

# The Concept of Third World

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THERE ARE TWO FUTURES, THE FUTURE OF DESIRE AND THE FUTURE OF FATE, AND MAN'S REASON HAS NEVER LEARNED TO SEPARATE THEM.

—DESMOND BERNAL

## Introduction

The idea of Third World comes from the Cold War era when it was essentially used as a terminology for nations that remained non-aligned with either the Western powers or the Communist Bloc led by the USSR. As former colonies of imperial forces, these nations were faced with the issues of institutional instability and resource scarcity. To avoid intervention in domestic affairs and seek subvention from both power blocs at the same time, third world nations took the course of political non-alignment. With dissolution of the USSR and the rising global dominance of the United States, the concept of Third World is believed to have lost relevance in the political perspective. Thereafter, it has been associated quite commonly with the impoverished and emerging economies of the world.

## Objectives of the Paper

This paper looks into the challenges that Third World nations encounter due to the decisive influence of advanced economies in the international sphere. It further seeks to analyze the economic and political progress made by these nations in the changing geo-political scenario. The questions addressed in this paper are as follows:

- (i) Has the international political structure enriched the “core” of wealthy nations at the expense of the “periphery” of third world states?
- (ii) How does Globalization impair the policies of the Third World thereby posing a threat to their national interests?
- (iii) With developing nations emerging as major international economies, is it apposite to categorize nations into three worlds?

## Method

This paper makes use of secondary research gathered from Political Science books and scholarly articles

<sup>1</sup> W. W. ROSTOW, *THE STAGES OF ECONOMIC GROWTH: A NON-COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*, (Cambridge University Press, 3d ed. 1990) (1960).

<sup>2</sup> B. R. Tomlinson, *What was the Third World?* 38 *JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY* 307, 310-11 (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Mitchell, *Explaining Third World Democracies*, 28 *PS: POLITICAL SCIENCE AND POLITICS* 83 (1995).

published in various journals. Qualitative data has been extensively relied upon for the findings of this paper.

## Chapterization

- (i) Has the international political structure enriched the “core” of wealthy nations at the expense of the “periphery” of third world states?

As former European colonies of Asia and Africa attained freedom, they were deprived of resources regarded essential for their socio-economic progress and rise in global position. Development economists of the West were of the view that problems of the Third World could be resolved through advancement in technology and use of modern means of production and communication.<sup>1</sup> Dependency theorists were critical of this approach, seeing it as a political strategy of the West to impose Capitalism on the Third World.<sup>2</sup>

The Modernization theory regards financial capital and technology as the primary base of development in an economy. The dependency model contests this fact showing as to how the modernisation school does not take into account, such social structures and features that place the periphery in a position subtly distinct from the core. Circumstances of the Third World have been essentially different from the West in the context of political history. To therefore propose a universal master-plan of progress limits the possibility of them, exploring into ideas that could cover special issues of domestic interest.<sup>3</sup> Conventional economists rely their faith on capital inflow into third world nations from Multinational Corporations. They however turn a blind eye to the paucity of skilled human resource that results in under-utilisation of capital resource. Social ills and unfavourable legal environments are other factors that development economists disregard in their proposals for remedy. Therefore, the Third World Movement aims at either taking an autonomous-domestic road to capital investment or adopting democratic versions of socialism to attain self-sustenance.<sup>4</sup> For that reason, export control & import substitution, small & medium enterprise, and skill development were the key areas of focus for dependency proponents as they sought to avoid foreign intervention in matters of domestic interest. The international order as established in the Three World Model brings with it a hierarchical structure resulting in ‘the reproduction of cores and peripheries.’<sup>5</sup> As a strategy of international dominance and capital growth, Trade Protocols and Treaties of the West are so designed as to leave the peripheral nations

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Angotti, *The Political Implications of Dependency Theory*, 8 *LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, DEPENDENCY AND MARXISM* 124 (1981).

