RETHINKING THE THIRD WORLD: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE THIRD WORLD

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─Abstract ─

What do we mean with the term, the 'Third World'? What has really changed in the Third World since the end of the Cold War and what are the major explanations of change? Have these changes also led to a change in the definition of the Third World in terms of either its boundaries or its major characteristics? Is the scope of the term limited with the experiences and conditions of the states? How have International Relation theories perceived the Third World? In an effort to outline answers and explanations with respect to these above-mentioned questions, this paper aims to analyze the relevance of the term, the 'Third World' in the aftermath of the Cold War. Analysis of the term in the post-Cold War Context is divided into three sections. Questioning the validity of talking about a single Third World, the first section addresses major areas of change in the Third World. In the second section, existence and expansion of Third World conditions within the territories of industrialized countries is examined. Finally, the last section focuses on how International Relations theories have perceived the Third World and an alternative approach to understand the relevance of underdeveloped/developing states within international politics.

Key Words: *The Third World, Conceptualizing the Third World, International Relations Theory and the Third World.*

JEL Classification: Z00

1. INTRODUCTION

The term, 'Third World' ('Tiers Monde') was for the first time used by the French economist, Alfred Sauvy in an article, in the French magazine, L'Observateur in 1952 to refer to the masses before the French revolution (Holm,1990:2). The term represented signs of political weakness, economic poverty and social

marginalization, as parallels among the pre-revolution masses and the poor states in the world system, in terms of their exploitation by others, were highlighted (Tabah,1991:357). Just like masses were exploited by the priests and the nobles prior to the French revolution; weak, poor states were exploited by the rich, powerful states. By the late 1950s, the term was used to refer to a growing number of non-aligned nation-states, which were reluctant to take sides in the Cold War (Berger,1994:259). Through non-alignment movement, these states tried to maintain a distance from both 'First World' capitalist states and 'Second World' socialist states, in an attempt to emphasize that they belonged neither of them.

Relevance of the term has been questioned within academic circles since the 1990s, due to both changes in the world political order with the demise of the Cold War and the increasing differentiation among Third World countries. Some scholars have argued that with the Cold War coming to an end, the concept lost its relevance as a useful category. The term, 'Second World' was set aside in the post-Cold War and it is no more relevant in today's international politics. What about the Third World, is this term still applicable as a category in referring to a certain set of states? Post-Cold War literature has proposed several alternative terms to describe this group of states. However, despite the creation of alternative terms, the notion of a 'Third World' has remained to be a central element of social science discourses (Thomas,1999:226).

2. THE THIRD WORLD IN THE POST-COLD WAR CONTEXT

This section aims to address major areas of change in the Third World and International Relations theories' approaches to the Third World in the post-Cold War.

2.1. Major Areas of Change in the Third World

According to some scholars such as Caroline Thomas (1999:225) the continued use of the term, the 'Third World' is worth defending. They pointed out that the term still has relevance despite the ending of the Cold War and the demise of the term, the 'Second World'. Yet, other group of scholars such as Fawcett and Sayigh (1999:7) suggested that it is not a useful term anymore because of major areas of change across the Third World with political, economic and security dimensions. With respect to political dimension, political liberalization has had its mark on a remarkable number of Third World states. However, it would not be appropriate to talk about the domino theory effect, as there have also been some remarkable exclusions from the waves of democratization. Fawcett (1999:236)

highlights limits of the democratic transition in those states as "multi-party elections can not guarantee democratic consolidation, particularly where states and civil societies are chronically weak and local and international conditions are only intermittently favorable."

When it comes to economic dimension, like political liberalization, economic liberalization have taken place in many Third World countries since the end of the Cold War. However, slow economic growth, low living standards, low economic diversification and lack of economic competitiveness have continued despite increasing number of available options to cope with these problems, offered by international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. Nevertheless, a number of developing countries such as the Asian Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) overcame their economic problems getting closed to the group of industrialized 'First World' countries (Randall,1992:729).

What about security? Has the end of the Cold War resulted in a more liberal set of security arrangements? The most obvious change was the ending of superpower-client relationships that characterized the Cold War era. In practice, however, many Third World countries have continued to depend on great powers for arms and protection. Great powers have continued to provide these states arms and protection because disorder in the Third World has threatened economic and security interests of the advanced industrialized countries. Hence, security in the Third World has been perceived as "inseparable" from security in the First World (Fawcett, 1999:243). The increasing gap between the developed countries of the North and the underdeveloped states of the South has also led to higher degree of interference in Third World affairs by the superpowers (Hurrell,1999:250-251 and Blight and Weiss,1992:229). According to Mohammad Ayoob (1995) internal vulnerabilities of the Third World states have triggered external involvement of the regional powers which in return has contributed to regional conflicts.

