

One Earth - Two Different Worlds

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After a long day of shopping, you sit down to eat your dinner and decide to watch a bit of television. In between watching Corrie and the season finale of your favourite show there's an advertisement break. The first is a charity appeal, reaching out to the general public to donate as much as they can for those facing starvation in other areas of the globe. The next is a McDonalds' advert, showing off their new triple burger with fries and a drink at a new affordable price.



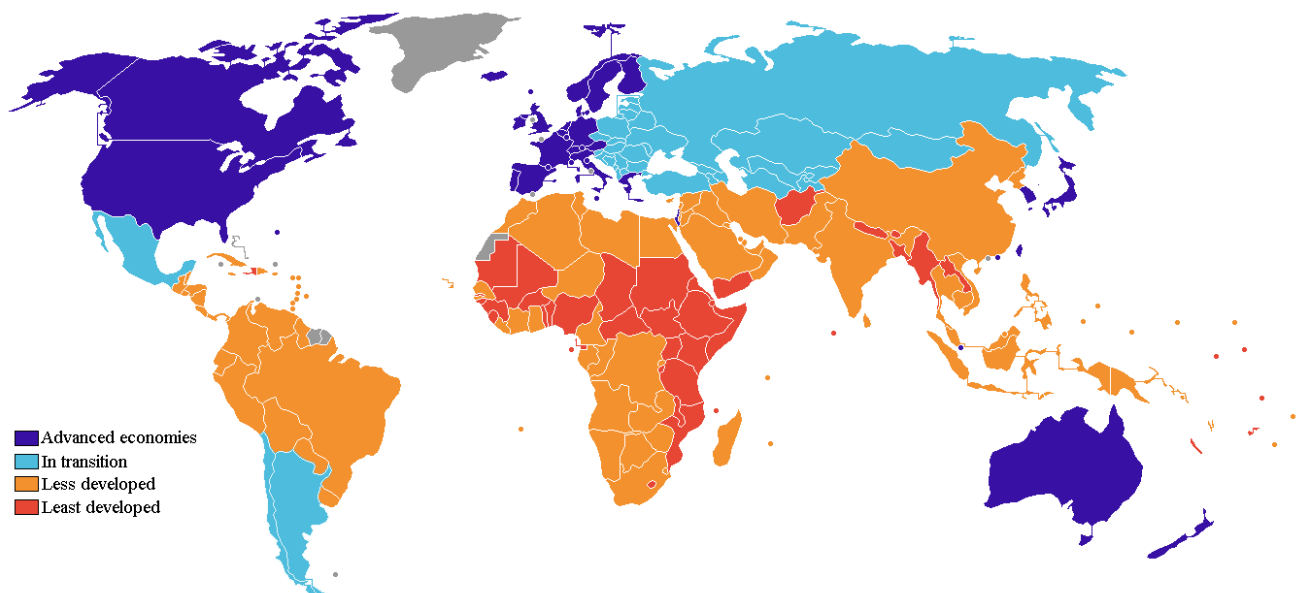
Suddenly you begin to realise the many things we take for granted and walking into a fast food chain when you're feeling a little peckish is just one of those. A few advertisements later and your favourite show comes back on. You're distracted by the drama and the next time you look down to your plate of food, you realise you made too much and decide to

throw the rest away. What a waste? The process whereby food takes to get into your fridge is also a chain of wasteful counterparts. This critical reflection will look into the links between consumer society, waste and the contrasting lifestyles developed countries have on those who live in poverty elsewhere in the world.

Food manufacturing is far from being the only form of production which generates waste. Most products made in capitalist societies have an end of life expectancy and in a lot of cases you buy something knowing that within the near future you are going to have to replace it; whether that be through upgrading, or simply because things are no longer made to last. Baudrillard (1998) states that within today's consumer society, objects are no longer made to withstand the hands of time but are instead made to be broken. In order for

capitalist societies to maintain profit, they need to ensure people keep buying their products. Consumer society is linked with product obsolescence. Functional obsolescence can occur when the product is no longer working as it should. Aesthetic obsolescence, when the product is no longer viewed upon as being fashionable enough; Apple products are a good example of this as they are always bringing out new updates. Finally, psychological obsolescence can occur, which is the feeling one can get when they

production or travel. As cited by Allen and Hamnett (1995) the increased interconnectedness has not allowed financial differences across the globe to be evened out. However, it has instead increased global inequalities, leaving those in third world countries at an increased disadvantage. “Much of the ‘third world’, for example, is excluded from the global financial system and, if anything, it is further away from the developed world in the 1990s than it was a decade earlier” (Allen and Hamnett 1995:



have simply had their product too long and it needs to be replaced. Mass production leads to mass waste, which has detrimental environmental and health effects on those living in developing countries.