<sup>5</sup> David L. Blaney, *Reconceptualizing Autonomy: The Difference Dependency Theory Makes*, 3 *REVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY* 459 (1996).

with no power of bargain.<sup>6</sup> This prevailing dominance of the core thereby establishes a relation of dependence whereby the periphery is under the obligation to “conform to a type of international and internal structure which leads them to under-development or more precisely to a dependent structure that deepens and aggravates the fundamental problems of their peoples.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of investing in potential sectors that could ensure self-sustenance, the West seeks to use Third World as a market for its produce. With continued subjugation and dependence, Third World nations are left with no recourse but to develop an economic structure that favours the core at the expense of the periphery. In the year 1991, fall of the Soviet Union further made way for absolute Western hegemony and consequent imposition of western economic ideas upon the Third World. Post the Cold War, US and its allies exercise decisive influence over financial institutions of global order, be it the IMF, the World Bank or the World Trade Organisation. Trust of the United States and its allies is henceforth regarded the primary condition for financial assistance from these institutions. Western dominance is further enhanced by its seductive charm that indirectly guides the business ethics and lifestyle of the third world.<sup>8</sup> When citizens of the periphery are introduced to western patterns of consumption, there is an increased demand for these goods and services. This places a heavy burden on the Balance of Payments Account of these Third World Nations (Demonstration Effect). Western Imperialism in the current geo-political scenario is not limited to ideological imposition or economic exploitation. It goes far beyond to cover the realms of territorial transgression and other forms of external aggression.<sup>9</sup> A number of essential International covenants such as the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and certain protocols of the Geneva Convention have not been ratified by the United States. With its unprecedented war might covering over 70 countries and 800 military bases,<sup>10</sup> US has infringed political sovereignty in Afghanistan, Iraq and other nation states of the Middle East. As evident from the post war era, US invasion of Iraq could only further the cause of political Islam dividing the existing societies already prone to internal conflicts.<sup>11</sup> Critics are also of the view that US intervention in the Middle East is no humanitarianism but a well-planned strategy of resource exploitation, oil being its primary concern. In the current geo-political establishment, American imperialism stands uncontested and incontrovertible. With its tremendous economic, political and cultural dominance, the Western core exercises a decisive influence over the

periphery of third world nations leaving them in no position to negotiate or bargain for their interests. The welfare-centric policies of the Third World have been ripped apart by structures of International Order that are essentially governed by the First World. Neo-classical economic ideas do not seem to favour the strategy of development in the periphery but instead assist the core nations to preserve the *status quo*.<sup>12</sup>

**(ii) How does Globalisation impair the policies of the Third World thereby posing a threat to their national interests?**

“Globalisation can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanced relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space.”

—Anthony Giddens<sup>13</sup>

In its generic sense, globalisation implies the integration of political, cultural, and economic structures in order to enhance and diversify the existing social institutions. Contrary to popular beliefs of international solidarity associated with the phenomena of globalisation, what has in fact come along with this shift in global paradigm, is the fragmentation of civil society, the alienation of the marginalised communities, and cultural invasion that further makes way for Western hegemony.

As 15th century Europe witnessed the dawn of capital, instances of globalisation could be well associated with imperialism. Capitalism as the ideal economic model for development was expanded over territories. This era was further characterised by the conquest and exploitation of Asian, African, and Latin American countries for the appropriation of resources regarded essential for the survival of capital.<sup>14</sup> Thus from its very outset, Globalisation sought to enrich the core via flow of resources from the periphery. With transformations in world order and emergence of independent nation states, the core continues to command authority over the Third World through its well planned strategies of neocolonialism. The term ‘neocolonialism’ was coined by former Ghanaian President, Kwame Nkrumah, to reflect upon the imposition of capital and globalisation for indirect political control over the periphery and

<sup>6</sup> RAHUL RAO, *THIRD WORLD PROTEST: BETWEEN HOME AND THE WORLD* 47, (Oxford University Press, 1st ed. 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Theotónio Dos Santos, *The Structure of Dependence*, 60 *THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC REVIEW* 231 (1970).

