.

On the afternoon of November 3, 1995, however, Margaret Szwez received a phone call from Bill Comaskey, the mayor of the City of Thompson. A fax sent from Szwez to Comaskey later that day begins,

Further to our telephone conversation this afternoon, I would first like to apologize for any distress our mail appeal package caused you personally, or the City of Thompson.
Before we make any retractions, we are verifying the figures and statistics used in the letter as they were part of a proposal for funding we received from two groups in Thompson.

Szwez goes on to list the statistics from the fundraising appeal and their sources, which include reports published in the Thompson Citizen, RCMP documents and official Government of Manitoba publications. In a letter sent to Margaret Szwez following a meeting with Sydney Woollcombe of SCC, Comaskey wrote,

City Council has reviewed and discussed this letter in a meeting of November 13, 1995 and collectively finds it as offensive as I do and as I have expressed to yourself and to Ms. Woollcombe.

Given the inaccuracies and untruths contained in this document which paint our community in the most negative manner possible to the thousands of people to whom it has been sent, we have discussed at length, our legal options in the matter.

The consensus of Council at this juncture is that I forward to you this letter demanding that a letter of retraction be sent to each and every person or agency to whom the original letter was sent. We are most serious about defending the image of our community and we believe the content of your offensive document constitutes a clear case of slander which we have no intention of allowing to go unchallenged.

In a Thompson Citizen article titled “Save the Children looks at local third world,” James Ritchie wrote,

Although Thompsonites spend a considerable amount of time boosting the community to outsiders, some residents were surprised to learn that Save the Children Canada was describing Thompson in terms of Third World conditions.

The following day, in an article entitled “Comaskey takes a strip off ‘Save the Children’”, journalist Kevin Mason describes Mayor Comaskey as “not hold[ing] anything back when he reported to council on the fund raising [sic.] activities of the Save the Children campaign. […] The mayor told his colleagues that he was appalled that such an organization would in the name of charity use such underhanded tactics.” Mason continues:

Because of the tactics they have used to help raise funds, it really brought into line the organization’s overall credibility. Save the Children has used statistics unfairly to
coerce people into donating to this cause. As far as Comaskey can see, all they have accomplished is send out the message that they do not deserve any type of financial support.

Comaskey is not letting the matter die down as he will be taking that message to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities meeting with him.

While this is the organization’s first campaign in Canada, Comaskey hopes it is the last that will involve this community. The mayor did not like the idea of his community being used to “blackmail” people into donating money. If this is their technique, then they can go somewhere else.

[…]

While the mayor said that he did not want to get into a public debate on the issue, he felt that the Save the Children organization has violated this community as well as violating the rights of the people who live here.

[…]

The mayor noted that the letter, which was to have a circulation of about 6,000, was not circulated close to Thompson. He wondered if that was because they did not want the letter and its contents to get back to the city.

[…]

The real tragedy for the city is that the people who will receive this letter will not know what the community is actually like and so will believe the nonsense they read, said Comaskey.

As alluded to in the Mason article, Comaskey also submitted a resolution to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the organization that represents Canadian municipalities to the federal government. According to a *Thompson Citizen* article (Mason, 1996), although Comaskey “did not want to take this fight into the national forum he felt that he had few other options left open to him, since the letter was sent out on a national basis.”

The resolution read as follows:
WHEREAS Save the Children-Canada has undertaken a campaign to raise funds;

WHEREAS one of the methods employed by this organization was to send hundreds of letters across the country soliciting funds from organizations and individuals;

WHEREAS the contents of this letter are offensive and an embarrassment to communities across Canada;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities indicate to Save the Children-Canada that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities strongly objects to such misleading fundraising tactics.

Submitted by the City of Thompson, Manitoba

The FCM reviewed and endorsed the resolution at their December 1995 meeting. In a letter sent to Save the Children – Canada on January 9, 1996, the FCM declares themselves “opposed to this method of fundraising” and said that “[SCC] will enjoy no support from FCM as long as [they] employ[ed] such tactics.”

Comaskey continued to pursue his mission at the national level, sending a letter to Romeo LeBlanc, at the time the Governor General of Canada and an Honourary Chairperson of Save the Children Canada. He enclosed a copy of the original fundraising letter, which he refers to as “very offensive and unprofessional and definitely not reflective of our modern, friendly city, the third largest in the Province of Manitoba.” Judith LaRocque, Secretary to the Governor General, responded to Comaskey by politely telling him that it would not be appropriate for the Governor General to involve himself in the internal affairs of Save the Children Canada. On February 6, 1996, Margaret Szwez at Save the Children Canada received a phone call from the Mayor’s Office on Comaskey’s behalf, attempting to procure a copy of the mailing list through which the Thompson fundraising letter had been distributed, information that Save the Children Canada was not prepared to provide.
Comaskey’s campaign against SCC ran out of momentum as it hit dead ends such as the Governor General’s noncooperation and inability to gain access to SCC’s mailing lists.

Save the Children Canada did not retract their letter. Speaking with James Ritchie of the Thompson Citizen, SCC “maintained that they would stand by the letter for two reasons: fundraising is a tough business; and the issues described in the letter are verifiable.” Program director Gail Smith “noted that the letter was not a tourism brochure, […] not sent indiscriminately across the country, mass mailed, or published as an advertisement.” Smith also commented that “Poverty is not pretty. We’re in the business of fundraising and we can’t do that by telling people everything’s o.k. when it isn’t.” Despite this, their responses took a resoundingly apologetic tone. A letter sent from the Thompson Boys and Girls Club to a local politician reads: “Save the Children Canada have admitted that the letter is in style similar to those they have used describing third world communities and that this is the first fundraising publication they have done describing a Canadian community. They have stated they would consider taking a different approach in the future, but the conditions described in the letter are accurate and they stand by them.” The letter was sent to only 6000 people, they argued, and they were inexperienced with fundraising for in-Canada programs. Later in the same letter, it says that SCC “are more than willing to work with communities to develop a different, positive and progressive style [of fundraising] that reflects well on local government.” A Save the Children Canada employee said: “We’ve only been in the Canadian program for two years and we are kind of feeling our way. It’s very limited funding. In order to raise money we have to tell it like it is.” SCC admitted that “the tone of the letter may be regrettable, but they stand by their interpretation of the facts.” There is an unmistakable sense that SCC acknowledged that describing Thompson like a Third World
community had been an error in judgment, that they would learn from their mistakes and take a different approach in the future. And indeed, archival evidence suggests that they did. Subsequent fundraising appeals for in-Canada programs were approached very differently. Currently, the only in-Canada programs that appear on SCC’s website are those that explicitly target Aboriginal children, a decision to be further unpacked in the next chapter.

While no one was more vocal in their opposition to SCC’s Thompson letter than Mayor Comaskey himself, many on Thompson’s city council and other community members, as well as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, shared his concerns. For a fundraising letter so unremarkable amongst Save the Children’s other (Third World) fundraising campaigns, it is remarkable how heated a discussion and how apologetic a response it engendered. What differentiates Thompson and its residents from these other places and people is, of course, its First World location. Other moments of slippage between the language of Third and First World poverty inspire similar anxiety. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, for example, many in the United States were outraged over some media outlets’ use of the word “refugee” to describe those displaced by the storm. President George W. Bush stated, “The people we're talking about are not refugees. They are Americans, and they need the help and love and compassion of our fellow citizens” (quoted in Associated Press, 2005). Smith (2006) refers to this distinction as “doubly cynical:”

It seeks to sanitize the experience of the approximately 400,000 people displaced, evacuated and evicted from New Orleans by bestowing on them some kind of superiority and respect not normally given to “refugees.” It therefore also exposes what Bush thinks of the rest of the world, demeaning millions of others who remain merely “refugees,” a social category presumably lower than “Americans.”

This same double cynicism is at work in the Thompson case: not only did Comaskey’s insistence that SCC’s fundraising letter was false deny the existence of serious social
problems in Thompson, but also raised questions about what makes Third World communities legitimate subjects of this kind of representation. What would have been an unremarkable and unobjectionable way in which to describe poverty in the Third World was nothing if not remarkable and objectionable in the case of the First (see also Birrell, 2010).

Although SCC’s Thompson letter prompted an extensive discussion about the degree to which these fundraising “tactics” were legitimate and appropriate for a Canadian city, the discussion was never broadened to one about the potential problems with such developmentalist representations when applied to communities in other countries. Talk of broader issues around representing poverty in the Third World as well as in the First are conspicuous by their total absence: the entire conversation operates on the unquestioned assumption that it is only when developmentalism travels to the First World that it becomes problematic. While academics and development practitioners debate the ethics of developmentalist representations of Third World poverty, the vast majority of the general public tend to accept these images without question. In the case of Thompson, a small group of these people found the developmentalist lens turned on themselves, and found it a very uncomfortable situation in which to be. Those who opposed Save the Children Canada’s approach to fundraising for their Thompson projects were quite effectively able to get their concerns addressed. In the face of the enduring and naturalized edifice of developmentalism, parallel protests of Third World communities tend to attract limited attention, and ultimately have little effect (see for example Iweala, 2007; Wainaina, 2006).
2.4 Concluding Thoughts

Rather than taking their experience of perceived misrepresentation as a starting point for thinking through the parallel misrepresentation of others, a Canadian community found its First World privilege violated, and in objecting to the way it had been represented only shored up this privilege more firmly than before. In speaking of another incident in which First World privilege was violated on a massively greater and more violent scale – September 11, 2001 – Judith Butler (2004) theorizes the United States’ experiences of suffering and vulnerability through terrorism as a site that offers a clear choice between two possible responses: “[D]o we now seek to restore [First World complacency] as a way of healing from this wound? Or do we allow the challenge to First World complacency to stand and begin to build a different politics on this basis?” (p. 8) Perhaps a different politics of poverty representation could in some small way have germinated from the Thompson case, but we will never know: this particular challenge to First World complacency was certainly not permitted to stand.

Representing poverty in Canada through the tropes of developmentalism obviously produced strong objections; this raises questions about the nature of more acceptable ways of representing this and other occurrences of First World poverty. In the following chapter, I hope to explore some of these, and begin to put them in conservation with the mechanisms of developmentalism. The separation between the dominant tropes of poverty representation used NGOs both reflect and reproduce prevailing understandings of the First and Third Worlds as distinctly separate and internally coherent geographies. ‘Our’ poverty, that is, poverty located in the First World, is rendered fundamentally separate from ‘their’ poverty – poverty located in the Third World.
Chapter 3: Initiating a Conversation Between the First and Third Worlds in Canadian Visualizations of Poverty

Jones (2000) ponders the extent to which “the term ‘development’ […] itself reproduces the very benchmark by which ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’ are judged to be apart, separate, superior/inferior” (p. 240). As the experience of Save the Children Canada in Thompson demonstrates, the concept of development and the developmentalist modes of representation to which it gives rise play a central role in the construction and sedimentation of this binary. Within the developmentalist paradigm, “‘we’” – the affluent First World subjects – “supply the ultimate reference point” (White, 2002, p. 413): developmentalism rests on the assumption of a homogenous, prosperous First World against which an equally homogenous, impoverished Third World can be made legible. By highlighting the existence of First World poverty, this clear separation between poverty and wealth can be exposed as the fiction that it is. In this chapter I operate in the space opened up between representations of First and Third World poverty in NGO fundraising and publicity material, a space that comes into existence when poverty in the First World is made visible alongside poverty in the Third. In the section that follows, I sketch out some of the key similarities and differences between how the First and Third Worlds are represented in Canadian NGO fundraising and publicity material. While I offer some analysis as I go along, I will reserve broader speculations on the overall effects and significance of these representations until my concluding sections.
3.1 In Response to Negative Stereotypes

NGO fundraising and publicity representations are designed for a very specific purpose: to encourage Canadians to donate money. This means that unlike less sympathetic representations, they explicitly aim to present poverty alleviation as a worthy goal, and poor people as deserving of charity, sometimes directly responding to more negative representations. This tendency of NGOs to explicitly oppose negative stereotypes of the poor plays a significant role in the divergence between representations of First and Third World poverty: negative stereotypes of the poor too are bifurcated along this divide, and therefore the NGO images combating them are naturally also different. Unsympathetic representations

Figure 1. Why can’t street kids just get a life?
Covenant House [Poster] Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Toronto ON
of First World poverty, for example, frequently suggest that it is the result of laziness or personal failings on the part of individuals. This stereotype is directly addressed by Covenant House in an advertisement designed to highlight the complexity of factors that result in a child living on the street, factors that go far beyond a particular child’s individual culpability (see Figure 1). Often, First World poverty is simply not represented: it becomes invisible in the face of the hyper-visibility of middle class affluence and conspicuous consumption. The Salvation Army, in their campaign “We See What Most Don’t”, explicitly set themselves apart from those who overlook First World poverty’s existence (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2. We see what most don't](http://salvationarmy.ca/sanewsletter/christmas09/)

Salvation Army [Poster] Source: http://salvationarmy.ca/sanewsletter/christmas09/
Philanthropic representations of Third World poverty frequently show passive images of women and children, in part responding to media representations of Third World people, especially men, as violent and savage, involved in incomprehensible and pre-political conflicts between ungovernable mobs (see Figure 3). While the Third World often remains a “zone of war” (Barkawai, 2004, p. 141) in NGO representations, they tend to highlight individuals who have suffered as the result of violence, but are not themselves violent. Through the emphasis on their passivity and victimhood, development NGOs encourage the viewer to revisit the violent imaginaries of the Third World they have been exposed to – child soldiers, ‘terrorists’ and guerilla armies – and to focus instead on the vulnerable, helpless and harmless women and children who deserve donor support.

![Figure 3 A thirteen year old soldier](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/29/world/africa/29soldiers.html)

**Figure 3 A thirteen year old soldier**

Source: L. Addario for the New York Times


### 3.2 The Use of Photographs

The use of photographs is virtually a given when it comes to development NGO fundraising and publicity material. This was powerfully illustrated by my experience looking
through organizational archives and browsing websites: I was overwhelmed by the hundreds of pairs of eyes that stared at me from brochures and posters (see Figure 4). The office walls of Oxfam Canada, Save the Children Canada, and CARE Canada were adorned with enlarged versions of some of these photographs (see Figures 5 and 6). Some feature groups of people and some single individuals; some of the people are engaged in activities while others are sitting and looking at the camera. These images typify the genre of documentary photography, intended to display poor, oppressed or marginalized individuals with the intention to inspire change. As the intended audience of these photos are those “who [have] the power to pressure for change, documentary photography usually pictures the relatively powerless to the relatively powerful” (Rose, 2001, p. 20).

