CHAPTER 8

The Large Second World and the Necessary Shifts in Research Approaches in Macrosocial Dynamics

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The historical situation after the breakdown of the Second World (countries with socialist or communist regimes) put forward the following fundamental questions: which concept can be more adequate for a description of the contemporary global world in place of the previous concept of “three worlds”? Does it make practical sense to divide the globe again into different “worlds,” as suggested by a number of different approaches (such as “the clash of civilisations,” “the West and the rest” and “Eurabia”)?

The article will argue that the “three worlds” scheme can still be put to use, with some modification. There are also strong arguments both for perspectives involving many worlds and perspectives involving one world. The author will critically analyze the main prejudices and common myths in post-socialist studies and put forward a new conceptual approach that includes social ontology, political sociology, political anthropology, socio-political dynamics, and social evolution.

The Socialist Second World Had Died. The New Large Second World Has Come

The collapse of the socialist camp (1989) and the USSR (1991) put an end to the old, coherent concept of “three worlds.” Subsequent attempts at structuring the world in three parts usually fit the modernization approach (by degree of closeness to “a modern society”), as well as or geographical and civilizational approaches (by location, major religious traditions, cultural identity).

The first approach is justified only within the so-called transitological, or developmental paradigm, which was most clearly espoused by F. Fukuyama in his idea of “the end of history.” Over the past twenty years there has been no amicable movement of societies towards “Modernity” (in the Western understanding of this term); the social dynamics was much more complicated and diverse. Therefore, the underlying idea of a unilinear evolution from a traditional stage to modernity seems to have been fully discredited.
The second approach is not much better. Geographical location and cultural identity, albeit providing some limitations and possibilities, are unsuitable predictors for the direction and the trajectory of historical developments. Comparison between South Korea versus North Korea, Kuwait versus Lebanon, Egypt versus Bolivia, Mexico and Argentina versus Colombia and Venezuela shows an evident inability of linguistic, religious, ethnic and cultural factors to explain their divergent dynamics.

Ideological division as a boundary between “the worlds” has gone away. Levels of modernization and cultural identity seem to be inadequate parameters. The alternative approach is based on a social phenomenology: rude facts concerning internal stability and consolidation, as well as their sustainable success and dominance in three external fields: geo-economics, geo-politics, and geo-culture.

From this perspective the more stable and successful First World (the Global Core) is still ahead of many others. Now, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Estonia have almost entered this prestigious club. Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria are the closest to approaching it. By contrast, Greece and Portugal, despite their EU-membership, may become long-term problem areas and risk falling out of the First World.

At the other extreme, there is the global periphery, i.e., the contemporary Third World (the Global Periphery)—a zone that embodies trouble, hopeless backwardness, stagnation at the lower levels of social development and welfare, areas of criminalization or endless and violent social and ethnic conflicts. It includes many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, and also Palestine, Lebanon, Somalia, Afghanistan, North Korea, Haiti, as well as some of the most backward South American countries (such as Bolivia) and the most isolated Arab countries (such as Libya).

All other countries may be called semi-periphery in the broadest sense. This is the new Large Second World (the Global Semi-Periphery): China and Venezuela, Russia and South Africa, Armenia and Turkey, Moldova and Algeria. Some countries are close to a breakthrough into the First World (Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Latvia, Lithuania, maybe Georgia) in case they achieve success with their reforms. Some other societies have been weakened by squabbles, and they are now at risk of falling into the Third World (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan).

In addition, other ways of structuring the sprawling Second World may be useful; for example, within the following categories: the size of the territory, the size of population, wealth, ethnic consolidation/conflict, more centralized/decentralized, obtaining more or less military power, orientation to this or that power center of the First World, etc.