<sup>8</sup> Aswini K Ray, *Reinventing the Third World*, 47 *ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY*, 36 (2012).

<sup>9</sup> RAO, *supra* note 6, at 40.

<sup>10</sup> David Vine, *Where in the World Is the U.S. Military?* *POLITICO MAGAZINE* (July/August 2015), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/06/us-military-bases-around-the-world-119321>

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Taras, *The (Il)Logic of Intervention in Iraq: Sectarianism, Civil War, and the U.S. Game Plan*, 23 *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ON WORLD PEACE*, 33, 36 (2006).

<sup>12</sup> Neva Seidman Makgetla & Robert B. Seidman, *The Applicability of Law and Economics to Policymaking in the Third World*, 23 *JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC ISSUES* 35 (1989).

<sup>13</sup> ANTHONY GIDDENS, *THE CONSEQUENCES OF MODERNITY* 64, (1st ed., Polity Press 1990).

<sup>14</sup> James Petras & Chronis Polychroniou, *Critical Reflections on Globalisation*, 32 *ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY* 2249 (1997).

semi-periphery.<sup>15</sup> Globalisation when seen from the narrow standpoint certainly brings a significant acceleration in the GDP of developing countries, followed by rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. However, accumulation of tremendous debt, fall in fiscal revenue and increasing income inequalities are the adverse effects of globalisation that certainly outweigh its economic benefits.<sup>16</sup> It may be true that large cities by far benefit from globalisation, but the fact that this comes with a widening regional disparity is often disregarded by conventional economists.<sup>17</sup> Globalisation brings a structural change in the trade markets of third world peripheral and semi-peripheral countries opening them to the international economy. A general perception that arises out of such a change is that economies across the border promise blue-chip investment and monumental opportunities in trade. This opens the business environment to the inflow of Western capitalistic economic ideas, makes way for the convergence of macroeconomic trade policies, and favours the implementation of such measures that further the cause of privatisation, devolution, and decentralisation.<sup>18</sup> The imposition of such ideas limit the scope of domestic governance and constrain the rational designs of public enterprise.<sup>19</sup> The appalling consequence of globalisation on the disadvantaged sections of the society has turned out to be an issue of rising concern and debate for administrators and policy makers.<sup>20</sup> In the 1980s and 1990s, policies such as those of 'unfair and unequal terms of trade; cutbacks in social spending; reduction and finally elimination of all subsidies; cancellation of protective labour legislation; removal of legal restrictions on foreign ownership of land, water, and all other resources' were implemented in third world economies to institutionally reform them so that they could cater to the concerns of Multinational corporations.<sup>21</sup> Marginalised farmers dependent on primitive forms of agriculture, rural poor engaged in primary production, and industrial workers have immensely suffered as a result of such unjust policies. Policies to the contrary, such as those of trade barriers and regulations seeking to protect small producers are vehemently opposed by the Corporate World using the institutions of International economic order.<sup>22</sup> With threats of economic sanctions, Third World nations are under the compulsion to comply with international standards of trade regulation. Such regulations entail absolute deprivation and denial of social security and welfare to the vulnerable sections of the society.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> KWAME NKRUMAH, *NEO-COLONIALISM: THE LAST STAGE OF IMPERIALISM* (Panaf, 1974) (1965).

<sup>16</sup> Partha Gangopadhyay and Shyam Nath, *Globalisation, Sub-national Governments and Urban Crises in the Developing World* in *GLOBALISATION AND THE THIRD WORLD: A STUDY OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES* 68, (B.N. Ghosh & Halil M. Guven, 1st ed. Palgrave Macmillan 2006).

<sup>17</sup> H.W. RICHARDSON, *THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT*, (Springer - Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 1st ed., 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Gangopadhyay and Nath, *supra* note 16, at 70.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*, at 71-72.

<sup>20</sup> D.N. Dhanagre, *Globalisation, Towards an Alternative View*, 52 *SOCIOLOGICAL BULLETIN* 4, 11-12 (2003).

