

THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM  
AND THE FOUR WORLDS  
Some Notes On Political Culture

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The typical big United Nations Organization in the UN system today would have about 150 states as members. Using a division of the world into four worlds, the Northwestern "First world" (countries of corporate capitalism), the Northeastern "Second world" (countries of state socialism), the Southwestern "Third world" (countries of the New International Economic Order) and the Southeastern "Fourth world" (the countries of East and Southeast Asia and Oceania), it is clear that the overwhelming majority of the member states are in the Third world. More particularly, one may perhaps say that there are around 20 countries in the First world (not counting Japan, Australia and New Zealand that according to this classification would be in the Fourth world), about 15 countries in the Second world, the countries of "really existing socialism"; about 100 countries in the Third world and about 15 again in the Fourth world - but classifications are by no means absolute and unambiguous.

~ However, it is not so important that all countries are unambiguously classified; what matters in this connection is the effort to describe their political culture.

In doing so let us conceive of the UN system as a stage for the enactment of roles played by countries and groups of countries, in principle a world theatre with the world population as spectators. Like other theatres it is not the "real thing", it is at best a mirror of the real thing - the real thing obviously being the game countries in general and governments in particular play - some of them cooperative, many of them conflict games, some of them combative, even to the point of being lethal. On the stage offered them by the UN system, and we are thinking here particularly of the General Assemblies provided by the organizations members of the system, they are supposed to limit themselves to words, gestures, behaviour compatible with that of the stage offered to them. The parts they perform they usually write themselves, which does not mean that there is not a master writer of the drama: History itself. So, in order to understand the drama better let us try to understand the underlying script provided by History.

Needless to say, there are many interpretations but that also applies to less grandiose master writers, and also when the script is made highly available in print.

Actually, all one needs to know is the basics of the power play. Some time ago the Indonesian leader Soekarno made a distinction between the OEF and NEF countries; the Old Established Forces and the New Emerging Forces. Obviously he counted Indonesia and the non-aligned movement he spearheaded so brilliantly among the latter, and the colonial powers among the former. But his world model suffered from one major weakness: there were only two actors. As a mirror of the world this is unrealistic; as a play it is, in addition, boring.

However, we can make use of his vocabulary and his distinction between "old" and "new" on the one hand, and "established" and "emerging" on the other, for what might be a more adequate description of the world, in terms of the four worlds alluded to above:

Table 1. The UN dramatis personae

	<u>Established</u>	<u>Emerging</u>
<u>Old</u>	First world	Second world
<u>New</u>	Fourth world	Third world

First, there is the Old Established World, the First world, certainly no longer so sure of itself after decolonization and deeply shaken and marked as it is interlocked in a potentially devastating nuclear conflict with the Second world, a seemingly endless series of conflict of liberation from colonialism and neo-colonialism with countries in the Third world, and the economic challenges from the countries of the Fourth world. But it still looks old and established relative to the other three worlds, the challengers.

Thus, there is the Second world, the Old Emerging Force. It has been on the scene for a long time now, as a challenger, from 1917 to be precise, or from 1922 with the founding of the Soviet Union. Brought into being by the two world wars one might in a sense be surprised that it is not even stronger. How can it be that old, and yet only emerging? And that is precisely its major dilemma: it has been emerging for too long a time, the

others are starting getting used to it, the nuisance value is there but not as high as before. The Old Established Forces have learned some ways of coping with it. In fact, they even look pretty established, only pretending to keep on emerging all the time.

The second challenge is, of course, the Third world - here described (like the First world, using Soekarnos terminology) as a New Emerging Force. Emerging it certainly is, to the point of very high visibility (and audibility), and it is also new. It does not as yet have to come to grips with the phenomenon of age, with what happens to a person when he is no longer enfant terrible, but simply terrible. That stage may soon come, however.

Then, however, there is the third challenge: the Fourth world, here presented as highly successful, as nothing less than the New Established Force. New it certainly is, so new that most people have not yet discovered it but tend to put the rich countries in the Fourth world into the First world as Old Established Force and the poorer countries in the Fourth world into the Third world as New Emerging Force (this is the reason why the Third world does not appear with as many members in the paragraph above as one is customarily used - the present division is simply somewhat different). But it is that established? Not quite, but in the view of the present author considerably more than the emerging forces. There is not only the economic triumph of Japan to some extent reproduced by the economic triumph of the mini-Japans to point to, but also the ideological and political strength of China some years ago, and the coming political and military strength of that country.