![Figure 4. This is Oxfam](#)

_Oxfam Canada [Brochure]_

*Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON*
Figure 5. CARE Canada office cubicle
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON

Figure 6. Entrance to Oxfam Canada's Ottawa office
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON
Whether posed or candid these photos imply a documentary-like truth: these are real people being shown as themselves. “[F]rom its very invention,” Rose (2001) notes, “photography has been understood by some […] as a technology that simply records the way things really look” (p. 19). “The photograph,” Campbell (2007) comments, “is a construction that obscures its own production” (p. 379). In the case of NGO representations of Third World poverty, viewers are encouraged to see the photographs not as produced images but rather as telescopic portals into the reality of the Third World. These images accrue value (in Poole (1997)’s terms) through their ability to reproduce this reality. This understanding of photographs is a dangerous one – for “rendering, even by photographs, is never innocent. These images are never transparent windows on to the world. They interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways” (Rose, 2001, p. 6).

The sheer quantity of photographs is the most initially striking difference between NGO representations of poverty in the First and Third Worlds: while NGOs working in the First World occasionally use photographs of people in their advertising, it is nowhere near as common. Some do use documentary-style photographs implying the depiction of “actual poor people” (see Figure 7) while others do not depict people at all (see Figure 8). Of the photographs that do appear in this material, a significant percentage explicitly declare themselves non-documentary: they show photographs of people, but in obviously posed or contrived ways that make it clear that they are models rather than ‘authentic’ poor people. These photographs, unlike those commonly used to depict the Third World, make their constructedness clear; in the case of highly symbolic and stylized images, it is on this constructedness that their effectiveness depends. The important aspect of these photographs is their message, not their claim to depict reality. The Salvation Army Dignity Project, for
Figure 8. Union Gospel Mission website image
Source: Screenshot by A. Stryker (2011 June 4) from http://www.ugm.ca/services/recovery

Figure 7. Look at a potato
Raise the Roof [Poster]
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2011 May), Vancouver BC
example, is a series of ads, each showing an individual reaching above their heads toward a different need (an elderly man reaches for a blanket, a woman with a baby reaches for formula and a bottle) (see Figures 9 and 10). The people depicted in these ads represent the experience of poverty in a symbolic way; it is unlikely that anyone viewing them would assume that they are depicting ‘real’ poor people.

Figure 9. Dignity project #1
The Salvation Army [Poster]
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Vancouver BC
Development NGOs make use of our fascination with visual representations of the exotic to draw people into their advertisements. Photographs “compel us to look at them, especially when the material they show us is unfamiliar or strange,” and this effect is “multiplied in images of people from the colonial or non-European world who appear both like and not like us” (Poole, 1997, p. 17). Perhaps it is in part because the degree of unfamiliarity or strangeness in First World poverty is not so great that NGOs turn to other forms of advertising when representing First World poverty. Concerns for privacy and the
use of people’s images is also significantly elevated when it comes to First World
individuals: different legal and ethical standards apply to the use of images of Third World
bodies and First World bodies. North American or Western European children, even those
who live in poverty, would never be displayed naked and fly-covered with such flippancy
(Lissner, 1981). Unlike citizens of the ‘developed’ world, however, the individuals who
appear in NGO representations of the Third World (or their parents, in the case of minors)
have little control over their images.

As discussed above, photographs “exert a cultural claim to represent ‘reality’” (Poole,
1997, p. 17) in a way that other forms of imagery do not. Because of the variety of forms
taken by representations of First World poverty in NGO advertising (many of them explicitly
making no claim to portray reality), it is less likely that viewers of such representations will
treat these advertisements as a source of knowledge about what poor people and their lives
are ‘really like.’ For many, by contrast, NGO representations of Third World poverty are one
of the primary sources of knowledge about the Third World, coming to stand in for reality.
This conflation between an image of a thing and the thing itself is a danger in all types of
representation; the danger is particularly grave in the case of the Third World and its
inhabitants. When knowledge about the Third World is acquired through representations of
poverty, the Third World becomes a homogenous zone of poverty, and non-poor Third world
citizens (along with other differences, such as those who live in urban rather than rural
settings) fade into invisibility.
3.3 Poverty and Space

The following, an excerpt from an Oxfam poster, provides a useful starting point for thinking through a less obvious but important difference between First and Third World representations of poverty. Under the heading “Two Children: Two Futures,” we learn about two girls: “Marie: Born in North America” and “Maria: Born in the Third World.”

Marie can expect to live to the age of 82.
As she grows up, she will be assured of adequate nutrition, hygienic living conditions, schooling, and advanced medical care.
She will receive full vaccination against all childhood diseases at the appropriate age and at the proper intervals.
She will marry in her mid-twenties and will have one or two children, properly spaced and delivered in hospital after regular prenatal checkups.
The greatest danger to her health in her middle years will be the risk of an accident at home or while she is out driving, or a particularly virulent influenza epidemic.
As she enters old age, she will be liable to develop cardiovascular disease or cancer, but will survive the first attacks of these with little disability because of excellent medical care and rehabilitation services. She will receive good institutional care in her old age.
Some 17 million babies were born last year in the more developed nations, and most of them will grow up to enjoy conditions of life and health similar to those to be experienced by the fortunate Marie.

Maria, on the other hand, is not quite as fortunate:

Maria can expect to live to the age of 44.
Her problems begin before birth because her mother is likely to be in poor health. If she is born in Africa or Southern Asia, she has a 1-in-3 chance of being underweight, a greater chance of dying in infancy, and a high probability of being malnourished throughout her childhood.
She has a 1-in-10 chance of dying before her first birthday and a 1-in-5 chance of dying before her fifth.
Her chance of being vaccinated is less than 1-in-2.
She will be brought up in inadequate housing in unsanitary conditions contributing to diarrhoea [sic.], cholera, tuberculosis.
She will have a 1-in-3 chance of being taught to read and write. She will marry in her teens and may have seven or more children close together unless she dies in childbirth before that.
She will be in constant danger from infectious disease from contaminated water. She will be chronically anemic from poor nutrition, malaria, and intestinal parasites.
As well as caring for her family, she will have to work hard in the fields, suffering from repeated attacks of fever, fatigue, and infected cuts.

If she survives into old age, she will be exposed to the same afflictions as her counterpart Marie in North America: cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Unlike Marie, however, she will succumb quickly and die, having no access to proper medical care and rehabilitation.

Some 24 million babies were born in the least developed countries last year, and most of them will grow up in the same miserable conditions of life and health to be experienced by the unfortunate Maria.

While these contrasting life stories do highlight some important aspects of global inequality, the narrative they create is troubling – particularly the relationship they establish between poverty and geography.

These two scenarios are clearly framed to suggest that the sole cause for the very different lives led by Marie and Maria is their geographical location; other than that, even their names are practically the same. The message is simple: those born in the First World will be affluent and those born in the Third World will be poor. This idea lurks beneath the surface of many representations of Third World poverty. The causes of their poverty are ‘natural’ (Jefferess, 2002): it is the space inhabited by Maria that is responsible for her poverty. This reflects Ferguson (1994)’s observation that “[p]oor countries are by definition ‘less developed,’ and the poverty and powerlessness of the people who live in such countries are only the external signs of this underlying condition (p. xiii).” The Third World becomes a naturalized, a priori space of poverty, extrinsic to the existence of people living with poverty. The narrative of Marie and Maria leaves no room for the existence of affluent or educated people who live in the Third World, nor does it allow for the existence of people in the First World who lack adequate nutrition, healthcare or living conditions. The First World as a space of inevitable affluence is here presented as a fait accompli with no mention of those First World residents for whom affluence is far from inevitable.
This deterministic relationship between space and poverty runs throughout representations of the Third World.\textsuperscript{12} Attempts to explain First World poverty by virtue of its location run up against the pervasive notion that the First World itself is a space of affluence. In contrast to Third World poverty, which defines the space in which it exists, First World poverty is always an anomaly within space. Geography does not exist as a discursively viable explanation for First World poverty as it does for Third World poverty. The ‘naturalness’ of Third World poverty tends to limit the extent to which the Third World poor are held individually responsible for their own poverty; rather, they are seen as victims of ill-fortune and geography (Jefferess, 2002). Poverty becomes explainable by the basic tautology that people in the Third World are poor because they are in the Third World. The fact that poor individuals in the First World inhabit a space defined by its wealth means that their poverty cannot be cast in the same entangled relationship with their environment, at least not on the same scale. Biography becomes a more important tool for interpreting First World poverty than does geography: factors such as involvement with drugs or sex work, health conditions or childhood experiences with abuse are often provided as partial explanations. Like geography, biography is a depoliticizing and limiting way to understand poverty, providing a comfortable narrative that does not require deeper interrogation.

\textsuperscript{12} This is not to say that it does not function at all in representations of First World poverty. On a much smaller scale, the causal relationship between space and poverty at times becomes confused, particularly in spaces of concentrated poverty such as Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES) (a “zone of degeneracy” according to Jiwani and Young (2006)) and some Aboriginal reserves. In general, however, geographical determinism is present to a significantly lesser degree.
3.4 Global Poverty

Just as the existence of poor people in the First World is obscured by the definition of the First World as a space of wealth, affluent classes in the Third World becomes invisible when it is normalized as a space of poverty. This has become particularly true in the case of millennial developmentalism’s emphasis on “global poverty.” Through the rising popularity of global poverty lines (such as the classic $1 or $2 per day metric) ‘the poor’ are defined universally and packaged into a single statistic (Roy 2010 p. 7), just as their nations are defined and packaged as Third World. The narrative of global poverty, with its reliance on dollar-a-day measures of absolute poverty, tends to refer in practice almost exclusively to Third World poverty; First World poverty is thus displaced out of the ‘global.’ As Third World poverty is increasingly understood through the language of global poverty, the existence of poverty outside developmentalist discourse more and more becomes an uncomfortable interruption to the narrative’s coherence.

A focus on global poverty, despite its strength in foregrounding the very poorest people in the world, makes it more difficult to conceive of First World poverty as a serious problem: in the face of dollar-a-day poverty, homelessness in North American cities (for example) risks becoming seen as a superfluous concern, with obvious political ramifications. Just as the colonial realm enabled Europeans to displace particular aspects of their identity and society into a different, distant space (McClintock, 1995; Said, 2003), the existence of the Third World enables the displacement of inequality within the First World into a different, distant space, easing its disavowal. Conversely, all but the very poorest in the Third World are also displaced, including the affluent, the educated and the active.
3.5 Children, Untapped Potential and Empowerment

Children are a common subject of NGO representations of both First and Third World poverty, and the role they play is similar in both cases. As Cameron and Haanstra (2008) observe, children can’t easily be blamed for their own poverty, and for this reason they have been widely considered the most ‘deserving’ of the poor since the medieval period. The obvious direct cause of child poverty is the poverty of their families, meaning that their hypothetical parents (generally not pictured) provide a simple and easy explanation for their plight. In this United Way advertisement (Figure 11), for example, we are told why Ehsan is looking sadly at the camera: his mother missed paying the rent (again). He is, in this depiction, the victim of his mother’s carelessness, looking to the viewer for help. It suggests

Figure 11. Ehsan’s mom missed the rent
United Way of the Lower Mainland [Poster]
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 December),
Vancouver BC
irresponsibility and sub-standard parenting on the part of the mother, and places blame for Ehsan’s plight squarely on her shoulders. The relationship between Ehsan and the viewer is the paternalism of aid relationships writ large: the child’s real parents are rendered invisible by their exclusion from the image and incompetent by the accompanying words. This leaves a vacuum into which the donor can insert themselves as a responsible and generous benefactor.

Save the Children Canada uses a very similar narrative in their campaign folder for the International Conference on War-Affected Children (Figure 12). Two children stare sadly through barbed wire, alongside the quote “Don’t ask me why I am here…ask the big people.” Empirical studies assessing what types of imagery are the most successful in
getting people to donate money consistently report that showing children is an extremely successful strategy. “The image of the child victim,” says Campbell (2007), “remains a potent signifier” (p. 371), something that seems to hold true in both Third and First World examples. McClintock (1995) observes,

the family offer[s] an indispensible figure for sanctioning social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests. Because the subordination of women to man and child to adult were deemed natural facts, other forms of social hierarchy could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. The family image came to figure hierarchy within unity as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensible for the legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms (p. 45).

Through translation of the power relationship between the donor and the recipient into this familial framework, the inequality and paternalism implicit in the aid relationship are rendered benevolent and benign.

Children, in NGO advertisements, become the embodiment of potentiality: their young, budding lives could go in any direction. With the help of donations, these advertisements suggest, they can still avoid lives of poverty, even if it is too late for their parents (Jefferess, 2002). While the children-as-potential narrative functions similarly in representations of First and Third World poverty, the degree to which similar narratives of potentiality are operational in the case of adults is significantly different. The poverty of those in non-Western societies is seen not as a result of their failure at something so much as because they haven’t yet had a chance to try. Discourses around Third World poverty remain inflected with narratives of primitiveness and undevelopment; Third World adults as well as children are infantilized back into a pre-civilization state of potentiality, playing out the colonial trope of the childlike native. The American Dream rhetoric that haunts understandings of poverty in the First World suggests that affluence is the result of some
individuals – all of who begin with a roughly equal chance at success – working more diligently than others to achieve financial success. In this paradigm poverty is the result of personal failure, of failing to live up to one’s potential. While poverty in the Third World is seen as the result of an undeveloped state, poverty in the First World is more likely understood as some form of maldevelopment, existing as it does within an ‘already developed’ society.

