

# Global division of labour sociology essay



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The GDL is defined as the division of socially necessary activities, including productive and reproductive tasks, on an international level. Classically, this would see the specialisation of countries in the production of particular types of products.

Few inclusive analyses of the GDL have been offered, as differing opinions exist in relation to the GDL. According to classical theorists such as Adam Smith, division of labour has allowed for an increase in production and has allowed industrious nations to experience "universal opulence" (Smith, 1776: book 1); specialisation, for Adam Smith, is the key to productivity and substantial development. Karl Marx, who focused on changes into the modern times, viewed capitalism as a system of production that contrasted previous economic orders in history (Giddens, 1993: 708); capitalism would advance with the intensification of the division of labour. Émile Durkheim, who concentrated on the social implications of the division of labour, concluded that new forms of social cohesion form resulting from advances in the division of labour (Giddens, 1993: 707).

Theories of this GDL have altered over the years. The classical division of labour saw two domains of production linked by one-way trade in raw material and factory-made products, respectively; the metropolitan countries were countries with the most factories, with the colonial countries having less. This classical international division of labour continued in the postcolonial period, with Northern hemisphere countries still dominating as the world's industrial hubs; Southern hemisphere countries predominantly engaged in primary sector production.

Furthermore, the classical theory persisted in the form of the modernisation theory, which suggests, " that uneven world development can be linked to the advance of industrial societies overtaking traditional societies" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 306) - industrial societies being northern countries, and traditional societies being those in the south. The main differences between these countries include their cultural identity, where northern countries focus on individualism, and southern countries on community and family. As long as traditional culture stays strong, the classical division will remain and modernisation will remain a struggle to achieve.

Carefully related to the modernisation theory is the world systems theory, which revolves around a clear division concerning the core and periphery. It is because of this belief that there is only a single world that is " connected by a complex network of economic exchange relationships" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 306), that some believe is an " unequal international division of labour" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 306). Immanuel Wallerstein further described this phenomenon as a system encompassing of three spheres, namely the core, periphery and semi-periphery. Based on the logic of capitalism, the system promotes unevenness, absorbed with wealth and power in the core, leaving the periphery facing poverty and exclusion (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 306).

As a result of unexpected development in some peripheral regions in the 1970s, the 'classical' international division of labour was altered to the emerging New International Division of Labour (NIDL). It was because of falling profitability that resulted in the relocation of some manufacturing processes to the peripheral countries from the core. This was a reaction to

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the " rapid industrialization of East Asia and other newly industrialised countries (NICs) and to the partial deindustrialisation of the old heartlands of capitalist production" (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007: 197). This 'global industrial shift' did occur due to the supply of labour in the periphery, and the low-cost labour-intensive manufacturing processes.

The global division of labour, although focused on economic issues, did also have its hand in social issues, initiating advantages and disadvantages in both areas of society.

It was Durkheim who concluded that the increasing division of labour allowed for an increase in independence; it is here where Durkheim would link this view with his study of anomie - the feeling of aimlessness provoked by certain social conditions (Giddens, 1993: 707). In an ever-growing economic world, it becomes clear that societies do not grow socially as they do economically. As " industry is one of the most globalised manufacturing sectors" (Giddens, 1993: 546), one could say that it has a more far-reaching effect than any other in terms of the GDL. It is here, with Transnational Corporations, that one can see the driving force of the division of labour.

Tracing back to the Industrial Revolution, for example British East India Company being the first multinational (Robins, 2006: 24), TNCs have been the only winners. Whenever a company exports any sort of capital - money, or labour - it contributes to the unemployment in the home country, like in the case of the NIDL (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007: 197), benefitting only the consumer and the TNCs who abuse cheap labour. These companies do develop infrastructures in peripheral countries, developing a dependence on

the core countries by the periphery. Contrastingly it is also possible to move from periphery to core, which was the case for Japan, rising from the periphery to the second position in the core bloc in the 1970s (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007: 196).

The global division of labour is not only about factories moving, but people as well. This entails people searching for jobs across borders as well as internally in a country. As a result of large labour migrations, friction can occur in the form of xenophobia against a worker's culture, or an issue involving trade unions. It is in this case that NIDL, a form of globalisation, "has generated more extreme forms of racism as people try to defend their own national identity" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 164).

Globalisation, a result of the GDL, is 'for many women around the world a concrete process of exploitation' (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 514) as there is "no known instance of society in which women are more powerful than men" (Giddens, 1993: 173). This should not come as a shock to anyone as women remain "compelled to work in 'the sweatshops of the world'" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 513). This is a solid example of just one gender group marginalised by the GDL. It is in peripheral countries where workers are "exploited to produce goods for the richer nations, as in Korean enterprises where many Burmese workers work on textile production" (Macionis & Plummer, 2012: 513). The spread of work between genders across borders are as questionable as the wealth gaps between First and Third World nations.

The GDL, as a result of its differing theories and forms, can be described as complex. Smith, Durkheim and Marx had classified it differently as a result of opinions; similarly the process has evolved from its classical form to the NIDL. Furthermore, complexity is seen in a lack of a simple international arrangement as the global workforce is divided, shaped by social and economic factors. The GDL can be socially valuable or destructive as it is inclusive on a world scale yet it functions on the basis of division and inequality. By accessing the 'winners' and 'losers', one can deduce the contradictions this procedure is known to harvest.

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