2.2. The Human Aspect: A Third World within the First World?

Third World status has effectively been globalized in the post-Cold War context, not only in terms of the experiences and conditions of the states but also in terms of the living standards of people living in industrialized nations. It is widely argued that "increasingly there is a Third World within First World states" (Thomas,1999:229). In defining the Third World, it is emphasized that there are two aspects of the Third World including the state aspect and the human aspect. In defining the Third World from the state aspect, the concern is with those growing number of states which lack any meaningful influence in global governance institutions and are vulnerable in the face of a functioning global

market. On the other hand, in defining the Third World from the human aspect, the concern is with those "human beings for whom poverty is the norm, for whom vulnerability and risk are defining features of their daily existence, wherever they are located territorially" (Thomas,1999:229). For instance Berger (1994:267) indicates that 'internal colonialism' had marked the history of the United States and Australia leading native Americans and Australian aborigines to live in conditions "which mirror the conditions in which the rural and urban poor of Third World countries live".

In the meantime, expansion of Third World conditions within the borders of the industrialized states is ironically paralleled with Third World ruling elites' high standard of living similar to that of industrialized countries while majority of the people continue to live in Third World conditions. In consequence, as Berger (1994:268) rightfully suggests, "the governments and elites of Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Oceania have been incorporated into the global political-economic order on favorable terms at the same time as they enthusiastically claim to speak for the rural and urban poor of the Third World." This ironic situation clearly demonstrates the increasing integration of ruling elites of the Third World and the First World on the one hand and socio-economically vulnerable people of the First World with the Third World. According to Berger (1994:268), it points to the 'internationalization' of class structure, undermining meaning of the term.

Regarding 'internationalization' of class structure, Robert Cox (1999:3-28) puts forward a three-fold hierarchical categorization (integrated, precarious, and excluded) of people in terms of international production, which cuts across territorial boundaries. The first category (integrated) includes highly skilled people integrated into the management process, who "take decisions about what is produced and where and by whom." (Cox,1999:9). Constituting world's super-rich, these people are at the top of the hierarchical structure and they are able to take advantage of the opportunities which global economic integration presents. The second category (precarious) includes precarious workers, "whose numbers vary with levels of demand for products" and "their lesser levels of skill make them more easily disposable and replaceable" (Cox,1999:9). Against the background of low working conditions, these people can not be easily organized in a united way to confront managers of the first category as they are segmented by ethnicity, religion, gender, and geography (Cox,1999:9). The last category (excluded) includes the rest, the rapidly growing number of people in the First and Third World states, who are excluded from international production. These people are "the unemployed and many small low-technology enterprises in the

richer countries and a large part of the marginalized population in poor countries" (Cox,1999:9). From Cox's point of view, if world politics will not go through a fundamental change then both the polarization between rich people and poor people, and disappointment of people with existing forms of politics will increase (Cox,1999:3).

2.3. International Relations Theories and the Third World

With the exception of a few contributions, the Third World has remained irrelevant to the literature of International Relations theory. Particularly, rationalist mainstream International Relations theories such as neo-realism and neo-liberalism remain indifferent to the problems of the Third World states. A number of scholars have criticized core assumptions of these theories and their domination of the discipline. For instance, pointing out statistics about violence taking place in Third World states, as indicated in the UNDP Report for 2002, Steve Smith (2004:508-509) accused mainstream International Relations theories for viewing this type of violence as "simply marginal if not irrelevant". According to Smith (2004:510), exclusion of the most marked forms of violence in world politics by the dominant theories of the discipline with a remarkable focus on the policy concerns of great powers has contributed to a process that set out the stage for 9/11 terrorist attacks. He (2004:499) stated: "The discipline helped to sing into existence the world of September 11 by reflecting the interests of the dominant in what were presented as being neutral, and universal theories".

Barry Buzan also criticizes mainstream theories, particularly neo-realism's approach to the Third World. Buzan (1998:214) suggests that there are two major sources of attractiveness of neo-realism including oversimplification and homogenization of the disciple, and the central idea of bipolarity with respect to the Cold War. Due to these two sources of attractiveness, Buzan (1998:214) argues that neo-realism marginalizes, and subordinates weaker players in the international system at the expense of great powers. He (1998:214) blames neo-realism for not paying much attention to concerns of Third World states and "being essentially a theory of Great Power". Lastly, he (1998:217) maintains that neo-realism is wrong to take for granted that the international system is dominated by 'like-units' for he thinks understanding the Third World requires "giving more weight to the nature of these states".

Like Smith and Buzan, Louise Fawcett (1999:234-246) condemns mainstream theories of International Relations for neither taking the Third World seriously nor attempting to understand it. She (1999:244-245) mainly criticizes neo-liberalism of being strangely irrelevant to the concerns of many developing countries due to

its West-centric focus, and for this reason she maintains that "neo-liberalism can only partially help to explain the advance of the more successful developing countries". Other than mainstream theories, she (1999:245) directs her criticism at theories of dependence for viewing the Third World states as subservient and dependent. She (1999:245) maintains that deficiency of dependency theory stems from its ignorance of the capacity of many Third World states to change radically in past decades. In this regard, she (1999:245) argues that it remains insufficient to explain the states which now have close ties to the major economic processes in the international system such as Chile and East-Asian NICs.

