

Christopher Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 1990; 197pp; ISBN: 0-415-03003-X

Reviewer: Mohammed Ali Bapir¹

Clapham wrote this book in the Cold War period. In this era, third world states were proxies and "spheres of influence" of either the Western capitalist bloc led by the United States or the Eastern socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union. The Cold War lasted roughly between 1949 and 1989. This was known as the bipolar-era. Throughout this period almost all the third world states witnessed crises of governance. What Clapham presented, cannot be appreciated without taking this historical context into consideration.

What draws attention is the title of the book 'third world politics'. In its first chapter Clapham asserts that 'the phrase third world is generally taken, and is taken here, to include the Americas south of the United states; the whole of Africa; Asia apart from the soviet Union, China and Japan; and the Oceanic Islands apart from the Australia and New Zealand'. In his categorization he did not appeal to the geographical classifications for in one way or another, he argues 'it might suggest that the third world might be formed as the result of the cultural characteristics of its people, yet there are no similarities between the indigenous cultures' (p.3). He has classified them because they have 'common circumstances'. Additionally, it is stated that the phrase 'third world' is chosen because of its meaninglessness for the reason that the third world politics can only make a sense in a single world. Third world states have got their common circumstances, he argues, as a consequence of the process of imperialism; since 15th century, 'the process has brought them together in many respects as a single society, economy and political system'. Hence, what distinguishes the third world states from the rest is the fact that they are non-western cultures. Then he sheds some light on the effects of imperialism and colonialization: 'both the territorial states and the societies were artificial' in doing so 'bureaucratic organization becomes directly responsible for the political management of the state'.

After defining the third world politics, in the second chapter 'European Colonialism', Clapham turns to illustrate the historical processes that brought the third world into existence; 'the European colonialism was the means by which this global political and economic order was created' and then he identifies the drive of the process; 'the ultimate basis of colonialism was technological and its principle motive was economic' (p.12). As the colonial powers arrived they divided their colonies with no respect of traditional boundaries and existing political cultures: 'arbitrary lines became the frontiers between independent states'. That is, 'within each territory a political order and administrative hierarchy is

¹ Department of Politics & International Relations, University of Kurdistan-Hewlér, Kurdistan Region, Iraq. Email: mohammadable@gmail.com

established to run it'. The only mechanism to gain political power was force which was legitimized by alien elite to establish control over people not of their own. In this way, he notes, the role of colonialism in making centralized and authoritarian states in the third world (p.18) after the colonial state formation, the process of decolonization began. This process was motivated by the idea of nationalism and characterized by nationalist movements, as an opposition to foreign power. He, then, discusses the 'colonial response and the transfer of power' by emphasizing the action of state leaders: 'the nationalists were the middlemen, they needed to balance the inside and outside elements'.

The transfer of power to the de-colonized entities gave third world states a certain structures of nation-building and development. In the third chapter 'The Third World State', Clapham discusses the nature of such states. He points out some features that characterized the state such as, representative of the colonial administration; the instruments of government which breeds institutions and in rank, institutions constituted the 'state which has emerged as the key to the structure of third world politics' (p. 39). The state, he argues, is distinguished by the combination of its power and its fragility, the state has the structure of control or a top-down structure. That is because; the state and society are not emerged as common expression of a set of shared values- everything was artificial, to put it in other way, there is a 'lack of organic unity or shared values between state and society'. Further, he defines fragility as the weakness of legitimacy; consecutively, the absence of legitimacy boosts governmental insecurity. Thus, the lack of value consensus threatens state's survival.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that what matters for Clapham was the state not society, in discussing the idea of legitimacy and value consensus. For him, what is active is the state while society is rather passive. Nevertheless, he points out a very fundamental problem which links the state and society, an inner factor, legitimacy. He asserts that efficacy and legitimacy in the modern states need rational legal authority, public officials, courts and bureaucrats. Instead, the third world states had traditional and charismatic authority. Thus, 'their system was held together by the oath of loyalty or by kinship ties' (p.49) – such neo-patrimonialism breeds corruption and patron client relations.