Globalisation has led to an increased interconnectedness across the globe; whether that be through communication, finances,

236). To make matters worse, many industrialised countries manage their waste by using undeveloped countries as a sort of dumping ground. “Tonnes of hazardous waste leave the port of Los Angeles destined for recycling plants in the less developed world (Allen and Hamnett, 1995: 246).

Beck (1992) argues that new modernity is

best explained through the concept of risk. These risks are now being made on a global scale. Risk society refers to “a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself” (Beck, 1992: 21). Capitalist societies in developed countries are now making new risks which create an uncertainty upon the future. In relation to consumer society and waste, we are now creating risks on a global scale to which we do not know the environmental

outcome. Beck (1992) also includes that the new dangers of society are no longer due to an “undersupply



of hygienic technology” but is instead due to the mass production of products (Beck, 1992: 21)

Due to a high demand of electronics and the life expectancy of such products becoming shorter, the production of e-waste has also highly increased. It is estimated that 20-50 million tonnes of e-waste is produced globally each year (Brigden K. et al, 2008). E-waste constitutes of electronically discarded objects,

including mobile phones, televisions, microwaves and computer components. The e-waste produced by rich countries is deported to developing countries in Africa and Asia to be recycled. The retrieval of recyclable metals is usually carried out by children from poor families; without any protection and using only basic tools the children take apart discarded electronics. They “isolate metals (mainly copper and aluminium) and the open burning of certain

components to isolate copper from plastics in which they are encased, particularly from plastic coated wires and cables” (Brigden K. et al, 2008: 4). During the burning process hazardous metal pollution is created. As cited through the World

Health Organisation (2015) Olafisoye et al. conducted a study in 2013 looking into the effects of lead poisoning produced from the Alaba International Market in Nigeria. They found unnatural levels of lead in the soil, water and plants. Lead poisoning can lead to “drowsiness, exhaustion, convulsions, permanent muscular paralysis, coma and eventually death can occur at very high blood lead concentrations of 100 µg/dl and above” (World Health Organisation, 2015: 7).

As cited by Hawkins (2006), the removal of waste has become a necessity in today's society. Once the perceived waste has been removed from one's sight, it is no longer thought upon. Landfill sites are generally kept far away from the general public. Little is thought on what happens to the waste and the effects it has upon other people. The throwaway society thesis reflects the wasteful side of consumer society. "Zygmunt Bauman's



analysis of the contemporary culture of waste descends rapidly upon modern society's 'addiction' to consumption and disposal" (O'Brien, M. 2013: 20). Bauman argues that as To revert back to food wastage, according to statistics, 1/3 of the food we purchase is thrown away. Households alone throw away 5.9 million tonnes of food each year (Wrap, 2008). An enormous amount of food is also wasted outside of the home. In 2013, Wrap conducted three studies looking into annual food wastage. They looked into differing segments of food wastage, including hospitality, production, supermarkets and also the home. They found that a staggering 12 million tonnes worth of food is wasted

a society we have become disengaged with the practices of production, consumption and waste. Theories build a picture of fast paced, ever growing consumption. As cited through O'Brien (2013), Ferrell presents individuals in society as continuously purchasing whilst

throwing away objects which are deemed no longer of use, even though they were bought a short time ago. We throw

things away today to make room for new things we can buy tomorrow (O'Brien, 2013).

each year and "75% of which could have been avoided" (Wrap, 2015: 1). Food may be deemed as not purchasable or uneatable for reasons such as being past the expiry or display until date; smelling or looking off; or for the simple reason of having bought the same food twice. Whilst living in a country of such waste, it can be difficult to imagine the alternative life of those living with little to no food. People living in third world countries are lacking that much food that they are developing illnesses, malnutrition and starving to death. Malnutrition is a leading

cause of disease; more than 1/3 of global disease for children is caused through a lack of nutrition (World Health Organisation, 2015b). Childbearing is also particularly hard. “Maternal nutrition increases the risk of death of the mother at birth and may be associated with about 20% of maternal deaths” (World Health Organisation, 2015b).

A consumer society, a society which can be viewed upon as having anything readily accessible, can have detrimental effects on those whom are struggling to survive due to a lack of resources. What we may deem upon as being a useless, out-dated product could be a root of survival for children in African and Asian countries trying to find recyclable metals. The food we throw away and view upon as not being suitable for human consumption would provide those without food a chance to live. Globalisation may have created an interconnected space across the globe but those whom lack the connections are worse off than ever before in comparison. We may have an increasingly better knowledge of the lives of those living in third world countries but as we watch charity pleas from the comfort of our sofa; we couldn't be further worlds apart.

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