

Culture

1, 2, 3, 4... Anthropology and the Fourth World

Nelson H. H. Graburn



Volume 1, Number 1, 1981

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077275ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077275ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Graburn, N. (1981). 1, 2, 3, 4... Anthropology and the Fourth World. *Culture*,
1(1), 66–70. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1077275ar>

Article abstract

The term the Fourth World comprizes those native peoples whose lands and cultures have been engulfed by the nations of the First, Second and Third Worlds. Parallelling the usage of the term Third World, this term has come into use in the past ten years by scholars interested in the political status of indigenous people in "internal colonies", and by the leaders of the minority peoples themselves, such as the Dene and the Lapps. This paper discusses (a) the sources of the term, (b) its range of meaning and relation to the term Third World, (c) the consciousness and political reality of the Fourth World, and (d) the problems and usage of the term in anthropology.

Tous droits réservés © Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Anthropologie (CASA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society /
Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie, 1981

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit
(including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be
viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal,
Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to
promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

1, 2, 3, 4...

Anthropology and the Fourth World

Nelson H.H. Graburn

University of California, Berkeley

This paper examines some of the ramifications of the concept, the Fourth (IV) World. It is particularly appropriate to discuss this in Canada, where the concept has been strongly expressed by members of the Fourth World themselves, by George Manuel and Michael Poslums in their book, *The Fourth World and Indian Reality* (1974) and in the *Dene Declaration: Statement of Rights* (1976).

1. Sources

A search of the historical usage of the concept of the Fourth World reveals the following, few, recent, sources, many of which appear to be independent inventions.

A. The Minority Rights Group (London) published a book edited by Ben Whitaker in 1972, entitled the *Fourth World: Victims of Group Oppression*, subtitled: *Eight Reports from the Fieldwork of the Minority Rights Group*. They have no discussion of the origin or meaning of the term.²

B. Gerald Berreman in his article "Race, caste and other invidious distinctions," in the journal *Race* (1972) uses the term, which he told me he thought had appeared in an article in the *Village Voice*, (Greenwich Village, N.Y.) which may be the prior appearance in the literature.

C. Manuel and Poslums in their 1974 book entitled the *Fourth World* state that the idea for the concept came from Mbutu Milando of the Tanzanian High Commission in Ottawa (1974: xvi, 245).

D. I myself used the concept in the title of the book on *Ethnic and Tourist Arts*, subtitled *Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* in 1976. This came about in 1975 because I was trying to think of a better title than the provisional one, *Contemporary Developments in Non-Western Arts*, which, while it avoided "Primitive," had connotations of Eastern, i.e. Oriental, or perhaps was Ivy League! My family asked, "Well, what is it about?" To which I replied, "On...Benin Woodcarving, Cuna *molas*, Eskimo stonecarving..." My brother-in-law replied, "Ah, you mean Third World arts!" To which I replied, "No, *Fourth World* arts." I then searched in the libraries and found that others had independently come up with this same concept—with the same connotations.

E. Later I obtained a copy of the *Dene Declaration* in which they identify themselves as Fourth World, but do not discuss sources of the concept. In the last year or two, usage of the term the Fourth World has become too frequent in scholarly literature for every item to be cited here. The fact that it has "arrived" is also signaled by the attention given the term in a major college textbook on American Indians (Kehoe, 1980).

2. Meaning of the Concept

There still appears to be a number of somewhat overlapping meanings and applications of the concept, the IV World.

A. The earliest publication, Whitaker (1972),

nowhere discusses the concept which is the title of the book, but the subtitle is “Victims of Group Oppression”—a wide net. However one can infer more from a perusal of the case studies considered, including:

- Asian Minorities In East and Central Africa
- The African’s Predicament in Rhodesia
- The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society
- The Two Irelands
- Religions in the Soviet Union, Including Jews, Moslems and Buddhists, as well as Orthodox and Catholic Christians
- The Crimean Tatars and the Volga Germans—Both Displaced Peoples
- The Burakumin in Japan

This wide-ranging array does not restrict itself to minorities (Black in Rhodesia), autochthonous groups (cf. Asians in Africa) nor to “ethnic groups” (cf. Catholic and Orthodox Russians). These “victims of group oppression” could be considered victims of internal colonialism, but to consider them as oppressed or disenfranchised groups is better, and overlaps with some meanings to appear later. No other citation in the literature uses the term in the same way.