True, they are not a unit, not even a voting block performing as one actor. But that also applies to a large extent to the Third world, cut through by so many cleavages that it is hard to accept it as an actor in the same sense as the First and the Second worlds can be considered. To take only one example: there is always the ambivalence of the Latin American countries, racially/ethnically (at least as far as the elites are concerned in most cases) belonging to the First world; in terms of world dominance patterns certainly not belonging to the First world. So, where do they belong - somewhere in between, oscillating between the two, leaving the Third world jobs to be done, and roles to be performed, essentially to the Afro-Arab-Asian

majorities. However, regardless of how that may be, let it only be noted that this division into four worlds is not the one generally accepted in the system itself where the division into three worlds only is the dominant one. But, as will be seen later there are certain advantages to the division into four worlds if one wants to understand the role-playing of the key actors.

How, then, would one expect them to behave on the stage set for them by the UN system, with the world as spectators, represented by the mass media? Given, of course, that the Third world alone in most or at least many cases will be able to mobilize not only a majority but a two thirds majority, numerically by far outdoing the other three?

I think it could generally be expected that the First world will play a double role. On the one hand, since its voting power in no way corresponds to its image of itself (or that held by others who still pay considerable homage to the Old Established Force) they will tend to denigrate the significance of the UN stage in general. There will be acts of arrogance, display of light, but also aristocratic, irritation: "What do you people think you are doing?" There will be efforts to behave as if one is above what happens, regarding the stage as a Kindergarten sandbox where the First world adults are stooping to the level of the children, playing with them because it seems to mean so much for them, but making it clear that any moment they can withdraw to adult quarters, leaving the children alone to their own infantile devices. At regular and irregular intervals they will issue declarations to the effect that among these infantile devices is something called "propaganda", and that "the UN is no longer what it was". They may certainly be objectively correct on both counts, but that is not the reason why they say it: they say it in order to reserve their dignity in a world they no longer control, not to mention a forum they no longer control.

Then there is the other approach: that of switching the game to other dimensions where they still are superior or at least think of themselves as being so. There are two obvious candidates: the dimensions of professional skill, and of the power of capital, of money - the so-called Golden Rule: he who has the gold is also in a position to rule. He will

insist in the purely technical aspects of the organization and try to shift from political to professional discourse. He will see the organization as one of technical assistance from the more to the less proficient, not as political pressure from the more to the less powerful in terms of voting power. And he will, of course, control the purse of the organizations in such a way that when he is no longer able to stop any initiative via voting mechanisms, nor by controlling it professionally/technically he can at least control it by seeing to it that no money will be made available. Of course, this only works insofar as he himself has money and others do not - both conditions may be gradually eroded.

Summarizing one may say that he is playing a double role of aloofness and pretense on the one hand, and hectic activity on the other to continue domination through whatever leverage might be exercised by means of technical superiority and capital endowments. There must be an ability to switch, and even switch quickly. Or there must be a division of labour with the ambassador or the chief delegate playing the aloofness role, and the lesser members of the delegation the other roles. It should be pointed out that this is entirely compatible with having ambassadors etc. to the UN system with no knowledge of anything at all except how to play the game of arrogance of an aristocracy gradually being phased out from its position by historical forces it can no longer control.

Let us then have a look at the Old Emerging Forces. I have mentioned their basic dilemma: they have been emerging for too long a time. They have certainly been the victims of the Old Established Forces, but that was some time ago and fresher victims among the New Emerging Forces can vocalize the antagonism much more effectively, with fresh data and the conviction power given to a person still directly and recently suffering. Then, the Old Emerging Forces are in the embarrassing situation that they produce their own victims; even if "non-represented <sup>nations</sup> not appear as countries members of the UN system they are able to make themselves heard and seen and known. Not only do they no longer have much underdog legitimacy; they also have some topdog illegitimacy associated with them, a point the People's Republic of China never failed to make, although that particular country hardly qualifies as a victim in the same way as the

countries under the sway of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

One can actually sense it already in the way the actors are dressed, the garments being rather important in any theatrical performance. First world actors are dressed in business suits, impeccably tailored, the British and the French leading the flock with North American attempts to catch up, all of them appearing as the members of the top echelons of modern aristocracy, technocracy, they are. And the Second world is essentially dressed the same way, as the members of the New Class they indeed are - only somewhat less successfully so, a little shabby here and there, and above all behind in style by a couple of years, sometimes even a decade or two, overdoing the black suit for instance where the correct colour would be more light overdoing the darkish tie where the correct one would be a trifle more extravagant, even loud colour. What else would one expect from an Old Emerging Force at this level of high diplomacy, still blissfully fighting the image of the Old Established Force they had of him some decades ago? Imitating - yet at a certain distance?