Scholars and socialist economists have therefore been severely critical of globalisation as a factor that significantly contributes to the rising income inequality in the periphery. Apart from its socio-economic repercussions, Globalisation has proven to adversely affect cultural identities in the Third World. As global and local cultures collide, problems in reconciliation of the two develop bicultural identities, identity confusion, and self-selected cultures.<sup>24</sup> In Berry's opinion, Globalisation creates a crisis of marginalisation wherein, an individual in his quest for a western lifestyle, fails to identify himself with the local culture. Such an individual further fails to associate with the Global culture due to disparities in income and quality of service.<sup>25</sup> Conservatives are of the view that adolescents are distinctly vulnerable and receptive to the fancy ideals and cultures of the West. Such cultures are therefore held responsible for the rise in issues like premarital sex and teenage pregnancies in the periphery.<sup>26</sup> The dynamics of globalisation henceforth uphold the contention, that in search of economic efficiency, atrocious social consequences are utterly disregarded. The First World reserves the exclusive right to unilaterally establish its consummate world order leaving no scope of negotiation for the weaker nations to engage in. The core nations along with their mighty multinational corporations are therefore in the ideal position to write the destiny of the Third World.

**(iii) With developing nations emerging as major international economies, is it apposite to categorise nations into three worlds?**

The theory of Third World is usually traced back to the late 1940s when newly emerging nation states in the international polity were reluctant to align themselves with either of the two power blocs. The rise of Third Worldism was strongly associated with struggles of liberation and regionalism in the erstwhile colonies of Asia and Africa.<sup>27</sup> With the establishment of a New International Economic Order in the 1970s and the decline of Communist Bloc in 1991, the credibility of Third World as a movement has been contested by international organisations, political scholars and activists.<sup>28</sup> Third World as a movement was instituted on the ideals of Political non-alignment and protectionism. However, traditional centres of relationship are often inconsistent as nations in their political interest fall under the compulsion of

<sup>21</sup> Subhashini Ali, *Neocolonialism at Ground Zero: Globalization and Poor Women in India*, 11 *NEW LABOR FORUM* 29, 29-30 (2002).

<sup>22</sup> Dhanagre, *supra* note 20, at 12.

<sup>23</sup> A Bagchi, *Globalisation, Liberalisation and Vulnerability: India and Third World*, 34 *ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY* 3219 (1999).

<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *The Psychology of Globalisation*, 57 *AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION* 774 (2002).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> Arnett, *supra* note 24.

<sup>27</sup> Mark T. Berger, *After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism*, 25 *THIRD WORLD QUARTERLY* 9 (2004).

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

dependence from either of the two power blocs.<sup>29</sup> Since the mid-1960s, credentials of India as one of the leading Third World nations, was on a relative decline. Owing to Pakistan's strategic armed alignment with the US and its influential role in SEATO, India's security concern were triggered and it therefore sought continued military assistance from the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> In furtherance to this, economic policies of India also took the shape of Soviet Socialism with Nehru's commitment towards state oriented models of development. This colossal shift in diplomatic trajectory was described by Gopal Krishna as a 'retreat from idealism'.<sup>31</sup> The period of 1970s further witnessed the disintegration of Third World with struggles between the 'red-brotherhood' of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and China as it marked the explicit defeat of socialist internationalism.<sup>32</sup> International peace and security were the foundational principles of Third World Movement. Leaders of the non-aligned bloc were stringent advocates of nuclear disarmament and non-intervention.<sup>33</sup> These principles were however disregarded as one could see these Asian and African nations in an arms race, with countries like India and Pakistan developing a strong nuclear arsenal. Conflicts within the Third World manifest as to how, keeping oneself free from entanglements in the political ambitions of hegemonic powers is an idea far beyond the reality. In the early 1990s, Fall of the Soviet Union attended well to the Western cause of Economic and Political Globalisation. The Post-Cold war era scrambled down such political and spatial distinctions that had earlier broke the World into three fractions.<sup>34</sup> With grounded territorial, political and economic distinctions, the Third World as a movement of collective identity stood in a grey area of dubious authenticity.<sup>35</sup> The formations that emerged out of Soviet breakdown essentially featured a rising Third World subordination to the US followed by an intensified dependence on transnational capital.<sup>36</sup> The era of Globalisation has witnessed a shift in the axis of international economy from the West to the Eastern Pacific Rim in nations like South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>37</sup> The US ideas of modernisation succeeded in drawing the attention of liberal democracies in Asia as they sought to reform the economy on western lines. With global capitalism, came the consciousness that development in isolation is a utopia. Nations realised the need to conform to