B. The second or contemporaneous use of this term, by Berreman (1972) defines “IV World Colonialism” as “exploitation inflicted by ‘III World’” (i.e. non-Western) peoples on their internal minorities, analogous to what they have often experienced themselves at the hands of “first—” and “second-world” colonialists (Western non-communist and Communist nations respectively). While this is useful, it omits in the light of the following, the remaining internal colonies of the I and II worlds, as Berreman has recently agreed.

The most widely agreed upon meaning of the term IV World refers to the indigenous, autochthonous peoples whose lands have been overrun by the modern nations of the I, II, and III worlds. Thus it applies to all forms of internal colonialism of autochthonous people—usually minorities—who still exist without political autonomy within modern nation-states. This is expressed by Manuel and Poslums (1974) as “aboriginal peoples” (p. xv) who have special non-technical, non-modern exploitative relations to the lands in which they still live (p. 5, 7) and are “disenfranchised” (p. 236) within the nations in which they live. In his forward to that book, Vine Deloria, the American Indian spokesman, recounts the history of the split between the III World and the IVth based on (a) the fluctuating use of the former term by U.S. radicals, and (b) the espousal by the III World nations of modern “technical” and bureaucratic concepts, in imitation of I and II Worlds of the West (1974: ix-xii).

In my 1976 book, I defined the IV World as “comprising those native peoples whose lands and cultures have been engulfed by the nations of the

First, Second, and Third Worlds” (1976: Frontes-piece) based on the explicitly *political* analogy with the concept III World (see later), saying “Non-nations—native people subject to internal colonialism—logically form a politico-structural Fourth World category...” (1976: 1). This, indeed, followed a series of papers I had written (1976, 1970, 1975) on the different evolutionary histories of relatively powerless minority indigenous peoples, compared with majority colonial peoples who had achieved independence from their colonial statuses.

The *Dene Declaration*, while not explicitly defining the concept IV World, uses it in a way that leaves us with no doubt of its meaning, similar to the previously mentioned concepts. It states:

We...insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a Nation...

...You will find in Africa and Asia the existence of Asian and African countries...with Asian and African governments for the Asian and African peoples. The African and Asian peoples—the peoples of the Third World—have fought for and won the right to self-determination, the right to recognition...as distinct nations. What we the Dene are struggling for is the recognition of the Dene nation by the governments and peoples of the world.

We the Dene are part of the Fourth World. And as the peoples of the world have come to recognize the existence and rights of those peoples who make up the Third World the day must come when the nations of the Fourth World will come to be recognized and respected.

There has been one other major published concept of the Fourth World, one proposed by economists and used by some in the United Nations. It refers to nations sometimes called “basket cases” such as Bangladesh, where the average *per capita* income is under \$50 p.a. I consider this to be an unsuitable usage because (i) it does not parallel the explicitly *political* meaning originated for the III World, (ii) it is based on very weak monetary income data, which is highly suspect, and may have little or no meaning (being monetary) to the peoples concerned, and (iii) it, of course, ignores, the still colonized minorities with whom many of my sources are concerned. Another anomalous use of the term appears in the title of a book *The Fourth World: the Imprisoned, the Poor, the Sick, the Elderly and Underaged in America* (1976) which consists of an anthology of articles and extracts from books, edited by Hamalian and Karl. As its subtitle implies, it is not part of the series First, Second and Third Worlds, for it does not concern itself with “nations” or other politically or territorially recognized entities. In a note on the flyleaf, the editors do not mention the origin of their use of the term Fourth World, but state:

This book... [is] ...about those who belong to no structured world except that created by association with the Fourth World—a community of the powerless... in a sense

no community at all. The Fourth World is common to the other 'three worlds' but its people and their condition cannot be identified by their race, sex, religion or nationality. The Fourth World exists not merely because of political or economic factors, but because of human indifference and ignorance.

Thus their usage differs in substance from that of the majority, but shares the common factors of political submersion and existence within modern nation-states.

Thus if we accept the majority definition of the concept, we may include in the IV World the Indians and Eskimos of Canada and the U.S.A., the Maori, the Australian aborigines, the Lapps and some Africans (as Manuel and Poslums do, 1974: 5) plus the Ainu, tribal groups in India, the Indian peoples of Central and South America, the minorities of the USSR, and some of the people of New Guinea, as I have in my 1976 book.