Then there is the Third world. Of course, they emphasize their distance to the Old Established Force by taking on their own garbs, dressing in the national costumes of their region or country rather than the national costumes of the technocratic class of the Atlantic region, the grey flannel suit. Very colourful and fascinating garments and headgear make the performances considerably more of a pleasure to the eye. What is very often lost on the spectator, however, is certainly not lost on the nationals of these countries: the costumes are national, indeed, but of the upper classes of those nations, or upper castes. Not only a border line between the NEF and the OEF is drawn; the border line between elites and people is also clearly demarcated through this particular theatrical effect.

What about the Fourth world, how do they dress? In my experience they dress inconspicuously. There is no national costume now that the Mao-suit is out. There is no decadent First world elegance. But there is no Second world shabbiness or old-fashioned dressing either: if not exactly sharp dressers one may at a glance, or <sup>with</sup> a little touch, establish the richness and quality of the material. "Inconspicuous, but self-assured" might be the

signal that is sent to the spectators around the world - a theme to be taken up immediately. The Japanese business man's dark suit, tie, stockings, shoes, white shirt - impeccable and impeccably, uniformly boring.

Given all of this how would one expect the rhetorical performance to be, including gestures and other aspects of non-verbal behaviour?

The First world would be expected to be doing its best to convey the impression that the real power is behind the scene. The bored look, the put-on, with an occasional light smile, when the Second and Third worlds are engaging in their rhetoric will have to be combined with short and relatively terse speeches, very constrained rhetorically in order not to undermine their attacks against <sup>empty</sup> rhetoric, filled with some technicalities to indicate where the reality, in their view, is located, occasionally with a more or less veiled threat indicating that economic resources might be withdrawn, even the participation in the game as a whole, unless the infants should start behaving better. Having seen to it that the major working languages of the UN system are their own languages the effective use of restrained language behaviour comes more easily and is, as indicated, highly compatible with their role. Occasional, but conspicuous absenteeism from meetings to indicate that they have more important things to do.

Not so with the Second world. It has the difficult double assignment of being both "responsible" and challenging. It has to try to legitimize itself by being technically as proficient as the First world because it wants to be seen as an alternative pole of attraction, authority and developmental inspiration and on the other hand of being challenging, even castigating the First world whenever the occasion arises. Again this may call for division of labour between the politically efficient ambassador capable of castigation, and the technically more proficient lower ranks capable of adequate professionalism. The difficulty, of course, is that it is hard to beat the First world in its professional game, and hard to beat the Third world in its rhetorical game. The result, I think, may be a certain underutilization of the opportunity to play any role, and hence they quite often join the spectators rather than the actors. Somebody else, has snatched the roles away from them; they stand there a little without a script.

Not so with the Third world. The UN system offers a superb opportunity to compensate to some extent for centuries of colonialism and decades of

neocolonialism with years, if not also decades (but hardly centuries) of rhetorical overkill. Recent history provides the Third world with new and fresh/<sup>supply of</sup> countries on the scene who can provide new examples, and also new rhetorical energies. It is interesting to see how the oldest among the New Emerging Forces, those that were decolonized in the fifties, even in the fourties, such as India, become more and more moderate even reticent in their style, and both dress and behave more like First world Old Established Forces. Hence, for the process to be reproduced the production of new members is essential - and the production is going on seemingly unabated.