established patterns of world developments, by employing the means of co-operation and coordination.<sup>38</sup> Besides international trade, the Third World was now actively occupied in transactions of foreign investment, technology transfer, international outsourcing and flow of natural resource. With such a shift in global paradigm, international economies share the common economic attributes of free trade and capital investment.<sup>39</sup>

In favour of a multi-polar world order, nations of the Third World uphold the principles of International Law and advocate the reinforcement of multilateralism.<sup>40</sup> Non-aligned nations have been pressing for the democratisation of the United Nations Organisation so as to ensure fair and equitable representation against the established unipolar oligarchy.<sup>41</sup> The advancement and implementation of positive sciences, international means of communication and transnational cooperation are features of the Contemporary World Order that incapacitate the existing powers of subjugation and suppression.<sup>42</sup>

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## Conclusion

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The established institutions of World Order confer a formal equal status to all nations, promising them sovereign integrity and autonomy. These structures however feature such underlying mechanisms that largely differentiate based on power capabilities. It is the fundamental opposition to these pre-existing structures, that unites the Third World assigning them a collective identity. Since time immemorial, underdeveloped nations have been subject to exploitation and oppression at the hands of imperialistic forces. These powers have been in the ideal position to drain the resources of the Third World through a multiplicity of channels. Third World as a movement was instituted on the principles of liberation and self-sufficiency. Being faced with issues of personal interest, the integrity of the third world has been stirred at times. However, it stands firm with essential institutional reform and reinvigoration. Nations of the Third World have emerged as decisive role players exerting significant influence in the international order economically and politically taking the movement ahead with exceptional impact.

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<sup>29</sup> Ran Kochan, *Changing Emphasis in the Non-Aligned Movement*, 28 THE WORLD TODAY 501 (1972).

<sup>30</sup> Berger, *supra* note 27.

<sup>31</sup> G Krishna, *India and the international order: retreat from idealism in THE EXPANSION OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY* 269-71 (H Bull & A Watson, Oxford University Press 1984).

<sup>32</sup> G EVANS & K ROWLEY, *RED BROTHERHOOD AT WAR: VIETNAM, CAMBODIA AND LAOS SINCE 1975*, (London: Verso, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Chris Smith, *Disarmament, Peace Movements and the Third World*, 6 THIRD WORLD QUARTERLY 892 (1984).

<sup>34</sup> A Payne, *The global politics of development: towards a new research agenda*, 1 PROGRESS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, (2001).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> Mark T. Berger, *The End of the 'Third World'?*, 15 THIRD WORLD QUARTERLY 257 (1994).

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *supra* note 31.

<sup>38</sup> Bidya Nand, *United Nations and the Developing Economy of the Third World*, 39 THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 79, 80-81 (1978).

<sup>39</sup> Karl P. Magyar, *Classifying the International Political Economy: A Third World Proto -Theory*, 16 THIRD WORLD QUARTERLY 703 (1995).

<sup>40</sup> Surander Singh, *NAM in the Contemporary World Order: An Analysis*, 70 THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE 1213, 1215 (2009).

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*, at 1217.

<sup>42</sup> Mohammed Aziz Naim, *The role of Non-Aligned countries in the Present World Situation*, 3 INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE QUARTERLY 32 (1976).