More problematic are the Chicanos of California whom Manuel includes (1974) but who are excluded by Vine Deloria (*op. cit.*) along with the P.L.O., though he includes American Blacks [paralleling the inclusion of Brazilian Blacks by the Minority Rights Group (1972)]. A reviewer of my book pointed out that the concept also logically included the Basques, the Welsh, and some other European groups. In Montreal, popular sentiment seems to exclude Quebec from either the III or IV Worlds, inspite of similarities.

Thus, if we are to include only the indigenous aboriginal groups—as do the native peoples themselves—we have a narrower, yet still worldwide, definition. If we are to use the political fact of internal minority, we have a very wide and heterogeneous concept.

3. Relations to the Meaning of the III World

The III World or "Tiers Monde" emerged after the 1955 Conference of Non-aligned Nations in Bandung, which included Yugoslavia, Indonesia, China, and others. The actual origins of the term, like those of the IV World, are multiple, having been attributed to Alfred Sawry in 1956 and to Franz Fanon, amongst others (Campbell, 1979). Though it was first used to describe the politically non-aligned nations, it has commonly been applied to (a) less developed countries, (b) ex-colonial nations, (c) non-white peoples, and sometimes includes Latin America, as in the title of the Italian journal *Terzo Mondo*... "rivista sui paesi afro-asiatici e latino-Americani," or excludes it, e.g. Rossi (1963) stated of Latin America "It's tradition, language and religion belong to the West" (1963: 4). Sometimes China is included—as at the 1955 Bandung Conference, or excluded, as at the 1979 Havana Conference. At the

latter meeting it is interesting to note that some peoples were represented as "nations" who had not achieved independence, and might qualify as Fourth World, e.g. SWAPO, the PLO and the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe (*Newsweek* Sept. 17th, 1979). Though the leadership of Cuba at the recent conference makes nonsense of the original concept of "non-aligned" nations, it should not be forgotten that the activities of China in the original Bandung Conference were similar. Furthermore, the inclusion of such pro-Western nations as Singapore, Kenya and Liberia pose similar problems from the other side.

Peter Worsley, in his excellent book, *The Third World* (1963) points out that "Such oscillations of meaning are not by any means mere academic definition-spinning; they are the stuff of everyday international relations." (1963: 285).

Thus the fluctuating meanings of the IV World parallel, but do not cover quite such a range as those of the III World, based on (a) external political alignment, (b) internal cultural and political policies, and (c) colonial histories.

4. Political Reality of the IV World

Apart from "academic definition-spinning," the reality of the Fourth World stems from the consciousness of its peoples. The Dene (1976) explicitly state their aspirations, parallel with the recent history of the African and Asian ex-colonial III World nations, raising the prospect of the autonomous emergence as a III World nation. Manuel and Poslums are aware of or have visited other "aboriginal, disenfranchised" peoples, such as the Maori, the Australian aboriginals, the Samek, the Polynesians, as well as III World Tanzania (*op. cit.*). Some of the former groups have visited the Indians and Inuit of North America, as have Ainu and South and Southwest African native peoples, expressing not only a common political predicament, but also a "cultural kinship" in relation to the land, and the modern world.

Major formal expressions of the unification of the Fourth World have appeared with the various all-Eskimo meetings, attempting to bring together the Inuit-Yuit from Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Siberia; the longer-term-pan-national Samek (Lapp) movements discussed by Ludger Müller-Wille at the Canadian Ethnology Society meeting (1980) and perhaps above all, in the mass visit of representatives of the Native Peoples of North and South America to the United Nations in Geneva to protest the expropriation of their lands and exploitation of their peoples in 1977 (Stromberg, 1977).

This reality of consciousness is paralleled, even preceded, by western "white" organizations with similar goals, such as the Aboriginal Protection Society, started in England in 1843 by Quakers, and

the more modern Survival International of London and U.S.A., the Minority Rights Group, the I.W.G.I.A. (International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs) of Denmark, Indigena, of the U.S.A. and Latin America, among others.

The political reality of the Fourth World, even by another name, is very much aided and abetted by “do-gooders” such as anthropologists and their predecessors the missionaries, who have founded and sustained many of the “aboriginal-aid groups” cited above. In spite of the recent unpopularity of these classes from the Western world amongst many of the internal minority peoples, strong alliances do exist both in political action, such as the Native Americans’ visit to Geneva, and more importantly in consciousness-raising carried out either purposively or as a result of everyday conversation by anthropologists in their present fieldwork amongst these peoples. It has been my experience in working with the Canadian Inuit that they have questioned me and got as much information from me about “the modern world” as I have about them and “their world.”