Ananya Roy (2010) argues that this narrative has been recently remade by discourses of microfinance and neoliberal populism, in which it manifests as the ‘untapped potential’ of the poor. In the First World it is primarily children who are seen through this untapped potential lens; in the Third World it extends to a much broader demographic. Duffield (2005) suggests that “self-reproduction, and the natural resilience that this imparts, has long been axiomatic for people understood through the register of tradition, simplicity, backwardness and race” (p. 146). This long-time association with self-reproduction dovetails smoothly with neoliberalism’s focus on the atomized and entrepreneurial individual. In this way, the American Dream rhetoric of working one’s own way out of poverty, so long a mainstay in debates about poverty in the United States, is writ large over a new landscape: that of the Third World. While the rhetoric of empowerment (see Figure 13) functions in

Figure 13: I am powerful
CARE Canada [Website Image]
positive ways to counteract previous narratives of Third World passivity and helplessness, focusing as they do *exclusively* on the ability of individuals to work to change their lives distracts attention from the structural forces that get in their way. Indeed, the inverse of this sort of empowerment rhetoric seems, troublingly, to be a blame the victim narrative: if poor individuals are empowered to pull themselves out of poverty, failure to do so is likewise the result of personal failing. In another manifestation of the rhetoric of empowerment, NGO advertisements featuring both Third and First World poverty emphasize the ability of affluent First World individuals to become “Agents of Change” who can substantively contribute to poverty alleviation (see Figures 14, 15, 16). Like the emphasis on the empowered poor

*Figure 14. Become an agent of change today!*

CARE Canada [Poster]

*Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON*
Figure 15. I fought hunger today
Oxfam Canada [Publicity Sticker]
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON

Figure 16. Without you, there would be no way
United Way [Online Advertisement]
Source: Retrieved from http://www.bcit.ca/unitedway/
individual to work their way out of poverty, this focus on donor agency invites a celebration of the benevolent paternalism of charitable donations. The ability of the affluent to alleviate poverty is often limited to their ability to donate money to charities, foreclosing the idea of more critical kinds of social and political engagements. The position of the donor in NGO representations of Third and First World poverty both tend to celebrate, and by extension to justify, accumulated wealth.

3.6 Racial and Other Others

Discourses around both Third World poverty and poverty in Canada (with the exception of Aboriginal poverty, to be explored specifically in Section 3.8) are predominantly colour-blind, silent on the relationship between poverty and race. White (2002) observes, however, that “‘colour-blindness’ does not exist outside the domain of race, but is one of the distinctive approaches to it” (p. 416): “the silence on race is a determining silence, which both masks and marks its centrality” (p. 407). This does not mean that issues of difference are entirely ignored in development discourse, “but through a philanthropic frame, ideas about ‘race’ become subsumed within more palatable discourses of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’” (Kothari, 2006, p. 18). The boundaries between racialization and other processes of othering is highly porous: “the distinction between self/other, subject/object, is not specific to race, or class, or gender, but rather serves to signify them all [and] the connections are so

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13 Oxfam is the major mainstream exception to this trend: much of their public relations material features more political messages about such things as trade policies and debt forgiveness.

14 This is one area where my focus on the Canadian context becomes important: race, representation and poverty in the United States, a cursory examination suggests, are deeply bound up with one another in specifically American ways. The relationship between these three things is equally important in Canada, but the precise nature of the associations between them operate quite differently in these two contexts, and as such relate to Third World poverty in different ways.
intimate that one form of difference frequently stands in for another” (White, 2002, p. 417). Historically, the relationship between poverty and race has been exceptionally permeable, assumptions about racial others leaking into understandings of the poor, and assumptions about the nature of poverty inflecting the desire to “fix” non-Western lifestyles (see Charlton, 2000; Roemer, 2009). These interrelated processes of othering amount to the “reduction of places and people to an alien space” (Gregory, 2010, p. 175).

As a contemporary descendant of colonial discourses, developmentalism is profoundly entangled with processes of racialization, as are its attendant geographies of the First and Third Worlds. Kothari (2006) argues that “[b]y sustaining […] the ‘traditional’ versus ‘modern’ dichotomy, mapped onto third and first worlds [sic], respectively, development becomes a racialized project drawing upon a colonial imagery when identifying who and what is ‘progressive’ / ‘backward’”. She goes on to caution, however, that colonial racial formations have mutated as they move into the framework of developmentalism, resulting in new racial configurations that “are necessarily multiple and contested,” “more complex and less binary” but “no less insidious” than those in circulation during the colonial period. Terms like ‘culture’, ‘indigenous’, ‘tradition’, and ‘ethnicity’, while not explicitly racial terms, are “inevitably and always also racialized” (p. 13-14). In addition, development’s close relationship with professionalism and the position of the expert (Mitchell 2002) brings it into proximity with the “discomforting relationship between ‘race’, knowledge and expertise” (Kothari, 2006, p. 15).

Kothari (2006) comments that the concealment of the interplay of race and development “is founded upon the assumption that development takes place in non-racialized spaces and outside of racialized histories” (p. 9). Thinking about race and development
through philanthropic visualities places these assumptions in obvious tension with the way the Third World looks when viewed through NGO representations: with very few exceptions, the Third World is pictured as being exclusively nonwhite. Poole (1997) explores the relationship of the visual in constituting discourses of race, and “how visual images have shaped […] perceptions of race as a biological and material fact” (p. 17). Photographs, by virtue of their “material nature as image objects” (p. 15), support the idea of race as a fundamentally visual, phenotypical phenomenon, even when they circulate in the employ of a ‘colour-blind’ discourse like developmentalism. Saldanha (2006) affirms the importance of the visual in racialization, arguing that “the phenotype of humans can be shown to play an active part in the event called race” (p. 9). In NGO representations of Third World poverty, race functions as a visual, phenotypic technology (Poole, 1997, p. 16): looking at image after image of the Third World, it is impossible not to start thinking of it as a non-white space, and the poverty that exists there as a specifically nonwhite phenomenon.

Keane quoted in Campbell (2007) observes, “[I]t can become easy to see a black body in almost abstract terms, as part of the huge smudge of eternally miserable blackness that has loomed in and out of the public mind throughout the decades: Biafra in the sixties; Uganda in the seventies; Ethiopia in the eighties; and Rwanda in the nineties” (p. 372) (to this list Campbell adds Darfur in the 2000s). While Keane and Campbell focus on Africa, a similar claim could be made about the brown bodies of South Asia or Latin America.

“Representations in development cooperation, aid and advocacy,” Kothari (2006) observes, “reproduce overarching and homogeneous racialized spaces, associating, for example, Africa with famine and South Asia with overpopulation” (p. 13). In this way, Third World poverty becomes racially as well as geographically othered, encouraging a continued sense of
separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between ‘our’ wealth and ‘their’ poverty.\textsuperscript{15} The Third World, and indeed poverty itself, comes to be understood as culturally and racially other; this cultural otherness becomes a defining characteristic of the undeveloped subject.

Acknowledging and being attentive to the role of race in representations of Third World poverty in the face of colour-blind developmentalism is crucial for fleshing out the political and ethical impacts of representations of poverty. “Concealed through the cleansing of development terminology,” Kothari (2006) says, “notions of ‘race’ are submerged and the development gaze is diverted away from considering how racial differentiations might shape our understandings of key concerns of development, namely the dynamics of poverty and exclusion” (p. 17).

Across both spatial and racial difference, it is all too easy for this racial difference itself to become a substitute for deeper understandings of the causes of poverty. As we come to expect Third World (nonwhite) people to be poor, moreover, their poverty comes to be seen as natural and expected, rather than a symptom of global injustice. The poverty of individuals in the First World – and particularly the white First World poor – cannot so easily be assimilated into a narrative of general otherness, and thus cannot be as easily written off as an inherent feature of race or ethnicity. Because philanthropic representations of First World poverty depict significantly fewer bodies than do representations of the Third World (and because they display less overall consistency), their role in establishing a visual connection between race and poverty is less significant.

Race is, however, just one process of othering that is at work in NGO representations of poverty – an important one, to be sure, but not the only one. The very act of representing

\textsuperscript{15} Although it is important to remember that “whiteness cannot be conflated with notions about the ‘West’” (Kothari 2006 p. 15).
a group of people who are understood as “the poor” is an othering move. Both representations of First and Third World poverty depend on the distancing of the affluent donor audience from the people they are being asked to help; indeed, it is on this distance that philanthropy depends. When the poor people depicted are nonwhite in advertisements designed to appeal predominantly to white viewers, racial difference plays an important role in creating distance between donor and recipient: it augments the already existing distancing effects of class difference. In this way, NGO representations of poverty act as a force for distancing and differencing along a number of axis, cementing divides between geographies, races and classes. While this difference is instrumental in getting viewers to donate money (the ultimate goal of these representations), a narrative that positions poor people as fundamentally separate and distinct from affluent people has potentially destructive political implications.

3.7 Gender: Directions for Future Research

While at the outset of this project the representation of gender in NGO fundraising and publicity material was an area to which I intended to devote significant attention, it quickly became clear that to do the topic justice would be well beyond the scope of a paragraph or two in an extremely broad overview. The following section merely seeks to gesture toward fruitful avenues for future inquiry, with references made to several bodies of existing literature whose interaction can be productively explored. A longer and more targeted exploration in the future will, I hope, give the intersections between gender, poverty and the First/Third World divide the attention it deserves.
Much has been written on the figure of the ‘Third World Woman’ in development discourse. Dogra (2011) summarizes some of the key critiques of the way this figure has been constituted with particular focus on UK-based NGO representations; my examination of Canada-based NGO representations echoes her findings. Before jumping into a critique, however, it should be noted that the presence of this figure in development discourse at all is something to be celebrated. As Bulbeck (2007) reminds us, “a scant three decades ago, Ester Boserup (1970) astounded the international aid community with her claims concerning women’s central role in third world economies and societies.” Today, however, women and children make up an overwhelming share of those pictured in NGO advertising – they are, in Dogra’s words, the dominant face of these organizations. She speculates that this phenomenon is a function of the fact that “women and children […] project the most vulnerable face of disaster, which enhances their ‘suitability’ for help” (p. 335). Women (like children) are depoliticizing figures, she argues, and NGO focus on them depoliticizes and dehistoricizes poverty. Mohanty (1995) criticizes the homogenous and universal Third World Woman constructed through these representations:

[She] leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc)…in contrast to the [implicit] self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (p. 56).

Through this implied contrast with Western women, the Third World is again constructed as alien and backwards, this time specifically along gendered lines. She is considered to be a worthy recipient of aid “because of her ‘essential’ feminine characteristics: committed to her children and therefore an effective agenda of economic development, peace loving and
therefore a suitable partner in the transition to democracy, prudent with environmental
resources” (Bulbeck, 2007, p. 60).

The dominance of women and children in visualizations of Third World poverty also
have troubling implications for the construction of Third World masculinity (Canadian
Council for International Co-operation, 2008). While women are committed to their
families, peace-loving and ecologically-minded, men are lazy, involved in crime or
corruption, violent and absent from their children and families’ lives (Bulbeck, 2004). Men
are rarely pictured along with women and children, suggesting that they are at very least
absent from the lives of their families if not in part responsible for their poverty: men are
rarely shown as potential supporters of women. By not picturing fathers, these images invite
the viewer to fill the paternal position, a role that echoes the archetypal donor-recipient
relationship. The fact that women and men are rarely seen together suggests universal Third
World gender segregation, hearkening back to the harem imaginaries so central to classical
Orientalism (Dogra, 2011). Through more negative media representations of the Third
World, men are frequently depicted as ‘bad’ – as warlords or rebel leaders or guerrilla
soldiers – and by not countering these representations NGO visualizations do nothing to
unsettle these associations.

Dogra speaks of a binary opposition between representations of First World and Third
World Women: in contrast to Third World women, First World women are portrayed “as
ordinary citizens and professionals. Developed world women are invariably shown doing
something and, more importantly, doing many things” (p. 344). While indeed
representations of First World women are far more varied, there is a wealth of literature on
troubling representations of poor women in the United States and Canada (although hardly
anything on specifically NGO visualizations, and significantly less focusing on the Canadian context than on the American). Putting this literature into conversation with that on representations of Third World Women would allow for a more nuanced understanding how constructions of First World, Third World and lower class femininity interact in complex ways.

Women on welfare in the United States, according to Hancock (2004), are, like their Third World counterparts, the subject of pervasive stereotypes. The identity of these women, like the development NGO representations Dogra examines, “draws on citizens’ preexisting beliefs about women who exist at the intersection of marginalized race, class, and gender identities” (p. 2). Welfare recipients are misperceived as predominantly women, the majority of whom are black, and whose identities are pathologized, linked to long-standing racist associations of black women with laziness and fecundity. Their poverty opens them up to questions of their morality, character and abilities as parents (Cassiman, 2008; Hancock, 2004). Hancock (2004) also points to the way that these persistent representations, by solidifying a particular construction of poor women, discourages political solidarity between these women and women who are not part of this group. She concludes that (mis)representation of the ‘welfare queen’ produces “legislative outcomes that are undemocratic both procedurally and substantially” (p. 6). Entrenched stereotypical representations troublingly “mask the true demographics and needs of welfare recipients” (p. 23). While women dominate discourses around welfare recipients in the United States, like in Dogra’s and Bulbeck’s work on representations of Third World women, poor men are constructed (in discursive absentia) as deadbeats and criminals (Cassiman, 2008).
Sex workers are another hyper-visible segment of the poor in the First World – and the commercial sex industry, it need hardly be stated, is highly gendered (Scoular, 2004). In Canadian cities such as Edmonton and Vancouver, for example, the cases of missing and murdered sex workers are often not treated with the same seriousness as other murders and missing persons cases, with the women being dismissed as Aboriginal drug addict prostitutes. While they are hypervisible as deviants in media portrayals, the crimes committed against them are apparently invisible to the police and other government authorities. Many of these women are Aboriginal, tagged with racist ideas of feminine submissiveness, promiscuity, and involvement with alcohol and drugs (Jiwani & Young, 2006, Pratt, 2005). By virtue of not just their gender and their poverty but also their race and occupation, they are evicted from not only the realm of the normal but also the realm of the human: on the missing persons page of the Vancouver Police Department website, two lists appeared on opposite sides of the screen – one for missing persons and one for missing sex workers (Pratt, 2005).

