1 Introduction: Redefining the Third World?
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During the Cold War years, no term appeared to achieve greater clarity and simplicity than that of the ‘Third World’: whether in the political writings of Fidel Castro, the poetry of Ame Cesaire, or the economic analysis of Mahub ul-Haq, the term came to represent an ideology of its own. More than merely a socioeconomic designation, it indicated (and constructed) a psychological condition, a state of mind encompassing the hopes and aspirations of three-quarters of humanity.

Outside the Third World, and intuitively perhaps, it created (and many people feel they still have) a clear idea of what constitutes the Third World. It is one of a whole series of pejorative terms, including ‘underdeveloped’, ‘developing state’, ‘emerging nation’ and so on, with implicit notions of inferiority or backwardness when compared with ‘developed’, ‘industrialised’ or ‘First World’, which suggest civilisation and superiority. Accordingly, people have an idea of the countries considered to be Third World; for example, India, Chad and Nicaragua; and those that are not, such as Japan, Italy or the United States of America.

Despite such – we would argue misplaced – intuition, many students and scholars have come to question this dichotomous understanding in which states fit into one category or the other and where very occasionally a state might justify reclassification. Questioning and rejection come from a variety of sources; empirically, there are a number of reasons why we need to re-examine and redefine the concept Castro once described as ‘an affirmation of Afro-Asian unity’. Fundamentally this book is an examination of some crucial questions which as a whole challenge the certainty of the ‘Third World’ as an organising concept for study and for policy orientation in world politics. These questions stem from a number of sources: rejection of the simplicity of the idea and of the categories (First and Third Worlds) themselves; caution, doubt and tentativeness
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regarding modernisation (the idea that states will or can develop along a path that moves from Third to First World); and a discomfort with the ethnocentrism inherent in this whole modernisation (development) discourse (the inferiority/superiority idea is hard to sustain when it is evident that traditional wisdom has been destroyed by so-called civilisation).

Accordingly, this book aims to capture the creative tension between the need to engage critically with the concept at the theoretical level and the reality of what it denotes for the 'majority world'. Predicated on the Cold War, the book offers a detailed analysis of the rise and contemporary significance of the 'Third World'. There are a variety of reasons why now may be seen as a useful time to re-examine the idea of the Third World as well as a number a objections to the very term which are implicit in its existence and usage, in International Relations especially. These practical problems and inherent criticisms are outlined below and will, it is hoped, lead to an awareness of the potentiality of multiple meanings.

In order to begin a reconsideration of the Third World it is a worthwhile foundation to look briefly at the evolution of the term. Here it is interesting to note that its origins in French, while still implying notions of superiority, mean that the 'third' of Third World is from the French for 'third' as a fraction, rather than 'third' as in position, place or order. Its translation into an inferior positional attribute is therefore significant and is tied in with the whole modernisation thesis.

Credit for the introduction of the term 'Third World' is usually given to the French demographer and economist Alfred Sauvy following an article in France Observateur. The term alludes to the French term of le Tiers État, the label identifying the large group of underprivileged in preindustrial society. The popularity the term has subsequently achieved is linked to the process of decolonisation as well as to the Cold War. In the early years of Development Studies, 'backward regions' were thought to be on the verge of a rapid process of development in the image of the modernising, capitalist countries in Europe and North America; or, alternatively, destined to remain as they were because the preconditions were simply too adverse. Whichever view was subscribed to, 'Third World' is connected with a certain common background of emerging states, namely that of colonialism, and with economic and political features that set Third World countries apart from the industrialised West.