Not so with the Fourth world. Here there is another dilemma at work, of a totally different and new nature. The basic dilemma is that of being the New Established Force without letting the world know, or if the world knows it, at least not letting the world know that they themselves know. Nothing can be better to mystify the realities of the situation than having some of the members portrayed as members of the First world and others as members of the Third. However, the keener observer will immediately notice that Japan almost never participates in the First world role playing, nor do the mini-Japans or the ASEAN countries participate much in Third world role playing, leaving that to more vociferous Afro-Arab members. So, what kind of rhetoric do they engage in then? - Answer: no rhetoric at all, they simply keep silent. They are the silent, in the Japanese case even seemingly sleeping partners to the total exercise, looking as if they are doing time patiently, <sup>with</sup> the anti-Soviet eruptions from the largest country of the Fourth world, China, gradually diminishing in strength and frequency.

A typical example may indicate how this is done: the New International Communication Order. The Third world launches it as a question of global justice and equity, and justifiably so. It is as usual supported by the Second world, but somewhat less enthusiastically when it becomes clear that many of the Third world countries can imagine a communication order that does not presuppose governmental control as long as the Third world becomes capable of generating, sending news not only receiving them as defined by the First world. The First world responds with a political counter-attack - actually a new feature brought into First world rhetoric

essentially through the Reagan administration in the United States: this will be a threat to the free press. Resolutions are amended somewhat, but the essence of Third world rhetoric remains.

The First world then retreats to its second and third lines of defence: technical skills and capital scarcity. They emphasize how difficult it all is, and offer some of their availability to train the New Emerging Communication Forces, trusting that through professional socialization they will be able to gain the upper hand. However, this may also not work, in which case resolutions may be passed but with no funding attached to them. The net result is an organization based on the rhetoric that has survived the debating process and found its way into the resolutions, but with little or no money at all, out on the traditional begging expedition where the Third world asks for funds from the very same First world they have castigated so bitterly.

What does the Fourth world do when all this is going on? Very simply: they do not participate much in the debate, but probably listen very carefully. Instead of big words about a more symmetric distribution of senders and receivers in the world communication network, and about free press, they will walk around in the corridors putting one simple question to the New Emerging Forces: how many teleprinters do you need, what size, when, where? One might say a more pragmatic approach, highly compatible with economic growth, and also with silence in the organization. Guess who gets the contracts...

This, of course, points not only to the strength of the Fourth world strategy in combining silence with action, but also the weakness of the Third world strategy in the UN system. On the one hand the First world is seen as the root of all evils through the practice and reproduction of imperialist structures and processes tremendously beneficial to them, highly enriching. On the other hand there is one obvious remedy: redistribution from the rich to the poor. But then comes the problem: the world as such is not the welfare world taxing the rich in order to give to the poor; the assessment scale of the United Nations certainly is progressive but the total amount is so low that it is insufficient for the demands, not to mention the needs.

Hence, the Third world resorts to castigation and begging, and the more castigation the more begging, since the castigated country might be disinclined to come up with funds by itself. However, the transition from castigation to begging is not easily administered and may not work very well either. It is then the task of the United Nations system to provide a front stage for castigation, and a back stage for begging, so that the spectators do not see the latter but may even believe that if funds are made available it is because of the points made in the castigation session, and if they are not made available it is exactly because the First world is as bad as it has been presented. It is the front stage/back stage separation that becomes essential here, in practice a distinction between the General Assembly and the Committee Room, and between the Committee Room and the corridors/cocktail parties/private meetings. Again it may be that some division of labour is needed inside a Third world delegation. But it may also be a question of switching role behaviour from front stage to back stage. At any rate the Third world can hardly be blamed for seeing the UN as a great redistribution mechanism, and for trying to milk the system to the maximum. Whether the strategy adopted in doing so is the most efficient one is another question. The present author is inclined to think that it probably is the best, playing on the potential for bad conscience in many First world countries, particularly the more Protestant ones.

There is a problem, however, and that is the problem I try to capture with this, admittedly, impressionistic sketch, based on work as consultant for nine UN organisations over many years: the UN delegates are carrying terribly important messages, but they are also playing roles. And, as is always the case in social systems: the roles are interdependent. The messages are those of the four worlds and they are relatively clear in their economic, political and cultural content. But the roles are better understood in terms of the table which also indicates how four worlds are allocated to four roles. Today, that is.