While the examples of troubling representations of First World poor women I discuss here do not come from NGO visualizations, it seems likely that the dominance of these very negative representations in the mainstream media influence the way NGOs chose to position women in their own representations. Even from this lopsided comparison of NGO representations of Third World women and media representations of First World women, some interesting areas of intersection begin to come into view. Jiwani and Young (2006) comment on the way that sex workers, particularly those of Aboriginal descent, “fail to appear as active agents or as silenced as victims”; Dogra (2011) makes a similar observation in the case of Third World women. The parallel absence of men and emphasis on women as
mother figures in relation to reproduction (in significantly divergent ways) are also both worthy of future attention. Sherene Razack (1998) makes the point that narratives of sexual violence in Canada, such as that against sex workers, “cannot be understood outside of colonialism” (p. 59, see also Razack, 2002), suggesting fascinating resonances between the colonial lineages of representations of poor women in the First and Third Worlds. This being said, however, the comparatively low volume of NGO visualizations of First World poverty, many of which do not show human figures, mean that it is difficult to draw any preliminary conclusions. Through a broader sample of NGO imagery of First World poverty, perhaps combined with textual analysis of the way constructions of poverty and gender intersect in the way these organizations write about and structure their programming, the play of gender around the First/Third World divide could be more fully and fruitfully examined.

3.8 An Exceptional Space: Aboriginal People and the Fourth World

Much has been made of the comparatively ‘undeveloped’ state of Canada’s Aboriginal population. This information is frequently communicated to the general public through demographic statistics such as the following: a 2005 report published by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (as of 2011, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada) using 2001 data tells us that half the total Registered Indian population is under the age of 24 (22 on reserve), while half the total population of Canada is under the age of 37. The average number of children per family for Registered Indians living on reserve was twice that of the

16 For example, Jiwani and Young (2006) observe that in media coverage of sex worker murders in Vancouver, the dominant counterframe to the dismissal of these women as drug-addicted sex-trade workers "still succumbed to a dominant hegemonic frame that made these women more intelligible, and hence more acceptable, through their positioning in 'respectable' societal roles – as mothers, daughters, and sisters" (p. 901).
population as a whole. The infant mortality rate is 2 points higher and the high school completion rate is 20% lower than average. 17.5% of Registered Indians have less than grade nine education, and for the on-reserve population this number is 24.2%. The unemployment rate for Registered Indians in the labour force is 23.3% (27.7% on reserve) compared to only 7.4% for Canada as a whole. Average individual incomes were nearly $13,000 lower than the Canadian average and the prevalence of female lone-parent families is approximately twice that of the general population. Life expectancies for both men and women are about 7 years lower. Percentage of dwellings having more than one person per room for Registered Indians on reserve is 13.8% compared to less than 2% for Canadians as a whole, and the percentage of dwellings requiring major repair is 23.5% compared to 8.2% for the general population. On reserve, 36.3% of dwellings are in need of major repair.

Aboriginal reserves have frequently been described as having “Third World” conditions (see for example Galloway, 2010; Martin, 2008; Philp, 2007). Since the 1970s and the publication of George Manuel and Michael Posluns’ book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974), the term Fourth World has been circulating as a way to describe non-industrialized societies existing within industrialized, ‘modern’ nation-states. As the above statistics (and more importantly, the way in which these statistics are deployed) reflect, Aboriginal poverty in Canada is understood as separate from poverty in Canada more generally, presented as deeply linked to ethnicity and cultural difference in a way that poverty of other racial or ethnic groups in Canada are not, at least not as frequently or as deeply. This reflects the very particular history of indigenous peoples in Canada, a history of colonial violence that continues into the present. The way statistics like those above are interpreted by a Canadian public woefully ignorant of their own residence in a settler-state,
however, tend to reinforce racist beliefs of Aboriginal cultural and racial inferiority: many Canadians come to see their disproportionate poverty as the combined result of personal and cultural failings.

The way that Aboriginal poverty in Canada is represented by NGO fundraising and publicity material reflects this separation from Canadian poverty more generally, and offers an important interruption to the simplicity of the divide that I have been discussing between representations of Third and First World poverty. An exploration of this specific case offers insight into the unique discursive position occupied by Aboriginal people in the broader Canadian imaginary, as well as providing an instructive limit case where the Third/First World binary begins to break down. This section will by no means provide a comprehensive survey of representations of Aboriginal poverty by NGOs, but it will offer some initial thoughts on the position of these representations within the First/Third World binary.

To begin, I want to return to Save the Children Canada, the organization whose early forays into working with First World poverty sparked the Thompson case. Today the “Where We Work” section of their website (accessed 15 June 2011) is divided into four sections: Africa, Asia, Canada and Latin America/Caribbean. Clicking on the Canada section, one arrives at a web page titled “Helping children in Canada,” followed by the text below:

Canada is one of the best places to be born and to live. We have exceptionally low infant mortality rates, adult literacy stands at 99%, and our system of universal health care is the envy of the world. But many of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples remain in the grip of poverty, psychological challenges and violence.

Aboriginal peoples are the nation’s most marginalized demographic. Colonialism, residential schools, inequitable distribution of resources and geographic isolation have resulted in a range of devastating social and economic challenges for First Nations communities. Many families living on reserves continue to struggle to feed and protect their children.
Save the Children supports programs that are helping to improve Aboriginal children's chances of survival as well as their overall mental, physical, and behavioural development and well-being. Together with First Nations communities, we are working to preserve the unique culture of Canada’s Aboriginal people while helping them create a brighter future for their children.

Although since the Thompson case Save the Children Canada has experimented with several different programs in Canada, targeting both Aboriginal children and Canadian children more generally, Aboriginal programs are currently their sole First World focus. The way these programs are presented on the website, like many of the developmentalist representations previously discussed, erases the existence of non-Aboriginal poverty. In the first paragraph, Canada’s non-Aboriginal population is positioned as affluent and healthy in contradistinction to the Aboriginal peoples in the grip of poverty, psychological challenges and violence. Just as First World poverty and Third World affluence are rendered invisible in the developmentalist rendering of these imaginaries as separate and internally coherent, so too is non-Aboriginal poverty erased by this opening paragraph. Likewise, in representations of Aboriginal people as poor, poorly educated and plagued by psychological challenges, affluent, educated and healthy Aboriginal individuals also become written out of existence.

While this description of Aboriginal poverty bears many similarities to that of Thompson, like the Third World, Aboriginal poverty is a legitimate subject for representation through a developmentalist framework. Indeed, perhaps this is why it provides an appealing target for SCC’s current in-Canada program. When asked about whether the organization would ever consider running programs in Canada, a CARE Canada employee with whom I spoke (personal communication, 2010) immediately said that he and other employees frequently discussed how applicable their programs were to Aboriginal communities, recognizing this as a particular Canadian context into which their approaches could be easily
inserted. Unlike First World poverty more generally, Aboriginal poverty can be easily and smoothly incorporated into conventional approaches to marketing Third World poverty. While neither as numerous nor as consistent as NGO images of development in the Third World, representations of Aboriginal poverty tend to resonate strongly with several of the points I made in the previous sections. In the same way that Third World poverty becomes deterministically associated with a particular geography, by separating Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal poverty in Canada (in an apolitical way without attention to the colonial relationships that would legitimate the separation) suggests a simplistic and troubling cause-and-effect relationship between Aboriginality and severe social and psychological problems. Also like Third World poverty, Aboriginal poverty is profoundly racialized, and becomes understood through a paternalistic colonial narrative of helping a backwards people into modernity.
Chapter 4: What is to Be Done

NGO representations of poverty in fundraising and publicity material, I have shown, display significantly different characteristics depending on whether they address poverty located in the First World or in the Third World. While there are certainly subtleties and variations amongst them, each group of advertisements displays a distinct coherence and notable dissimilarities with advertisements addressing the other side of the First/Third World divide. These distinctions significantly impact not only the way poverty comes to be understood and addressed by Canadian organizations and individuals, but also how the First and Third World as fundamentally separate geographies come to take shape in Canadian consciousness. This has important implications for the different kinds of relationships, both geopolitical and ethical, that develop between these two geographies. In this chapter I want to explore some of these implications. I will first discuss the implications for humanitarianism as a mode of political and ethical engagement, as it is materialized through the work of non-governmental organizations. Following this, I explore the consequences of a strengthened discursive divide between the First and Third Worlds. From there I examine a variety of current examples of the way that some NGO representations invite kinds of engagements with poverty that in various ways circumvent some of the issues that arise from more conventional advertising styles. Finally, I close with some last thoughts on the First/Third World divide, and the problems and possibilities raised by its continued existence.
4.1 The Paradox of NGO Humanitarianism

A particular brand of humanitarianism dominates the way NGOs represent the relationship of their affluent donor audience to the poor people whose lives they seek to improve. While criticizing this NGO humanitarianism is often met with knee-jerk reactions from well-meaning philanthropists – who could be against helping the poor? – the conventional narratives to which it gives rise are crucial to interrogate. The depoliticizing tendency of NGO representations, for example, was mentioned several times in the previous chapter; this tendency is a hallmark of humanitarianism more generally. NGO humanitarianism is, as Ferguson (1994) famously said of development, “an ‘anti-politics machine,’ depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight” (xv). Many NGO representations of poverty act as part of these machines, whisking unsettling political realities out of sight of donors, encouraging them to act based on paternalistic charitable impulses rather than more robust ideas of social justice. Easy explanations for poverty (the poverty of a child due to the poverty of their parents, for example) are offered, discouraging viewers from asking for further explanation. Ferguson argues that development becomes a “neutral technical mission to which no one can object” (p. 256). NGO representations take this even further: poverty is reduced not only to a technical problem, but an easily solvable technical problem. If you (the donor) give money, you’ll fix it. Without you, there would be no way.

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17 In using the term NGO humanitarianism, once again I refer only to a particular group of large NGOs whose fundraising and publicity material is widely distributed and notably visible in the day to day lives of Canadians. There are of course NGOs who operate according to the principles of different varieties of humanitarianism, some more robustly political than others, but they typically do not assert their presence visibly in the public sphere to the same extent.
Gidwani (2008) argues that development was (and continues to be) the suturing problematic that allowed liberalism to comfortably coexist with colonial discourses of cultural and racial superiority and “enabling […] an imperial program of ordered change that would pull the colonized up the ladder of progress, but never so completely that colonized subjects would become self-identical with their rulers and thereby deserving of the same political rights” (p. 42). NGO humanitarianism similarly operates as a suture, this time between capitalist aspirations of accumulation of personal wealth and the troubling realities of growing inequality on both local and global scales. By depoliticizing poverty (wherever it occurs) the affluent donor subject is rescued from the need to see their own lifestyle as at all implicated in the wanting lives of others. By reaffirming the donor’s role in changing the lives of the poor for the better, humanitarian narratives reassure the affluent that they were not complicit in these people’s initial plight. NGO humanitarianism, to paraphrase Gidwani, enables a program of poverty alleviation that would pull the poor ever so slightly up the ladder of well-being, but never so completely that the comfortable inequality that allows the rich to continually get richer is jeopardized.

The power of depoliticized humanitarianism goes beyond the ability to reconcile the contradictions of a celebration of capitalist affluence and concern for the poor, however. “A humanitarianism separated from politics,” says Agamben, “cannot fail to reproduce the isolation of sacred life at the basis of sovereignty” (p. 134). Through the figure of the *homo sacer*, the bearer of bare life, Agamben explores the idea of human beings who can be killed in an act not considered homicide: people whose lives are not deemed as worthy of being lived – and therefore can be more legitimately terminated – than others. Rather than homicides, their deaths constitute “simply the actualization of a mere ‘capacity to be killed’”
While he alludes to the presence of bare life within every living being, he is clear that we are not all equally *hominity sacri*: he mentions both the poor in general and people in the Third World as groups whose existence is treated, from a juridical standpoint, as especially close to bare life. In philanthropic discourses that highlight the power of the donor to change lives by intervention in the existence of the poor, we see Agamben’s assertion that “*homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns” (p. 84) at work.

This separation of humanitarianism and politics, Agamben argues, is “the extreme phase of the separation of the rights of man from the rights of the citizen” (p. 133). It is the citizen, he argues, rather than the human being as such, that is the bearer of rights in the contemporary world. Drawing on Arendt, he argues that, “In the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of a state” (p. 126); “[r]ights are attributed to man (or originate in him) solely to the extent that man is the immediately vanishing ground (who must never come to light as such) of the citizen” (p. 128). This division between the concepts of man and citizen culminating in the separation between humanitarianism and politics results in the inevitability of humanitarian organizations “only grasp[ing] human life in the figure of bare or sacred life, and therefore, despite themselves, maintain a secret solidarity with the very powers they ought to fight” (p. 133) – that is, those powers who benefit from the perpetuation of the inequalities that humanitarian organizations purport to oppose.

Grewal (2003) argues that “it is the interrelation between the sovereign right to kill and the humanitarian right to rescue that constitutes modes of modern power” (p. 537). Combining Agamben’s analysis of humanitarianism and bare life with Foucault (2003)’s
expansive definition of the sovereign right to kill - “not […] simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on” (p. 256) – this interrelation comes into view. The conditions that enable the humanitarian right to rescue and those that lay the groundwork for murder – direct and indirect – are as Grewal suggests inextricably intertwined: modes of humanitarianism indeed produce unequal subjects (p. 537). Typical NGO representations of poverty contribute to the schemes of differential valuation of human lives that enable the sovereign right to kill to more readily affect some bodies than others. NGOs advertisements ‘sell’ the humanitarian right to rescue, which allows affluent Canadians to reinforce and legitimize their position of privilege vis-à-vis those in need of rescue.

4.2 Humanitarianism Across the First/Third World Divide

While narratives of depoliticized humanitarianism are at play in both NGO representations of First World and Third World poverty, the forms taken by these narratives (as well as their effects) differ in significant ways between the two imaginative geographies. In their efforts to ‘sell’ the right to rescue, NGO representations of those to be rescued break down broadly along a First and Third World divide; forms of representation deemed most likely to appeal to potential donors are different depending on where this poverty is located. There are points of intersection and overlap between the two approaches, of course, but the disconnect between them is striking. The way these representations are consumed and interpreted by their affluent First World audience is different as well, particularly the degree to which they are seen ‘true’ representations of people and places. Development is “the
dominant problematic or interpretive grid” (Ferguson, 1994, p. xiii) through which poverty in the Third World becomes known to the First World. First World poverty, as represented in NGO fundraising material, does not demonstrate a coherent or overarching form in the same way: it seems there is no parallel dominant problematic. Bhabha (1994) argues that “[t]he stereotype is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation [that denies] the play of difference” (p. 107). NGO representations of First World poverty allow for this play of difference to a degree just not seen in developmentalist representations: the danger of representations of Third World poverty ossifying into a coherent concept of Third World ‘reality’ is far more acute than in the case of First World poverty.