5. Problems and Usage of the Term “The Fourth World”

The term is little used in the USA, more so in Canada (by native-peoples and anthropologists, but rarely by others) and is better known by Europeans, e.g. the Minority Rights Group (London).

Anderson, in his book *Art in Primitive Societies* (1979) states that “following current usage, I will refer to... Fourth World Societies... characteristically primitive until their relatively recent contact by First (or Second or Third) World people” (1979: 165). However, I think his claim of “current usage” is a way of avoiding the charge of plagiarism, since he makes it in a chapter on “Art in Transition” which is based almost entirely on my *Ethnic and Tourist Arts* book and he cites no other sources.

Apart from the lack of consciousness of the political state of the world, popular adoption of the term the Fourth World, with its correct, i.e. political meaning, is faced with further problems. In thinking about the French reaction to or translation of this concept, I had supposed that one would say “Le Quart Monde” paralleling “Le Tiers Monde” (originally a French concept). However, on talking with many well-educated, but not academic Quebecquois, I was informed that (i) the term was not known and (ii) that one cannot say “le quart monde”... that it would have to be “le quatrième monde”—which did not make great sense to me. However, I was very glad to find that “le quart monde” is used in France, even if it is limited to “les gens avancés” (Saladin d’Anglure, 1980).

A more fundamental problem is with the cultural classification systems of the Western World. Most of

our arbitrary classification systems are dualistic or triadic; as Lévi-Strauss has written:

It follows that triadism and dualism are inseparable, since dualism is never conceived of as such, but only as a “borderline” form of the triadic type (1967: 147).

However this is probably not true of all peoples of the world. The Japanese stress three and five, and the Chinese four; ever since the work of Durkheim and Mauss on *Primitive Classification* (1903) we have known that Four is the key number for American Indian peoples—a more balanced and wholistic order than the hierarchical and dynamic reliance on three in the West and perhaps Japan. It is perhaps most appropriate that the major expression of the concept of “four worlds,” should have come from the Canadian Indian peoples cited above.

Alan Dundes, in a slightly less ethnocentric publication on Triadism, “The Number Three in American Culture” (1968) has asserted that this imbalanced and potentially pyramidic foundation is and always will remain the structure underlying our projected classifications of the social and natural world. In discussing this paper and the concept of the Four Worlds with him recently he referred to the American Indian quadripartite classification system, but in considering the Western, academic world, he stated flatly “It’ll never wash” (Dundes, 1980). I hope he is wrong.

Conclusion

The term, the IV World, is coming into general academic use, though, unlike its precursor the III World, it has not yet reached a level of public understanding in either North America or Europe. The emergence of the concept the IV World has arisen from (i) a need for social scientists to generalize about the processes and characteristics of a particular socio-political category of people, and (ii) from the growing world-wide consciousness among the leaders of the very peoples to whom the term applies who, like members of the III World, wish to form cross-national alliances and to demarcate themselves by a term which encapsulates their unique predicaments.

Among the many meanings which have so far been attached to the IV World, the features of minority status and relative powerlessness are common. In addition, for the term to be precise enough to be useful, (the term III World is now so misused as to be relatively useless for social scientists [Campbell, 1979]), we shall add, as do the IV World peoples themselves, the features: indigenous peoples who still bear a special, often spiritual, relationship to their traditional lands, from which they have not been (far) removed; an emically perceived “ethnic” difference between the minority group and the major-

rity of the nation; and, a special socio-economic relationship to the modern nation in which they are a part (cf. Müller-Wille and Pelto, 1980: 7).

NOTES

1. This paper was inspired partly by an essay on the meanings of the term Third World (Campbell, 1979) and by widespread reactions (e.g. Anderson, 1979) to my own usage of the term Fourth World (1976). The original and substantially similar version of this paper was delivered at the annual meetings of the Canadian Ethnology Society in Montreal on May 28th 1980. The only other significant consideration of the term of Fourth World was published in mid-1980 by Müller-Wille and Pelto. Although the official date of the journal in which their article appears is 1979, the issue consists mainly of papers given at the same meetings of the Canadian Ethnology Society on May 29th 1980. The use of the term Northern Fourth World for the published version of these papers stems directly from the original version of this paper which they cite and of which they were given a copy, which was delivered in the presence of one of the editors. Indeed in their introduction to the issue Northern Fourth World (Müller-Wille and Pelto, 1980) they cite this paper and state correctly that at the time of the Montreal meetings their symposium was entitled "Politics of Indigenous Groups" (*ibid.*: 8).

