

Review

International Relations in the Post-Industrial Era [Rephrasing the Third World]

Arthur A. Natella. Palmgrave Macmillan: New York, 2011. 213pp.

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Arthur Natella begins his book by stating that the concept of the “Third World” is out of date. The dominant attitude is that Third World people would to see things as they are seen by First World nations and do things their way if they are better educated. But the standard for measuring social values, according to Natella, is outdated, for various reasons. Among these is the fact that the United States is a debtor nation. Secondly, it is no longer a “manufacturing-based society” but one that is “service-based” or an “information-gathering nation, with its advanced technology often more geared t up for the collection of data than for the use of raw material in the manufacturing process” (9).

Natella is pointing out that the era in which we live is in transition since the values of the industrial revolution, based on the use and control of nature for the advancement of industrial power, are being replaced by post-industrial values. Even though industrialization is spreading to countries that have not been very much industrialized, First World values are being questioned as never before, especially as we are moving into a post-industrialized age. The belief that the industrial revolution can

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solve all human problems is showing weakness. As it is, two large “automakers in the US have gone into bankruptcy or are on the verge of bankruptcy” (12). Also, social changes are “part of a series of changing values that are developing before our eyes” (12). Natella makes a point of mentioning that in the West there is an increasing regard for the wisdom of non-industrialized and indigenous societies that characterize much of the so-called Third World. For example, the holistic notion of health that has been in place in Asian countries for over 1000 years has made a dent in Western thinking. This includes meditation, Reiki, acupuncture and pressure treatments, just to name a few.

Another issue Natella focuses on is the social effects of industrialization. With mass production and urbanization, there is growing loneliness and alienation. Another by-product of industrialization is the lessening of the importance of religion and spirituality in the urbanized world. Precedence is instead given to production and the acquisition of material goods. Now we are beginning to see a reaction to such values as there is a new interest in the techniques to achieve spiritual enlightenment, in a new appreciation for the wisdom of traditional cultures. And, we are seeing a growing curiosity in books, articles, and documents about indigenous groups.

The concept of First and Third World is blurry or arbitrary since what is happening all over the world defies such classification as we are moving from an industrial age to a post-industrial age. The labels industrialized vs. non-industrialized are rooted in the perception that the so-called First World countries believe they are at the forefront of human development while everyone else is lagging behind. Nations with the highest standard of living in terms of material wealth, education, healthcare, and longevity, and so on are considered superior. Natella argues that schools, colleges and universities, as well as millions of educated individuals make up the Third World just as is the case in the First World; these nations are developing countries with developing markets, so their progress should not be judged by our yardstick. These changing realities should, therefore, make us rethink and re-evaluate our assumptions of what define Third World.

Natella gets into the whole issue of the culture of industrialization and how it is contrasted with that of the Third World. He makes reference to our concept of punctuality, as well as our view of time (linear and chronological). The forward-looking frame of mind contrasts the Occidental and Oriental, particularly with reference to the American and old Chinese concepts. In the West emphasis is placed on youth,

information culture, materialism (in contrast to the sacred), mass production, bigness, speed, and urbanization as symbols of industrialization. However, “blind acceptance of modern industrialized social values of the Western and First World insinuates a rejection of traditional mores of large sections of the world that have had and continue to make great contributions to human civilization.” As we enter a new age that is questioning the wisdom of our social assumptions, the so-called developing countries are becoming more sophisticated in their interactions with First World nations, but will increasingly adopt and imitate others’ points of view on the experience of life itself. How the Third World people perceive life is not only worthwhile but it is extremely practical since they are quickly becoming an important part of the post-industrial world we live in.

Natella reflects on globalization, stating that it is full of paradoxes and is actually defined in terms of First World standards. He speculates as to whether some people might wish to avoid and escape from the complications and psychological ills of the modern urbanized industrial life, which is characterized by crime, pollution, and alienation. Would these people choose to live closer to nature and its rhythms by perhaps preferring ancestral wisdom to computerized data? Must they develop in the same way we have? Might we not wonder why we cannot wish to reconsider the values of traditional life and attempt to combine both the old and the new? Could we not start a social revolution based on human values instead of the byproducts of our inventions? Natella hammers on the notion that in terms of post-industrial education, steps should be taken to ensure that modern education should focus on how the world might be improved or changed for the better rather than continuing to follow “mechanized trends in education as well as mass production of educational mediocrity,” which are consistent with the philosophy of industrialization or dominance of First World values.

Natella speculates that in light new post-industrial educational approaches, a reevaluation of Third World stereotypes based on new information, and a growing sophistication about other parts of the globe will occur. It is human nature to project our own realities onto others whose lifestyle does not quite match ours, so we consider these people as deficient in education, intelligence, or sophistication. Natella also suggests that we need to take into consideration the fact that different countries have different local and foreign policies, as well as historical divisions. He also touches on the idea that nature is central to their way of life, and their relationship with nature is different from that of the West. Natella, in particular, highlights Native American respect for nature. Even in terms

of international business, we should be mindful that, in its broadest sense, business is a basic part of our lives, so in reality we are all business people. One of the major reasons for our ignorance of what is happening in the world is that reporting by our media is deficient. The world is changing, and will our view of it change as well?

Natella, in his book, which he calls a study, appealing to the West to reevaluate its notions of the Third World and accept the fact that changes in progress. There needs to be a revision in industrialized thinking since, as Erich Fromm, in his book *To Have or To Be* (1976), suggests the “dream” of industrialization appears to be coming to an end. No longer can industrialized countries be comfortable in their “assumed superiority to alternate and non-materialist views of living experience” (185).

This book is very informative and challenges First World (or Western or Industrial Revolution) views on the so-called Third World in an attempt to correct these notions, based on what the author perceives as a new era that we are now living in. The publisher of this book could, however, have been more thorough during the editing process. It seems there was a rush in publishing the book, without doing careful editorial work. In some places this text is repetitive, and there are several punctuation and other minor errors in sentence construction, and so on. Anyway, this book is a must read for those people who are interested changes in effect in the world, particularly as these pertain to international relations in the post-industrial era and the re-interpretation of the Third World.