The way critical examinations of representations of First World and Third World poverty have remained radically separate in existing literature troublingly fails to address the discursive work done by the differences between them. The visual separation between the two categories of poverty is symptomatic of a far broader separation in which particular kinds of life are treated according to different moral and ethical standards. While to a certain extent NGO humanitarianism produces the poor everywhere as unequal subjects, the particular understandings of poverty that are at work in the case of the First World are subject to discursive checks and balances not operative in the case of Third World poverty. Most NGO representations of poverty reflect the process of distancing whereby donor and recipient are rendered separate and discreet categories; this being said, however, the processes of othering that both constitute and spring from representations of poverty in the Third World are far more extreme forms of othering. The spatial proximity of First World
poverty to First World affluence limits the degree to which these representations can engage in processes of distancing, as well as the degree to which they tend to stand in for reality.

Representations of First World poverty unfold within an already established “intellectual and imaginative territory” (Said, 2003, p. 15): that of the First World, paradoxically defined (in opposition to the Third World) by its wealth. Representations of First World poverty are conditioned by this unstable and tense relationship with its existence in this space of wealth. While humanitarianism’s suturing effect is operative in the case of both First and Third World poverty, it is a far neater suture in the latter case. The additional racial and geographical distancing (on top of the class distancing inherent in representing poverty to the affluent) allows the Third World poor to be more comfortably positioned outside the realm of First World political rights. NGO humanitarianism’s efforts at enacting a similar suturing in the case of the First World poor can only ever be partially effective by comparison. It is always rough, incomplete and unstable, reflected in the assortment of philanthropic visualities employed in its representation. Third World poverty, by contrast, is shown to us in a far more ossified and stable regime of representation, reflecting the success of developmentalism as a suturing force and its victorious ‘rescue’ of the affluent First World subject from the contradictions of humanitarianism.

Agamben (1995) argues that “today’s democratico-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces within itself the people that is excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life” (p. 180):

It takes only a glance at the recent publicity campaigns to gather funds for refugees from Rwanda to realize that here human life is exclusively considered (and there are certainly good reasons for this) as sacred life – which is to say, as life that can be killed but not sacrificed – and that only as such is it made into the object of aid and protection (p. 133).
This is made plain by the figure of the refugee, “the very figure who should have embodied the rights of man par excellence” (p. 126). Despite efforts made by organizations such as the United Nations to use “the very rights of man that once made sense as the presupposition of the rights of the citizen” in a manner “separated from and used outside the context of citizenship, for the sake of the supposed representation and protection of bare life”, this remains a fundamentally paradoxical project so long as they insist that it is “not a political but rather a ‘solely humanitarian and social mission’”. “What is essential,” he says, “is that, every time refugees represent not individual cases but – as happens more and more often today – a mass phenomenon, both these organizations and individual states prove themselves, despite their solemn invocations of the ‘sacred and inalienable’ rights of man, absolutely incapable of resolving the problem and even of confronting it adequately” (p. 132-133).

Although not a perfect equivalency, it is useful to read First World citizenship into Agamben’s construction of the nation-state, and Third World citizenship through that of the refugee. In the way that the imaginative geography of the Third World erases the countries that make up this region as complex political entities and replace this conglomeration of nation-states with a vague and homogenous otherness, it impairs the ability of First World actors – individuals and the institutions that they make up – to think of Third World subjects as anything other than bare life. From the standpoint of affluent citizens of the First World, all Third World individuals are as good as refugees (indeed, if they are not already literal refugees). The First World poor are (usually) bearers of First World citizenship, even if in a capitalist world of exploitation and accumulation their ability to benefit from this citizenship is limited by their lack of economic power.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\) This could be taken in interesting directions through an exploration of the case of undocumented
From the perspective of those concerned with robust, politicized ways of working toward the alleviation of poverty, the effects of a First/Third World divide reinforced through NGO fundraising and publicity material are potentially perilous. By distancing and differencing along a number of axes NGO representations of poverty hinder possibilities for solidarity and political mobilization across boundaries. This distancing is made all the more insidious by the fact that it is achieved through the unifying language of humanitarianism, which purports to operate on the grounds of a shared humanity: this discourse “hold[s] the Other at a distance while claiming to cross the interpretive divide” (Gregory, 2010, p. 176). Through challenging the homogenizing cohesion of modern development, Jones (2000) argues, we “can provide a bridge linking the treatment of working class and sub-cultures within Europe and the supposedly distant, shadowy, silent, peripheral natives of the (post) colonized societies” (p. 239). In so doing it is possible to make visible the fact that “[t]he ‘Other’ of the Third World […] is inherently connected to the othering of Europe’s own hidden ‘others’” (p. 239). For example, in approaching the problem of racism from a perspective underpinned by an understanding of the First and Third Worlds as discreet entities, anti-racist activists not only miss important insights into the way racism is reproduced in Canada today, but also lose the opportunity for linking their struggles in productive ways with Third World struggles for economic, political and moral equality with the First. “[I]nsights into social change in the ‘Third World’ can,” Jones (2000) argues, “present renewed options and alternatives for western approaches, whilst reciprocally, it could assist academics and development practitioners to break out of the ghettoization of theory and practice in and of the ‘Third World’ itself” (p. 238).
4.3 Race, Racism and NGO Representations of Poverty

The First/Third World divide, especially as it is perpetuated through NGO visualities, is profoundly racial. Grewal (2003) makes use of the externally constituted racial category of ‘looking Middle-Eastern’ (including those of South Asian, Arab, Iranian or other heritage) to describe those who are perceived (on the basis of phenotype) as belonging to a homogenous, threatening racial group in post-9/11 America. Following Grewal, I suggest that the philanthropic visualities I have discussed constitute the even broader racial category of ‘looking Third World.’ The face of the Third World is inescapably nonwhite, and when such nonwhite faces appear in the First World, developmentalist assumptions about the nature and capabilities of Third World individuals travel with them. When the Third World, as Escobar observes, becomes defined by its poverty, the characteristics associated with this poverty ‘trickle down’ to mark all those who inhabit these spaces. Even authors who are critical of developmentalism tend to avoid discussing the messiness that occurs when individual bodies are tagged with these discourses as they move throughout different spaces and places. In a world characterized by increasing migration and immigration (and of course, where the First World has never been entirely white), we cannot afford to neglect what happens when discourses like developmentalism are transplanted from the crucibles of their formation and inserted – along with racialized bodies – into other geographical contexts.

Kothari (2006) argues that it is negligent not to consider how racism in the west influences the theories and practices of development. Such an interrogation should focus not simply on the influence of western racism on development, but also on how the assumptions and knowledges that enable development feed back into the ways of thinking that enable
western racism. The fact that the problematic representational practices of developmentalism are seen as legitimate ways of understanding Third World lives but not First World lives (demonstrated, for example, by the case of Save the Children Canada in Thompson, MB), a profoundly disturbing double-standard comes into view – a double-standard which, although on the surface geographical, is also deeply racialized. In the case of immigration from the Third World to the First, while the status of particular “Third World” groups within a given society may change over time, individuals who ‘look Third World’ remain saddled with enduring discourses associated with their assumed areas of ancestral origin. “Constructions of other cultures” become “more or less enduring codifications” (Gregory, 2004, p. 4). In the case of homogenizing understandings of the so-called Third World, the tropes of developmentalism play an absolutely crucial role in this codification – one in which those ‘looking Third World’ are marked as eternally other. This in turn legitimizes particular treatments of these people: both geopolitically, in the case of nation-states wholly designated as Third World, and of individuals who ‘look Third World’ in countries throughout the globe. Such enduring cultural codifications can profoundly influence the operation of racial prejudice on both a geopolitical and individual level. This constantly reiterated process of othering lubricates the mechanisms by which destructive geopolitical decisions are made to act on these othered populations, both domestically and internationally.

4.4 Poverty Alleviation Projects in Practice

My research examined the way NGOs advertise their work to potential donors rather than on the concrete elements of the work itself. This work does, I think, have the potential to link up in important ways with more practice-oriented research in the future. While the
visualities that I have been exploring are targeted at donors rather than poverty alleviation practitioners, their ubiquity in NGO activities suggests their influence likely exceeds this intended audience. Some critically-minded NGO workers, it has already been noted, are very much aware of the kinds of visual discourses their organizations are perpetuating. It is worth remembering the words of development practitioner Mark Goldring, quoted in Chapter 2, who observed that NGOs “have taken part in an intricate dance that sacrifices the long-term building of a balanced view for the short-term gain of raising funds for or awareness of [their] work” (quoted in Cameron & Haanstra, 2008). While some NGO practitioners, to be sure, are aware of the difference between the subjects constituted through their public relations and fundraising material and the actual subjects who are engaged in their programs, it is hard to believe that as individuals fully immersed in these visualities they are able to prevent slippage between the two. Further research could productively explore the degree to which anti-poverty practitioners espouse the depoliticized kind of NGO humanitarianism displayed in much of their fundraising and publicity material, or whether most, like Goldring, are aware of a separation between representation and reality. Butler (2009) observes that “there is no way to separate, under present historical conditions, the material reality of war from those representational regimes through which it operates” (p. 29); the material reality of poverty alleviation work, it seems likely, exists in a similarly close relationship with its representational regimes. Further study would certainly be required, however, to flesh out the nature and extent of this relationship.

In addition to the possible effects of NGO fundraising and publicity material on poverty alleviation practitioners, their impact on donors has potential to feed back into NGO practice. Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley (2002) argue that “now that so much [NGO]
funding comes from governments, multilateral donors or foundations, these donors are much freer to impose not only new standardizations and new forms of upward accountability but whole solutions that change markedly over time” (p. 830). NGO fundraising and publicity material instills certain attitudes and beliefs in the minds of donors, and NGO donor constituencies in turn perhaps come to expect programming consistent with these views. The degree to which this is the case is obviously highly variable amongst NGOs, depending on how reliant they are on donor funding and how accountable they are to donor opinions. The relationship between donor attitudes and NGO practice, however, would be a productive area for research. It would also be interesting explore whether the representational divisions between the First and Third World affect the inclinations of NGOs working with poverty in these different areas of the world to think of themselves as part of the same poverty alleviation project, and the extent to which the First/Third World divide interferes with solidarity, collaboration and knowledge sharing amongst anti-poverty organizations.

The increasing consensus amongst critical scholars that poverty alleviation projects are embedded in regimes of governmentality makes undertaking further explorations of the relationship between NGO visual discourses and poverty alleviation practice particularly of interest. Research in this area is especially flourishing in the context of the Third World, with many arguing that “in bettering through changing behaviour and attitudes, development is also a way of governing others” (Duffield, 2010; see also Duffield, 2001; Mitlin, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; Townsend, Porter & Mawdesley, 2002) – although as Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2007) caution, NGOs are not all equally agents of governmentality and these pressures are being actively resisted by some NGOs. Nonetheless, it is clear that in addition to poverty reduction, some degree of governability of populations is a goal of many NGO
programs (O’Reilly, 2010). Duffield (2001) observes that, with the decline of the role of the state in development programs,

The types of economic and social policies being pursued, levels of poverty, the degree of population participation, the extent of corruption and criminal activity, respect for human rights, the role of women, the status of the media and psychological well-being, have all become areas in which the borderlands as a social body have been opened up to levels of metropolitan monitoring, intervention and regulation unprecedented since the colonial period (p. 311).

While the strong state structures existing in the First World mean that NGO governmentalities enacted through programs addressing First World poverty are significantly overshadowed by those deployed through state social assistance programs, they too, like their Third World counterparts, play a role in the management of populations, particularly in countries like the United States where social services are increasingly contracted out to non-governmental players. The poor, in whatever context, are a population seen in need of particular management. The relationship between the representations of poverty in NGO fundraising and publicity materials and poverty alleviation practice, including the forms of governmentality encouraged by these practices (and the ways these forms of governmentality differ across the First/Third World divide) form a logical direction for future research.

4.5 Alternatives

All discourses, as Gidwani (2008) notes, are riddled with discontinuities and fissures. By focusing in Chapter 3 on the coherence of visual discourses around Third World poverty and First World poverty, it was not my intension to downplay the complexities and contradictions amongst them. Despite discontinuities and fissures, identifiable NGO visual discourses around First and Third World poverty do emerge, shakily in the former case and more strongly in the latter, and fleshing out the contours of their coherence formed the basis
of this project. In this section, however, I move beyond this focus on conventions, exploring
the messiness and counterdiscursive effects of atypical representations of First and Third
World poverty. Through a closer look at these discontinuities, I begin to think through the
political and ethical potential of representing poverty differently, of producing “countertales
that can be affective of thought and conduct in different normative ways” (Gidwani, 2008).
Such representations have the potential “to clear the way for a long-overdue renewal of
categories in the service of a politics in which bare life is no longer separated and excepted,
either in the state order or in the figure of human rights” (Agamben, 1995, p. 134). Because
NGO fundraising and publicity material is typically targeted at a broad public and distributed
widely, representing differently in this area has great potential to prompt Canadians to
question the frameworks for understanding poverty that have too often come to seem
inevitable.

The seeds of such countertales already exist, even amongst the representations
circulated by the more mainstream poverty organizations whose offices I visited in my
fieldwork. Buried in filing cabinets filled with the most conventional representations I saw
evidence of other possibilities. The work of smaller, more ‘alternative’ NGOs also gestures
towards promising other ways of representing, as does the work of artists whose work
explicitly seeks to trouble the First and Third World divide and all that follows from it.
“[F]ragments of a large number of possible orders glitter” on the periphery (Foucault, 2002,
p. xix). Different valuations of First and Third World life cannot, of course, be altered
simply by representing differently: all kinds of political, economic and social power
relationships exist that stabilize these differential valuations, which cannot easily be altered.
By representing differently, however, we can hope to at the very least draw attention to and
raise concerns about the existence of such relationships, and lay the discursive groundwork necessary for productive political and social mobilization. The production of representations of poverty that challenge our sense of the expected has the potential to force us to work at making sense of other worlds (Mudimbe, 1988), and to think critically about our understandings of them, in potentially productive ways.