2. Müller-Wille and Pelto (1980: 5) cite Waller (1976) in stating that "there are indications that the term Fourth World appeared for the first time as such in the journal *Resurgence*"... Its subtitle, *The Journal of the Fourth World*, refers to... "small nations, small communities, decentralization and ethnic cultures." However they do not cite the date of this original usage nor have I had the opportunity to check the early editions of this journal.

3. It is possible that the Dene picked up the usage of the term, the Fourth World, from the prior Arctic Peoples' Conference (1973) to which they were a party.

REFERENCES

- ANDERSON, Richard L.
1979 *Art in Primitive Societies*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.
- ARCTIC PEOPLES' CONFERENCE
1973 First Circumpolar Meeting, 22-25 November 1973, Christianborg, Copenhagen.
- BERREMAN, Gerald D.
1972 *Race, Caste and other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification*, *Race* 13: 385-414.
- CAMPBELL, Robert
1979 Concepts of the "Three Worlds": Some Observations on a Modern Folk Taxonomy, Manuscript, Berkeley.
- DELORIA, Vine
1974 Forward, In *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, G. Manuel and M. Poslums (eds.), New York, Free Press.
- DENE Declaration
1976 [?] Statement of Rights, Canada.
- DUNDES, Alan
1968 The Number Three in American Culture, In *Every Man His Way*, A. Dundes (ed.), Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall: 401-24.
1980 Personal communication, Berkeley.
- DURKHEIM, Emile and Marcel MAUSS
1903 *Primitive Classification*, Needham (transl. and ed.), Chicago, Phoenix.
- GRABURN, Nelson H.H.
1967 *Economic Acculturation and Caste Formation*, Paper given at the Southwest Anthropological Association Meetings, San Francisco.
1970 *Art and Pluralism in the Americas*, *Anuario Indigenista* 30: 191-204.
1975 Inuit Pivalliajut: The Cultural and Identity Consequences of the Commercialization of Canadian Inuit Art. In *Consequences of Economic Change in Circumpolar Regions*, L. Müller-Wille et al. (eds.), Edmonton, Boreal Institute. Occasional Paper No. 14, 1979: 185-200.
- GRABURN, Nelson H.H. ed.
1976 *Ethnic and Tourist Art: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- HAMALIAN, Leo and Frederick R. KARL eds.
1976 *The Fourth World: the Imprisoned, the Poor, the Sick, the Elderly and Underaged in America*, New York, Dell.
- KEHOE, Alice B.
1980 *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall.
- LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude
1967 *Do Dual Organizations Exist?* In *Structural Anthropology*, C. Lévi-Strauss, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday: 128-60.
- MANUEL, George and Michael POSLUMS
1974 *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, New York, Free Press.
- MULLER-WILLE, Ludger
1980 *The Sami Parliament in Relation to Nordic Sami Organization and the National Government*, Montreal, Paper presented at the Canadian Ethnology Society Meetings.
- MULLER-WILLE, Ludger and Pertti J. PELTO eds.
1979 *Stratégies politiques du Quart Monde nordique: Inuit, Cris, Sami/Political Expressions in the Northern Fourth World*, Introduction, In *Quart Monde nordique/Northern Fourth World*, *Études Inuit Studies* 3 (2).
NEWSWEEK
1979 A Test of Wills [The Third World at Havana], *Newsweek*. September 17. pp. 49-51.
- QUART MONDE NORDIQUE/NORTHERN FOURTH WORLD
1979 *Études Inuit Studies*, Special issue, 3 (2).
- ROSSI, Mario
1963 *The Third World: The Unaligned Countries and the World Revolution*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls.
- SALADIN D'ANGLURE, Bernard
1979 *Le Quart Monde nordique de Mercator (1595)*, In *Quart Monde nordique/Northern Fourth World*: 119-120.
- STROMBERG, Gobi
1977 Personal communications, Berkeley.
- WALLER, R.
1976 *Birth of an Era*. *Fourth World Colloquium, Resurgence* 7, 3: 24-26.
- WHITAKER, Ben ed.
1972 *The Fourth World: Eight Reports from the Fieldwork of the Minority Rights Group*, London, Sedgwick and Jackson.
- WORSLEY, Peter
1963 *The Third World*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.