Consequently, there are certain parts that have to be presented whether they are relevant to the issue or not; the roles have to be enacted. One could wish that the masks could fall, that they could all so to speak, be themselves

and judge the items of the agenda on their merits, for world peace and development, the two major tasks of the UN system. The First world would then have to step out of its assumed aloofness, the Second world of its repetitive messages combined with spectatorism, the Third world of its perennial underdogism, and the Fourth world would have to step in, not out -- simply start really participating, not only ob<sup>reverently,</sup> serving and using the system. In short, the back stage could move more to the front stage. Actually, if this is a badly hidden critique of somebody it is of the First and Fourth worlds for not fully participating, one because of a certain missionary inclination which becomes problematic when there are only hardened pagans around, the other because of a certain parasitic inclination which probably pays off if one sticks to the triple S program for Japanese diplomats, described in Kawasaki's Japan Unmasked: Silence, Smile, Sleep. I find more content in Second and Third world presentations when role behavior is filtered out. They also tend to send better people, possibly with the exception of the Soviet Union.

A second consequence can be seen by taking the time factor into consideration. How will the roles develop over time? Since world history in the twentieth century is the history of the three other worlds challenging the First (and inside the First North-Western Europe was challenged by South-Western Europe, by the Mediterranean countries - the challenge was known as "dictatorial fascism") I assume that First world role-playing of self-marginalization will continue, possibly to the point of leaving the system wholly or partly (US behavior in UNESCO January 1984, then IFAD, in March attacking UNCTAD, in MAY the WHO - and in June inviting "the UNDP to act as a sheriff enforcing the US concept of development" - Marc Nerfin in IFDA Dossier, September/October 1984, p. 2). In that case, will the Second world take over the role of the First, as being "responsible," "non-emotional," etc.? Will the Third world gradually

take over the role of the Second as "old emerging", starting with the oldest members, the real "oldboys"? We have indicated above that a process of that type is already under way: as Third world countries settle, so do their representatives, incanting the rhetoric but without emotion, leaving the emotions to the "angry young men/women".

Following the logic, this leads to the interesting question of whether the Fourth world will follow suit and fill the gap left behind by the departing Third world countries. In other words, will this radicalise the Fourth world? Possibly, yes. They are by and large doing extremely well economically and find themselves in a rank disequilibrium between high on economic power and low on political/military power (they are also very high on cultural power but do not seem to make use of that dimension). Radicalism is to be expected; China actually was an example of **that**. They may have to look less established, less a part of the Western world, co-opted, and more fighting for their position high up also in the political/military systems. To put it differently, if nobody plays that kind of role, as "new emerging," then the system is partly dead. Challengers are indispensable.

So, we postulate a new allocation pattern of worlds to roles something like this:

Table 2. The UN dramatis personae, a perspective for tomorrow

	<u>Established</u>	<u>Emerging</u>
<u>Old</u>	Second world	Third world
<u>New</u>	?	Fourth world

Again, the point is that there are roles to be played, words to be said. And that leads immediately to the question: who, if anybody, will fill the gap left behind by the departing Fourth world? Somebody from the Second world? Possibly; more likely somebody from the Third world. And another question: will the Second world also ultimately leave - is the position as "old established" simply un-

tenable in the longerrun - to be the whipping boy of the system, however justified? Does that mean that the UN will devote much more attention to the sins of the Second world (suppression of the first generation of human rights, civil and political) than the sins of the First world (suppression of the second generation of human rights, economic and social); the sins being exercised in the Second and Third worlds respectively. Possibly, yes.

And it may also mean that the day after tomorrow the Second world will leave, the Third world will become old and established, the Fourth world old and emerging and there will be two vacancies in the system. The First and Second world applying again? provided their nuclear suicide pact turns out not be a bluff (in which case the Third and Fourth world will have to rebuild them) they might do so. But there may also be other types of new forces queuing up: supranational and subnational actors, nongovernmental organizations, all of those who today have A, B and C observer status in the UN system. Some of them (the supra- and subnational, and the older NGOs) may be established; some others may be of the emerging type, angry - the younger NGOs, particularly those centering around peace, development, underprivileged groups (indigenous populations, women, the young and the old the handicapped) and abused nature. Needless to say, this will be a very different UN except for a major invariant: the role system may remain about the same. There will always be the oldboys and the newcomers, and there will be the status quo and the challengers - these are roles in any political system. The only interesting question is who plays them.

Conclusion: there is more to the UN than what meets the naked eye. And what the future will hold cannot be understood by counting votes on resolutions alone. There are deep structures, and this article is an effort to spell out one of them.