The past can sometimes suggest possible directions for the future; such is the case of these two undated CARE Canada advertisements (Figures 17 and 18), displayed on the wall of CARE Canada’s offices in Ottawa. The images are black and white and appear to be at least several decades old. Although without exception CARE Canada’s more contemporary advertisements rely on close-up photographs of individuals, these ads feature black and white images of objects: a grenade and a glass of water. By not following a documentary photography style, these advertisements make it clear that they do not depict the ‘reality’ of the Third World in a literal way. In Figure 17, the viewer is told that “for 16 million people a year, [the grenade] is an eviction notice.” Through the concept of an eviction notice, the ad invites connection between First and Third World experiences: an eviction notice is a traumatizing thing for anyone to receive, regardless of their country of residence. By suggesting that for some people the eviction notice comes in the form of a grenade rather than merely a piece of paper, however, the advertisement takes seriously the fact that what is at stake in an eviction varies widely across the globe. It draws a parallel between the vulnerabilities of poor families across the First/Third World divide, while at the same time making clear that these vulnerabilities are not evenly distributed geographically. Figure 18 similarly employs a unifying symbol – the glass of water – while drawing attention to the distinctly higher stakes involved in its consumption in some parts of the world than others.
In Figure 19, Oxfam innovatively puts the viewer in the position of the woman on stage who faces the prospect of using the toilet while being watched by a large audience of voyeuristic men, some with binoculars. Directly confronted by their leering eyes, the viewer is unable to distance him- or herself from the situation: instead, they are forced to see themselves as the potential subjects of this disturbing display, the target of this gaze rather than the gazer. The men in the crowd are mostly white: by presenting a ‘Third World’ situation being played out by individuals who appear to be of the First World (including the viewer themselves), this image disturbs the separation between the two ‘worlds’ often upheld by NGO representations. The viewer of the image is forced to understand Third World individuals through the lens of their own humanity. Figure 20, rather than putting the viewer
Figure 19. Do it with an audience

Oxfam Canada [Poster]

Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON
Figure 20. Dirty water kills
Oxfam Canada [Poster]
Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON
in the position of the vulnerable Third World individual, positions them as part of the ‘firing squad’, extending glasses of potentially fatal water to the dark, blindfolded individual bound against the wall. A strong link between the viewer and the situation that the advertisement depicts is created through much the same visual technique as that employed in Figure 19; in this case, however, the viewer is invited to consider their complicity in the situation’s perpetuation. Both Figures 19 and 20 employ human figures in the way that many representations of First World poverty do: symbolically, without any danger of being mistaken for a depiction of actually existing individuals.

Figure 21, a Save the Children Canada poster from the early 2000s, is a strikingly direct rejection of developmentalist representations that show documentary-style photographs of human figures. Not only does this poster not show such images, it bears the title “The Picture We Couldn’t Show You,” explicitly rejecting the use of photographs displaying Third World suffering. The photograph that is included on the poster shows a hand blocking the view of the camera, a gesture familiar from mostly First World situations such as a suspect leaving courtroom proceedings, or celebrities hiding their faces from the paparazzi. The image suggests that a photograph of a person – likely one of the victims of child slavery talked about in the poster’s small print – was attempted, but the potential subject did not wish to be captured on film and chose to interrupt the shot. It invites viewers to think about the many reasons an individual might not wish to have their image recorded and distributed. It reinserts the agency of Third World subjects to have control over their images, something
most First World individuals have come to expect and take for granted. This poster stands as a remarkable rejection of casual displays human suffering.\textsuperscript{19}

Unlike Figure 19’s strategy of placing First World subjects in a Third World situation, Oxfam Canada troubles the conventional First/Third World divide in Figures 22, 23

\textsuperscript{19} Placed in its context amongst Save the Children Canada’s other fundraising and publicity material, however, it is somewhat more contradictory. In stack after stack of other fundraising and publicity materials, Save the Children Canada seems to have no qualms about displaying images of people in all kinds of vulnerable situations.
Figure 22. Rwanda lands first man on Mars
Oxfam Canada [Poster] Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON

Figure 23. Somalia: will the boom ever bust?
Oxfam Canada [Poster] Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON

Figure 24. Ethiopia: why everyone wants to live there
Oxfam Canada [Poster] Source: Photographed by A. Stryker (2010 November), Ottawa ON
and 24 by showing Third World individuals in typically First World situations. Rather than adopting developmentalist assumptions about what people of the Third World can achieve – usually focused on basic needs self-sufficiency and small-scale entrepreneurial endeavors – these three posters show Africans achieving success by First World standards. Third World people are shown as potential middle class subjects. The viewer is confronted with the quite unusual ideas of Rwanda having a successful space program, Somalia having a booming economy, and Ethiopia as a place where everyone wants to live. They invite viewers to consider the citizens of the Third World as (potentially) just like them, discouraging distancing and calling into question persistent understandings of Third World individuals as part of a separate category of humanity.

These images have significant progressive potential; by depicting Third World individuals achieving success by ‘First World’ standards, however, they risk reinforcing mainstream, Western understandings of success as universal and celebrating the First World middle class as a fully civilized standard to which all others should aspire. Rather than troubling the dichotomy whereby affluent Western ways of life come to be understood as fully developed in opposition to non-Western, non-mass consumptive societies, these three Oxfam advertisements strategically work with the existence of this problematic dichotomy. They rely on the First World understanding of middle class subjects as ‘normal’ and highly valued, applying this framework to people from other places to bring up their own perceived value. It makes Third World subjects appear more ‘civilized’ and more worthy of being taken seriously by engaging in a troublingly Eurocentric understanding of civilization. Figure 23, for example, idealizes purely capitalist success without attention to the vast
inequalities to which it gives rise; Figure 24 celebrates the suburban ideal of heteronormativity behind a white picket fence.

Figure 25: On your own doorstep
In Figure 25, the French NGO Association Réunir depicts a First World child forlorn, nearly naked and emaciated in the style of development pornography. This child, however, is not an ‘authentic’ poor child; the image is clearly a manufactured one, making no claim to represent reality. The small text reads “Would you care more if it happened on your own doorstep? Thousands of children are staving in Nigeria.” The image is designed to be shocking enough to reach a donor audience desensitized to images of Third World suffering. While numb to ubiquitously represented starving black bodies, Association Réunir hopes that potential donors will be able to develop a more robust sense of empathy with starving black Nigerian children through the image of a starving white child. The poster instrumentalizes the deeply troubling fact that white poverty is more shocking to many potential donors than nonwhite poverty, and white bodies easier to empathize with than black bodies, using this racial prejudice to maximize its emotional punch. While this racial dynamic is the foundation on which this advertisement’s effectiveness rests, however, the caption reverts to a colourblind understanding of geographical rather than racial proximity. Instead of a more provocative message about racialized understandings of the value of life, the image pulls its punch somewhat by not making this message explicit. Nonetheless, the image is highly effective at interrupting the kinds of images that First World donor audiences are accustomed to viewing in relation to poverty in the Third World.

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) subverts a prominent convention of NGO representations of both First and Third World poverty: the stark separation between the intended donor audience and the people who the NGOs’ programs target. While in most cases the separation is enacted with the best of intentions, it tends to imply that the poor are not active, engaged subjects themselves. It obstructs the formation of any kind of cross-class
political mobilization in the name of equality or social justice. Most NGO fundraising and publicity material is designed to appeal to affluent potential donors, asking them to help vulnerable individuals living in poverty. Affluent individuals are encouraged to celebrate their wealth through charitable giving rather than to see their lives as bound up with lives lived in poverty and equally as entangled within an unjust social system. OCAP, on the other hand, focuses on political action rather than aid, and targets their advertisements at both the affluent and the poor themselves. They appeal to a cross-class sense of justice and desire for political and social change rather than to an apolitical donor-recipient relationship. Figure 23 calls for people to rally to “defend the poor and unemployed”; the banner shown in the photograph, reading “We’re here for our money”, implies that the poor and unemployed themselves will be amongst the throng, alongside others who want to speak out in their defense. Figure 24 similarly appeals to both a poor and non-poor audience who can together demand higher welfare rates. In OCAP’s brand of anti-poverty work, everyone is equally invited to be an actor. The affluent and the poor are equally empowered to work for change, and to do this work alongside one another. OCAP’s messages do not rely on the traditional paternalistic aid relationship in which an active donor provides help to a passive recipient.

The potential of the visual realm to productively destabilize the First/Third World divide extends far beyond the context of NGO fundraising and publicity material. Photographer Joan Bardeletti (2010), for example, attempts to make visible the persistently underrepresented African middle classes (see Figure 28 for an example). Covering Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mozambique, Morocco and Cameroon, Bardeletti’s project is profoundly destabilizing and productive, forcing its intended audience (the “public of developed countries,” Bardeletti says) to see the continent through a frame antithetical to that of
Instead of getting poor people what they need, the city is now auditing the Special Diet benefit and how poor people are getting it. This is a waste of time and money. We already know that $250 isn't enough for people on assistance. We already know that people are going hungry.

free meal and rally:
TUESDAY MARCH 24, 11 AM
at City Hall (Bay and Queen)

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty -- 416-925-6939

Figure 26. Defend the poor and unemployed
Ontario Coalition Against Poverty [Poster]
Figure 27. United we eat
Ontario Coalition Against Poverty [Poster]
developmentalism. By showing middle class First World residents that there are people in the Third World who live in ways that are familiar to them, the continent can no longer be easily interpreted as a space of universal poverty and helplessness.

![Image of people on a beach](http://www.classesmoyennes-afrique.org/2010/02/i-am-living-ok-but-you-have-to-always-stay-focus/#gallery)

**Figure 28. Beach day in Mozambique**

While these alternative ways of representing poverty around the First/Third World divide are not without problems of their own, they all productively contribute to Bhabha (1994)’s “play of difference”, disrupting the ability of First World viewers to passively and uncritically consume familiar tropes of representing poverty. The way NGO fundraising and publicity material often represents poverty in familiar ways means that these images come to
“reduce the different to the already known, and thus [allow viewers to] fundamentally escape the task of making sense of other worlds” (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 72-73). Conventional representations provide an easy out: easy both for those designing NGO fundraising and publicity materials and for those consuming and responding to these materials. The discontinuities and fissures in dominant NGO visual discourses that I have explored in this section tell the kinds of counter tales that force people to make sense of other worlds in new and potentially progressive ways. Taking seriously the negative effects of mainstream philanthropic visualities means taking equally seriously the potential of alternatives to pave the way for new kinds of engagement and understanding across and around the First/Third World divide.

4.6 Conclusion

Visual representations of poverty in NGO fundraising and publicity materials constitute the First and Third World poor as particular kinds of subjects, conditioned by a complicated blend of racial, class and gender prejudices mixed with the efforts of NGOs to present the poor as worthy of receiving donor aid. These (mis)representations of individuals coalesce to form understandings of the First and Third World poor as coherent groups, and ultimately feed into the constitution of the First and Third Worlds themselves. Through NGO representations of poverty, the First and Third Worlds are ossified as fundamentally separate and internally coherent geographies. The Third World, hypervisible in extremely circumscribed ways, solidifies in the minds of Canadians as a homogenous space of poverty, a racialized “smudge of eternally miserable blackness” (Campbell, 2007, p. 372). Representations of First World poverty, by virtue of their lesser degree of coherence, tend to
coalesce less tightly than their Third World counterparts. Because First World poverty is less frequently visualized in NGO advertisements at all, however, it is more likely to become entirely invisible. It is the middle class of the First World that dominates public consciousness, and in the face of its prominence First World poverty is pushed to the margins. The way that First World poverty is underrepresented in the face of ubiquitous and ‘intimate’ representations of Third World poverty further obscures its presence. Just as Joan Bardeletti seeks to destabilize conventional understandings of the Third World by featuring the oft-unnoticed African middle classes in his work, attempts to make poverty and other social problems in the First World more visible holds significant progressive potential, insofar as they expose the fiction of the First World as a homogenous space of wealth and goodness, the pinnacle of ‘developed’ civilization. As Jones (2000) observes, “localized concentrations of poverty in the ‘First World’, and commensurate concentrations of wealth in the ‘Third World’, pose profound challenges to the predominant tendency amongst academics and policy-makers to seal off these geographical (and implicitly, temporal) areas of the globe” (p. 237).

What is at stake in maintaining the Third and First Worlds as discreet discursive categories? What is invested in this division? Incidents like Save the Children Canada in Thompson, Manitoba suggest a struggle on the part of First World actors to maintain the uninterrupted coherence of this binary, whether this struggle is engaged in consciously or unconsciously. Disruptions to the separation between the Third and First Worlds become anxious moments for the way the First World thinks of itself: they are moments when the First World subject’s own potential as bare life becomes briefly exposed, and when they (we) experience a crisis moment in the continuity of what Butler (2004) refers to as our First
World privilege. Agamben (1995) draws attention to the “amphiboly inherent in the nature
and function of the concept ‘people’ in Western politics”:

It is as if what we call ‘people’ were in reality not a unitary subject but a dialectical
oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the set of the People as a
whole political body, and on the other, the subset of the people as a fragmentary
multiplicity of needed and excluded bodies (p. 177).

Embedded in the term people is a dual meaning: the idea of People as the “total state of
integrated and sovereign citizens” (p. 177), alongside people, “the poor, the disinherited, and
the excluded” (p. 176). “One term,” he says, “thus names both the constitutive political
subject and the class that is, de facto if not de jure, excluded from politics” (p. 176). Those
who live in poverty today are, as they have been for centuries in Western society, part of this
latter form of people, disenfranchised and subjugated within a variety of intersecting
relationships of power. The people of the Third World, both those who live in poverty and
those who do not, find themselves subject, in the eyes of Canadians, to similarly unjust
frameworks of understanding, relegating them en masse to the status of small-p people.