In Chapter four, 'Managing the State', Clapham attempts to outline the basic characters of third world states, and how they are managed. He emphasizes the vitality of ideology as a motive of such a power. The ideology was 'nationalism', which 'ascribed to the leader, the nation, and the party'. Thus, 'unity became the core value of the ideology', never the less, heterogeneity was a character of the state there for in diverse ethnical and identities unity includes some and excludes others. Thus, he notes that 'nationhood is due to the boundaries of the state rather than ethnic ones'. This would suggest, not only the state was artificial but also the societies which structure them as well, heterogeneous unstable societies are weak, once more society is unreceptive. He adds 'the power of the state, generally much greater than of any other organized political force within society'. Developmental and nation-building process done by the state, a single party state, produced the shrinkage of political arena.

The fifth chapter 'The politics of economic management', examines state and state action as well as internal and external pressures in managing economic and development policies the chapter explores the various paths third world states have chosen for development: socialist or capitalist. In doing so, the chapter clarifies that states had control over patterns of

production and distribution, yet 'any economic development programme requires both great determination and effective political institution'. What needs a special attention is the fact that revenues of the third world governments are derived partly from dependence on a highly unequal international trade. Secondly, Clapham notes that the greater part of governments spending goes to pay the salaries of state employees, 'in physical terms this means that it goes to the cities and especially to the capital city. In social terms, this means it goes disproportionately to the modern educated elite'.

Chapter six, 'Managing the External Political Arena', deals with how third world countries have fared during the Cold War. Clapham note that a high degree of internal ethnic and regional diversity that leads to domestic conflicts and in turn this provides opportunities for outside intervention. For instance, the United States used to support the monarchies while on the other hand the Soviet Union aided revolutions. Another point raised in this chapter is that, 'states whose governments depend on the military protection of their neighbors, are in rather greater danger of absorption than those which depend on the protection of more distinct powers' (p.135).

Chapter 7: 'Soldier and State' focuses on military intervention in politics and the role of the state and the government in managing means of coercion. Clapham notes that 'when the army goes into politics so does politics come into the army' (p.137). Then he adds, 'at any event, the military has become a lasting factor in political calculation' (p.157). The final chapter deals with on revolutionary states. Clapham define revolution as 'a rapid, violent and irreversible change in the political organization of a society' with the aim of destroying 'the existing political order, together with the myths which sustain it and the men which it sustains' (p.160). This would suggest that revolutions aim is to bring about a change. For Clapham, this change is the change of 'those who govern the state'; he therefore believes that 'ideology is often regarded as the essential element of revolutionary expertise, hence revolution is a matter of changing the way people think, in order to change the way they behave'.

Finally, Clapham's own conclusion is quite interesting: 'I have tried to show how third world politics works' and his mode of his argument which is a 'realist' one, how politics is played not how it should *be*. So through out the book there is not any suggestions hence, this goes against his statement when he says 'the problem is not where you should try to go, but how you should get there'. Unfortunately, he has nothing to say about how third world countries *should get there*, and thus the problem still remains. My second token is on the way he defines politics, '[politics] is very largely concerned with the immediate problems of management and survival'. This is a state-centric definition of politics and is realist in approach: what matters in politics is power and since states are the only actor who hold power, then what matters is only the state.

As to whether the text has achieved its aim, based on Clapham's claim one can that the author has done the job he set out to even though he has taken a top-down approach in doing so. Some characters of the statist approach are manifested throughout the book one of which is, the state is viewed as the primary force behind social and economic occurrences, and state leaders were held responsible for political and economic deterioration of the developing world. Emphasis is placed on patterns of elite domination and personal rule

tended to hamper a close analysis of the role of state in actual political economy. One of the weaknesses is that emphasis has not shifted to formal and informal factors and forces within and outside of the state: the state and only the state is the primary unit of analysis. There is a neglect of society as a unit of analysis and the dynamic interface between state and society.

Nevertheless, the text is able to achieve two things: firstly, it is not flawed with by polemics and ideological limitations characteristic of texts written at the time. Secondly, it enables reader to understand external dynamics and local realities of state politics.