In the light of above-mentioned critiques of discipline's popular theories, normative theory and Mohammed Ayoob's approach of 'subaltern realism' present promising alternatives to understand the Third World within the framework of international relations. To start with normative theory, Chris Brown (2000:2079) argues that "in the medium to long run, the most important task of International Relations theory is to produce a coherent understanding of the moral underpinnings of North-South relations". What Brown underlines is the need for developed states to act as responsible actors in the international system through not remaining silent against humanitarian crises taking place across the Third World. For instance, regime violence across the Arab world, in response to Arab Spring-related uprisings for political reform, has resulted in great numbers of refugees fleeing to both bordering and other countries (Ulack,2011). The deteriorating humanitarian crisis going on in the region with insufficient funds by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Western policymakers has not paid much attention to the issue (Ulack,2011). It is not beyond capacity of Western states to help reduce suffering of these people. Thus, normative theory loads developed states a more proactive role on humanitarian issues that challenge both Third World states and their people.

Mohammed Ayoob (2002:27-48) contributes to the discipline with an alternative approach to integrate the Third World into contemporary International Relations theory. He calls this new approach as 'subaltern realism' because it focuses on the experiences of subalterns, in other words the Third World states, in the international system. Ayoob (2002:40) criticizes mainstream theorists such as neo-realists and neo-liberals for concentrating merely on the industrialized states of the global North, and hence paying no attention to the states of the Third World. Ayoob (2000:28) argues that his approach has the capacity to fill important gaps in the International Relations theory which is dominated by neo-realism and neo-liberalism. With respect to neo-realists, Ayoob (2002:35) criticizes Waltz's and Mearsheimer's arguments about the superiority of

bipolarity over multipolarity for their weakness to address weaker states' security issues and dynamics of a number of conflicts in the international system. He (2002:35-36) accuses both scholars for ignoring the fact that "stability in Europe was achieved at the expense of stability and order in much of the rest of the world". In order not to challenge the status quo in Europe, superpowers chose sides in intrastate and interstate conflicts in the Third World (Ayoob,2002:35-36). With respect to neo-liberals, he (2002:36) says that neo-liberals' focus on "absolute gains as the major favorable outcome of cooperation within an anarchical system" is based on interdependence, neglecting economically and militarily dependent characteristic of most Third World states. Therefore, he (2002:36) says that the concept of absolute gains fails to understand the realities of the Third World countries.

Due to these shortcomings, Ayoob's 'subaltern realism' approach presents an alternative to mainstream theories of the disciple. It is built upon three traditions including classical realism, historical sociology, and the English school. Regarding the impact of the classical realism it is argued that despite the growing number of non-state actors and their increased capacity, the state continues to be the principal actor in the international system (Ayoob,2002:39). It is claimed that without the domestic political order that is provided by the state, there could not be development of any human value. Therefore, state repression is required for consolidating state authority in the process of state building. Otherwise, states would almost collapse as the examples of Somalia, Liberia, and Congo are pointed out (Ayoob,2002:39). In terms of the impact of the historical sociology literature, Ayoob (2002:43) draws parallels between the state formation process in Western Europe between 16th and 19th centuries and the state formation in the Third World in the 20th century. It is argued that the high level of conflict and violence in the Third World is due to the differences between state-making experiences of the Third World and the Europe (Ayoob,2002:44). First of all, there are limitations on state-making in the Third World that have been established by outside forces. Secondly, Third World states are expected to be able to end the process within decades although it took centuries to complete it in Western Europe. Lastly, Third World states face a dramatically changed international environment, both regional and global in comparison with that of Western Europe in its state-building stage (Ayoob,2002:42-44). Finally, with respect to the impact of the English School and Hedley Bull, Ayoob (2002:45) argues that international norms which have increasingly encourage international intervention into the affairs of Third World states, adversely effect state-making process in these countries. He (2002:45) claims that by intervening into state

building in many Third World states, great powers seek to advance their own global and regional political interests.

3. CONCLUSION

The characteristics that are used to describe the Third World today may be very different than those, when the term first came into use. However, what is clear is that usage of the term has not, to date, been abandoned. During the Cold War, the term represented solidarity and non-alignment among the states remaining outside of the First World and the Second World. With the ending of the Cold War, the term has become more than a description of state coalitions. The gap between the industrialized states and the rest of the world has suggested that a distinguishing characteristic of Third World countries was a shared 'underdevelopment'. Through time, use of the term has become problematic mainly due to increasing differences among the countries of the Third World. Nevertheless, the term has not disappeared. On the contrary, it has continued to be used frequently in divergent social sciences discourses. Today, defined in terms of states, the Third World has expanded to include the former socialist economies of the Second World; defined from the human aspect, it now includes growing numbers of marginalized people in the First World as well as the Third World states. The Third World has not been able to capture much attention by the discipline of International Relations compared with the large proportion the Third World states occupied in the international system. Mainstream theories of the disciple such as neo-realism and neo-liberalism have been subjected to a number of criticisms for their shortcomings in addressing the policy concerns of the Third World states. In this regard, normative theory and Ayoob's 'subaltern realism' offer theoretical alternatives to understand the Third World within the framework of international relations.

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