While NGO representations of First World poverty often attempt to raise money through
images that recuperate the poor into the category of People, those representing Third World
poverty attempt to achieve similar goals by relegating the Third World poor deeper into the
world of ‘people,’ and of bare life. Although weakened by their lack of economic and
political power, the First World poor, in possession of First World citizenship and in some
cases the phenotypic whiteness that typifies the First World subject, do maintain some
political advantages and a partial share in First World privilege. Being classed as a Third

20 There are, of course, non-citizen poor in the First World as well – and the limited rights they are given
make clear what a difference First World citizenship makes.
World citizen, on the other hand, is fatal in both senses of the word: as in fate-determining and (potentially) causing death.

The dangerous opposition between People and people will continue until the two categories coincide, and “there will no longer be, strictly speaking, any people” (Agamben, 1995, p. 176). The existence of the discursive divide between the Third and First Worlds is an impediment to such a coincidence of People and people; this being said, however, the wholesale rejection of the Third and First Worlds as categorical devices is hazardous. Jones (2000) notes that “due to historically unequal political and economic relations, whether it is possible to fully deconstruct the terms ‘First’ and ‘Third’ world remains to be seen” (p. 238). Similar to the way an uncritically colourblind approach to race simply ignores rather than actually engages with the enduring presence of racial prejudice in society, the historical durability of unequal relations between the First and Third Worlds cannot be dispensed with simply by acting as if the divide does not exist. Race, like the First and Third Worlds, is a social construct rooted partly in the material. Debates about how to best deconstruct and destabilize race are instructive for the First/Third World context, and the hazards of colourblindness an important cautionary tale. First World privilege must be made visible rather than simply denied, acknowledged even as it is broken down.

Escobar (1995), and more recently others like Sparke (2007), critically explore the way the Third World is produced with the goal of making space for critical reproductions of this imaginary that recall its original, revolutionary connotations (Sparke, 2007). Sparke advocates “geographies that map other-wise and which by doing so locate the Global South in places such as the tent cities of rich country homeless protests” (p. 120). The tent cities Sparke mentions do indeed represent a possible linkage point between First and Third World,
but these points of commonality, indeed, of potential solidarity are discursively obscured for First World publics through the continuance of the First/Third World binary. While academically and theoretically Sparke’s approach has promise, I worry about the difficulty of communicating his reimaginings and maps other-wise to a Western public burdened by the accumulated effects of years of developmentalist imagery, and not all with the patience necessary for his theoretical twists and turns. Developing a positive identity around Third Worldism is certainly a viable option for those in the Third World seeking to redefine their global identity on their own terms, but is perhaps a more difficult task when seeking to impact Canadian public consciousness.

The categories of the Third and First Worlds “bear the dead weight of common sense and routinely bracket our actions” (Gidwani, 2008, p. 147). Regardless of whether or not one ultimately attempts to work within or do away with these categories, stripping away this dead weight of common sense and being aware of the material and discursive work performed by their existence is key to managing their effects. We must be attentive to the risks involved in their perpetuation, to the baggage they carry and the serious consequences this baggage can have. While this bifurcated imaginary is enduring and coherent on a number levels, it, like any other socially constructed categorization schema, is prone to moments of crisis. These moments of crisis are opportunities for those who wish to undermine and destabilize it. The existence of poverty in nations throughout the world is just such an opportunity: we must productively exploit such existing fissures in the divide between the First and Third Worlds. Whereas Spark (2007) opts to contort the Global North/South dichotomy to accommodate points where it breaks down, I embrace these points of breakdown as indications of the binary’s profound inability to contain the realities of inequality and poverty in the world.
today. By making visible the porosity of these categories, the way reality overflows, exceeds and makes a mess of them, we can begin to clear space for ways of thinking that are attentive to these categories, but do not treat them as if they possess the dead weight of common sense.

In this thesis I have explored the ways that organizations attempting to alleviate poverty, through their fundraising and publicity material, consciously or unknowingly influence the ways that affluent Canadians think about poverty, and speculated on how these ways of thinking feed back into political and social actions. Governments elected by Western publics make decisions that have serious implications for those living in so-called Third World countries, as well as for the poor in Canada. It is they whose voices are most clearly heard at international forums and whose domestic and foreign policies have the most dramatic effects on other parts of the world. For this reason, influencing the perspectives of people in the First World about poverty in a variety of global contexts holds particularly powerful progressive potential. This is not to minimize the importance or power of Third World resistance, or to subordinate such resistance to the actions of Western subjects. Rather, it is to say that as a First World subject there is much work to be done at home, destabilizing the way the Third World is thought about in ways that allow Third World voices to be more easily heard and taken seriously, and encouraging support for government policies that treat Third World countries as inhabited by People equally as valuable as Western subjects.

Judith Butler (2004) calls for an ethics and a politics based on a profound sense of empathy and codependence with the other, a robust sense of shared humanity that transcends the anemic definitions offered by liberal humanism. “I do not mean to deny that vulnerability is differentiated, that it is allocated differentially across the globe,” she says. “I
do not even mean to presume upon a common notion of the human, although to speak in its ‘name’ is already (and perhaps only) to fathom its possibility” (p. 31). Philanthropic representations of the other explicitly seek to awaken a sense of empathy, or at least of sympathy – at worst, one based on paternalistic condescension. In the previous section, I explored some already existing possibilities for representing poverty in ways that move beyond this paternalistic condescension, fathoming new possibilities for crafting ethical relations of empathy across distance and difference. Representing poverty in new and innovative ways can create the conditions of possibility necessary to address global inequalities in new and innovative ways, based on ethically just emotional engagement and just political action.
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Appendix: Documents Pertaining to Save the Children Canada and Thompson, Manitoba

1. Original fundraising letter sent by Save the Children Canada regarding their programs in Thompson, MB. (1995, September 18)

September 18, 1995

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7J 4B5

Dear Mrs

There are many cities with large pockets of disadvantaged children. But I want to talk to you about Thompson, Manitoba.

The population of Thompson numbers 22,000 and is comprised of a variety of ethnic groups, including a sizeable number of Aboriginals. Children account for nearly 25% of the total population!

Situated about 500 miles north of Winnipeg, this small mining town is troubled by high rates of violent crime, alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and latch-key children. And with few social services available, many of Thompson’s 5,200 children are extremely vulnerable.

Save the Children-Canada is responding to the needs of the children by funding two multi-faceted programs; a Multi Cultural Child Care Program and a Boys and Girls Club that boasts many creative recreational and educational programs.

As a valued donor to the Canadian Program, I’m hoping you will help us with these important programs. Let me tell you a bit about them.

The Child Care Program, which begins this month, arose out of a particularly pressing need for affordable child care in the Eastwood area. The area is made up of particularly low-income Aboriginal, minority and single parent families. Organized, affordable child care is virtually non-existent in this area.

Countless children – sometimes as young as six years of age – often roam the streets at lunch time and after school while scores of latch-key kids go home to empty houses.

The Child Care project will provide a secure environment for many of these children through a lunchroom program designed to help with overflow of children from the local school. An after school program will help to control the problems associated with latch-key kids and a Mothers & Tots program will offer a creative way for stay at home moms to explore other aspects of life in the mainstream of society.
This initiative alone will greatly reduce the risk for many of Thompson’s most vulnerable children.

The Thompson Boys and Girls Club offers a different kind of solution for children who might otherwise wander aimlessly through the community.

The Club has been operating on a “shoestring” budget for some time, without a permanent facility or a full-time director to manage the program.

Now, with funding provided by Save the Children-Canada, the Club will be able to function far more effectively and develop community programs more efficiently.

The Boys & Girls Club offers programs, four nights a week, for children aged 10-12 and 13-17. They have also been instrumental in planting a community garden and initiating innovative educational programs. For example, they recently held a “Family Sexuality Week”, a workshop for high school students and at-risk teens. It included lectures for parents, professionals and business people. And “family Values and the Community” provided workshops for teens and parents together.

We believe programs like these will have far-reaching benefits for the children, their parents and the whole community.

Sydney Woollcombe, our Canadian Program Manager, witnessed the positive effects of the Club’s programs during her recent visit to Thompson. In her words: “Many of these youngsters come from abusive families. Some of them have been in trouble with the law. But they are not “tough” kids. They are just kids who have never had a chance to be normal. The Boys and Girls Club is giving them that chance and it doesn’t take long to see what a positive effect it’s having on them.”

[Photo: A simple game of baseball is a major event for members of the Boys and Girls Club.]

Like all of our work, the Child Care Program and the Boys and Girls Club are grounded in the principles of protection, participation and development of children.

Your donation today will help to ensure that these important programs continue for the children of Thompson, Manitoba. So please, be as generous as you can.

It will mean more than I can say to these kids.

Gratefully yours,
Margaret Szwez
Manager, Program Funding
Date: November 3, 1995
To: Bill Comasky, Mayor, City of Thompson
From: Margaret Szwez, Save the Children-Canada

Further to our telephone conversation this afternoon, I would first like to apologize for any distress our mail appeal package caused you personally, or the City of Thompson.

Before we make any retractions, we are verifying the figures and statistics used in the letter as they were part of a proposal for funding we received from two groups in Thompson.

Furthermore, Ms. Sydney Woollcombe, Save the Children’s Canadian Program Manager, whom I believe you met with on two prior occasions, will be in Thompson from Thursday to Sunday of next week and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you. She will be staying at the Mystery Lake Motor Lodge and I am sure you can reach her there.

Mr. Bike Owen, the Regional Coordinator for Manitoba and Saskatchewan for The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada has verified for me the following information:

- according to the 1993 Manitoba Health Report the under nineteen population in Thompson is 5,204, distributed into the following age categories:
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Category</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4 years</td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>1,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>1,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>1,335</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- in 1989 the RCMP reported that Thompson set the Canadian record for violent crime among communities of 10,000 to 25,000 apprehensions under the Intoxicated Persons Detention Act numbered 2,621 in 1989, also a Canadian record.

- school dropout rates reach 85% among Aboriginal students

- Manitoba Health reports that Thompson has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the province. Four births and one therapeutic abortion were recorded among the 10-14 age group and 315 births and 13 therapeutic abortions among the 15 to 19 age group in 1993.

I will be in touch with you next week once Mr. Owen has had a chance to discuss these statistics with his researcher. At this point anything you can sent to me that documents your figures for the city would be most appreciated.
3. Letter from Mayor Bill Comaskey to Margaret Szwez of Save the Children Canada. (1995 November 16)

November 16, 1995

Save The Children Canada
3080 Yonge Street
Suite 6020
Toronto, Ontario
M4N 3P4

Attention: Margaret Szwez:

Dear Mrs. Swzez:

This letter is further to our telephone conversation of November 3, 1995 and my subsequent meeting with your Ms. Sydney Woollcombe regarding a fund solicitation letter circulated by your Agency.

City Council has reviewed and discussed this letter in a meeting of November 13, 1995 and collectively finds it as offensive as I do and as I have expressed to yourself and to Ms. Woollcombe.

Given the inaccuracies and untruths contained in this document which paint our community in the most negative manner possible to the thousands of people to whom it has been sent, we have discussed at length, our legal options in the matter.

The consensus of Council at this juncture is that I forward to you this letter demanding that a letter of retraction be sent to each and every person or agency to whom the original letter was sent. We are most serious about defending the image of our community and we believe the content of your offensive document constitutes a clear case of slander which we have no intention of allowing to go unchallenged.

I await your response.

Yours truly,
Bill Comaskey
Mayor
A national charity known for third world projects has turned its attention inward to Canada and will be funding four pilot projects for children at risk. Two of those four projects are in Thompson.

Although Thompsonites spend a considerable amount of time boosting the community to outsiders, some residents were surprised to learn that Save the Children Canada was describing Thompson in terms of Third World conditions.

Mayor Bill Comaskey reacted with a letter defending the community and protesting the characterization to Save the Children Canada. At this newspaper we were at first surprised by the tone of the letter. Here’s a sample...

“Situated about 500 miles north of Winnipeg, this small mining town is troubled by high rates of violent crime, alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and latch-key children. And with few social services available, many of Thompson’s 5,200 children are extremely vulnerable.”

Contacted by the Citizen, director Gail Smith and program manager Margaret Szwez defended both the letter and the conclusions. They were aware that the letter had offended some people, but maintained that they would stand by the letter for two reasons: fundraising is a tough business; and the issues described in the letter are verifiable.

“Your mayor took exception to some of what we said about Thompson, and with some of the data,” said Smith from her Toronto office. “However we stand by the stats which were taken primarily from Health reports and the CMP.”

“It may sound harsh but we haven’t said anything we couldn’t say about Toronto,” offered Smith, “and we have said those things about Toronto.”

Mayor Comaskey objected that the letter “painted our community in the most negative manner possible.”

Direct Mail

Smith said that’s not quite true, and that the letter should be understood in context. First of all, she noted that the letter was not a tourism brochure. It was not sent indiscriminately across the country, mass mailed, or published as an advertisement.

“Save the Children is seventy-four years old,” said Smith. “We have a long history, generally of supporting Third World projects. However, about two or three years ago we decided there were so many issues in Canada among children we should look at them. We had become something of a children’s advocate, one of the few really that focuses specifically on children. The more we learned about our kids in Canada, the more we learned that there were issues in places like Thompson.”
Smith told us that as a pilot project Save the Children Canada undertook to support four programs in Canada. What they all have in common is providing extra supports for children who have suffered because of some displacement. The displacement could be new immigrants coming into the country, Aboriginal people moving from reserve to city, or people who’ve lost their livelihood.

“Because of the shortness of money and that we’re quite new to this area, we only have four such projects including these two in Thompson,” said Smith. “We support one in Toronto dealing with refugee children who are coming out of the trauma of a war scene and are adjusting to life in Canada. We have one in Newfoundland where the fishery economy has collapsed.”

One of the two in Thompson is support for the Boys and Girls Club which has been long on need and short on resources. The other project is the Multi Culture Centre’s new daycare for immigrant families. Actually both projects involve immigrant and Aboriginal children although they are not explicitly targeted as such.

“All of these projects are dealing with kids in distress,” said Smith. “Only recently we’ve had a national report released which identified that children in Canada are getting poorer. We should all be concerned about that. In Thompson you have people and agencies that are trying to do something about that – trying to help your kids. They didn’t have adequate funding resources so they turned to us, and if you believe that what they are doing is important then give us a hand.”

In all four cases Save The Children is acting as a funding agency. Actual operation of the projects is the hands of local agencies.

**Hard Edge**

Smith defended the hard edge of the letter. “Poverty is not pretty,” said Smith. “We’re in the business of fundraising and we can’t do that by telling people everything’s o.k. when it isn’t.”

“This letter didn’t go to everyone,” said Smith. It went to about 6,000 people across Canada who’d already indicated previously in a questionnaire that they wanted to direct some of the donation to Canada projects. We’ve only been in the Canadian program for two years and we are kind of feeling our way. It’s very limited funding. In order to raise money we have to tell it like it is.”

“I think your mayor is to be congratulated for defending his community, but that also has to mean defending the whole community,” said Smith. “Recognize that we are there to help in our small way.”

Smith said that with limited resources her agency had to make some tough choices about what projects to fund. The two Thompson groups make a good case, and the objective
statistics backed them up. As a pilot project Thompson had the added advantage of being relatively small, and therefore manageable. It is a community with an urban centre-and-hinterland structure, and it has both immigrant and Aboriginal populations. “These are good priorities,” said Smith.

Margaret Szwez who actually heads up the fundraising aspect itself told us that direct mail methods are the single most important device their organization has at it’s disposal. She also noted that the letter was not meant for general circulation, but was specifically aimed at people who’d already indicated a concern.

In Szwez’s discussion with us she addressed some of the issues of the facts used in the letter. We asked her why the letter had cited the figure 22,000 as the population of the city. Szwez told us that they were aware that the city had peaked at around 25,000 then fallen substantially below that and was no officially listed at 14,900. She added that their information showed a substantial ongoing exchange of population between Thompson and the outlying communities. “Allowing for the additional transient population we felt 22,000 was closer to the mark,” said Szwez. “You have to allow for some throughput migration.” And she noted her organization is concerned about all the children resident in a community, not just the ones who are ‘officially’ there.

“Most of the data was obtained from a 1993 Manitoba Health report,” said Szwez, as well as Canada Health and Stats Canada information. Information was also provided by the Boys and Girls Club and Multi Culture Centre. The RCMP provided case load reports.

“Our observations about child statistics and teenage pregnancies came primarily from the Manitoba Health report,” said Szwez. “The high rate of violent crime information came from the RCMP report.”

The Multi-Culture Centre’s day care project was selected because it gave support to very young children, allowing their parents to get out and work. The Boys and Girls Club received support because they give children and young people a place to go who otherwise have none.

All of the facts cited in the letter are found in the background material submitted to Save the Children with the original applications.

On a closing note, the Save the Children people said that the tone of the letter may be regrettable, but they stand by their interpretation of the facts. “What people in Thompson should take not of,” said Smith, “is that there are individuals and groups in Thompson who are trying to do something about these problems and are deserving of their support.”
Thompson Mayor Bill Comaskey did not hold anything back when he reported to council on the fund raising activities of the Save the Children campaign aimed to assist two Thompson groups. Comaskey said that he was disappointed that the group misled people with the “facts” they reported in their fundraising letter.

The organization is campaigning for funds and at the same time giving Thompson a bad name unfairly, said Comaskey. The mayor told his colleagues that he was appalled that such an organization would in the name of charity use such underhanded tactics.

Because of the tactics they have used to help raise funds, it really brought into line the organization’s overall credibility. Save the Children has used statistics unfairly to coerce people into donating to this cause. As far as Comaskey can see, all they have accomplished is sent out the message that they do not deserve any type of financial support.

Comaskey is not letting the matter die down as he will be taking that message to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities meeting with him.

While this is the organization’s first campaign in Canada, Comaskey hopes it is the last that will involve this community. The mayor did not like the idea of his community being used to “blackmail” people into donating money. If this is their technique, then they can go somewhere else.

The mayor also called into question the groups operation and expenses. He noted that the people associated with these professional fundraisers are in fact well paid. They do not seem to mind jet setting across the country and around the world on the money that good hearted people have donated to help less fortunate children.

While the mayor said that he did not want to get into a public debate on the issue, he felt that the Save the Children organization has violated this community as well as violating the rights of the people who live here.

In an earlier interview with the Citizen, Save the Children Director Gail Smith defended the hard edge of the letter. “Poverty is not pretty,” said Smith. “We’re in the business of fundraising and we can’t do that telling people everything’s o.k. when it isn’t.”

Smith explained that the Canadian program has only been running for two years and they are still kind of feeling their way. She admitted that the four Canadian projects (including the one’s in Thompson) will receive only limited funding.

The mayor noted that the letter, which was to have a circulation of about 6,000, was not circulated close to Thompson. He wondered if that was because they did not want the letter and its contents to get back to the city.
While Comaskey’s anger is directed squarely at Save the Children fundraisers, he said the two local groups in who’s names the funds are being raised really are not to blame. Both the Boys and Girls Club and the Multi-Culture Centre were offered help and encouraged to apply for funds. Comaskey has no doubt that these two local groups did what they felt was best for their organizations, and did not have any part in the fund raising letter.

The real tragedy for the city is that the people who will receive this letter will not know what the community is actually like and so will believe the nonsense they read, said Comaskey.

The last word has still not been said about a Save the Children letter which depicted Thompson in a most negative fashion. Both the Boys and Girls Club and the Multi-Culture Centre in Thompson accepted an offer from Save the Children to provide funding for their projects within the City.

Thompson City Council did not take offense to the groups applying for or receiving funding from Save the Children. Council did, however, object to the method used by the group to raise those funds. In a letter sent to about 6,000 people across the country, the city was described in part as, “situated about 500 miles north of Winnipeg, this small mining town is troubled by high rates of violent crime, alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy and latch-key children. And with few social services available, many of Thompson’s 5,200 children are extremely vulnerable.”

When contacted by the Citizen in early December, Save the Children director Gail Smith and program manager Margaret Szwez defended the letter and the conclusions they had made. Basically they stood by the letter for two reasons: the first being that fundraising is a tough business, and the second being issues described in the letter were verifiable.

Mayor Bill Comaskey also contacted the group to try and straighten the situation out. Comaskey didn’t fare much better than our reporter.

In response to what the mayor felt was a libelous attack on the city, he took the matter to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). Comaskey noted that at a Board of Directors meeting the representatives of the Western Prairies and the NWT gave quick support to the Thompson mayor. After going to the FCM Board of Directors with his concerns about the fundraising methods of Save the Children, Comaskey again found support.

The Board of Directors for FCM endorsed a resolution where they would add their objection’s to the “misleading fund-raising tactics” of Save the Children.

The four Canadian projects (two of which are in Thompson) are the first national projects the group has undertaken. The American parent group has, however, taken on domestic projects for a number of years and recently has grown some criticism for how these projects are run. One American national publication pointed to the Waltersville Elementary School in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where 400 sponsored children should have generated $96,000 in sponsorship donations in one year. Pamela Winnick, then an in-house counsel for Save the Children, visited the school in June 1994 and found that they had not received any benefits for the previous two years. She added that in July 1994, a check in the amount of $10,800 (barely ten per cent of the aggregate amount attributable to the 400 children) would be given to the school for an academic Olympics, a writing contest for all 840 children who attend the school.
The article went on to note that the Arizona projects were the worst that Save the Children had to offer. Save the Children internal documents showed that only $21.54 per child reached the field in 1993, out of $240 donated.

It was not only the American magazine that has recently taken aim at the organization as ABC news magazine Primetime also delivered a stinging attack on the American charitable group.

It was these attacks that council noted during their discussion of the FCM resolution. Councilor Graham Buckingham added that the ABC broadcast noted legal action was pending in at least one American state on the fund raising methods of the group.

Comaskey said that he wanted to thank the members of the FCM Board of Directors for their support in the matter. He said the fact the board of directors took issue with this matter was significant. The mayor added that while he did not want to take this fight into the national forum he felt that he had few other options left open to him, since the letter was sent out on a national basis.

Comaskey said that he was sorry this organization felt it necessary to portray Thompson in such a negative light in order to raise funds, but he was simply not prepared to let it fade into the sunset.
7. Letter to Mayor Bill Comaskey from Andrée Pinard of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and attached resolution. (1995 December 20)

December 20, 1995

His Worship Mayor Bill Comaskey
City of Thompson
226 Mystery Lake Road
Thompson, Manitoba
R8N 1S6

Dear Mayor Comaskey:

Your resolution on “Save the Children-Canada” was reviewed by FCM’s National Board of Directors, at its December meeting.

The resolution was endorsed as amended and as a Category “A” which indicates that it deals with a national, municipal issue (see copy attached). Actions are presently being taken by staff on this issue and the resolution will be forwarded to the applicable minister(s) for consideration.

Should you require information on the status of this issue, please contact Michael Roche, Director, Policy and Programs, at the FCM Secretariat.

Thank you for sharing your concerns with FCM.

Sincerely yours,
Andrée Pinard
Resolutions Policy Analyst

Attached:

MISC95.4.05          SAVE THE CHILDREN-CANADA

WHEREAS Save the Children-Canada has undertaken a campaign to raise funds;

WHEREAS one of the methods employed by this organization was to send hundreds of letters across the country soliciting funds from organizations and individuals;

WHEREAS the contents of this letter are offensive and an embarrassment to communities across Canada;

BE IT RESOLVED that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities indicate to Save the Children-Canada that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities strongly objects to such misleading fund-raising tactics.
Submitted by the City of Thompson, Manitoba

DECEMBER 1995 BOARD DECISION: ENDORSED
Office of the Mayor  
City of Thompson, City Hall  
226 Mystery Lake Road  
Thompson, Manitoba  

January 2, 1996  

His Excellency the Right Honourable  
Romeo LeBlanc,  
Governor General of Canada  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6  

Your Excellency:  

As Honourary Chairperson of Save the Children-Canada, and Her Majesty the Queen being a Patron, I am writing to you in order to apprise you of concerns I have regarding this organization.  

Please find enclosed a copy of a campaign letter circulated across the country regarding the City of Thompson. I find this fund raising letter to be very offensive and unprofessional and definitely not reflective of our modern, friendly city, the third largest in the Province of Manitoba.  

I have taken this issue to a national board level and have enclosed for your information a copy of a resolution passed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities objecting to Save the Children-Canada using misleading fund raising tactics.  

In your capacity as Honourary Chairperson, I feel you should be aware of the approach being used by Save the Children-Canada, and feel that harmony and goodwill should prevail in all aspects of fund raising activities.  

Yours truly,  
Bill Comaskey
FILE MEMO

cc. R. De Grâce, G. Smith & S. Woollcombe

This afternoon at 4:10 p.m. at Rene’s request, I returned a telephone call to Diane Ludwig of Thompson, Manitoba, who was calling from the mayor’s office.

Ms. Ludwig thanked me for calling back and said she was calling on Mayor Comaskey’s behalf to get a copy of the mailing list that was used for our fundraising letter sent out last September. I explained to Ms. Ludwig that we were not prepared to forward the list and that we were in fact waiting for a response to our last letter sent to the mayor which requested additional information. I also told her that we were aware that Mayor Comaskey had taken the fundraising letter to the Federation of Mayor’s Council.

She again thanked me for getting back to her and would pass the information along to the Mayor.

Margaret Szwez
Dear Reg,

Regarding the matter I spoke to you about the other day

Background Information

Save the Children – Canada, an organization that has existed for 75 years, and has volunteer chapters all across Canada, has traditionally done work in the Third World. They take a community development approach i.e. enabling and developing educational, nutrition programs with the communities, funding community buildings, etc. It is a very creditable organization.

Two years ago, responding to suggestions from their membership, they initiated funding programs in Canada for at risk children. They targeted Manitoba and Saskatchewan because of the high rates of child poverty in these two provinces.

I had occasion to meet with their Canadian Program Manager, Sidney Woolcombe, and she became interested in our work with children and communities. This led to a two year vital funding commitment on their part to the Thompson Boys and Girls Club who were struggling to survive. Their commitment was to fund a half time staff position for two years ($35,000) and an additional $25,000 towards the purchase/rental of a building.

In addition, through their association with us, they funded the Thompson Multi-Cultural Centre ($9,000) to renovate their facilities so they could house a very needed day care. When all is said and done, Save the Children – Canada will have put $69,000 into Thompson by the end of this year. They are also considering funding the Manitoba / Saskatchewan Region towards new club development and support for existing clubs.

In order to raise money for their Canadian program, Save the Children – Canada put out a letter of appeal to 6,000 of their supporters. In the letter they quoted information selected from the Thompson Boys and Girls Club proposal that focused on some of the social problems that the City was facing. This information was gathered from reports published in the Thompson Citizen or taken from R.C.M.P and Government of Manitoba publications. The only inaccurate information was the population of the City of Thompson that was overestimated at 22,000 (the population is really a bit less than 15,000).
The Mayor has taken exception to how the letter portrayed Thompson. He feels that it does not accurately portray Thompson and is insulting to the town. Save the Children – Canada have admitted that the letter is in style similar to those they have used describing third world communities and that this is the first fundraising publication they have done describing a Canadian community. They have stated they would consider taking a different approach in the future, but the conditions described in the letter are accurate and they stand by them. They have offered to work with the Mayor towards settling this matter but he has chosen to go public with the issue and has made statements that are inaccurate and insinuate wrong doing on the part of Save the Children – Canada. He has taken this issue to the Governor General, the Minister of Health, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities with unsubstantiated accusations and innuendo.

I can’t imagine why he is going so far with this. I can understand he may be trying to attract industry to invest in Thompson and this letter may conflict with the image he is trying to project, but I would think that this could be resolved by cooperating with Save the Children – Canada in future publications. They are more than willing to work with communities to develop a different, positive and progressive style that reflects well on local government. An outside group puts in $69,000 to his town, with the potential for more, and he keeps hitting them over the head!?

I have included all the documentation concerning this issue, including the Mayor’s letters and Save the Children – Canada responses, and two articles in the Thompson Citizen.

If you have the opportunity to brief Lloyd and Dingwell on this issue, I would very much appreciate it.

Sincerely,

T. Michael A. Owen, R. S. W.
Regional Coordinator