



Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Third World Quarterly

Development Theory and the Three Worlds by Björn Hittne; Eurocentrism by Samir Amin

Review by: Peter Worsley

Third World Quarterly, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1992), pp. 399-400

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3992786>

Accessed: 22/06/2014 03:01

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Taylor & Francis, Ltd. and *Third World Quarterly* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Third World Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

NON-FICTION REVIEWS

Development Theory and the Three Worlds by Björn Hittne
London: Longman. 1990. 296pp.

Eurocentrism by Samir Amin
London: Zed Books. 1989. 157pp.

Although Björn Hittne's book is a study in intellectual history it is a study of a body of theory which is necessarily concerned with development policy in practice. His starting-point is the assumption that both development theory and the world(s) with which it deals are in crisis, although he adds, immediately, that we lack a theory of crisis, and that radicals see crisis where defenders of the status quo merely see problems of adaptation. Nevertheless, the West is said to be in crisis, so is the socialist world (how true!), and the Third World. Within the latter, however, the crises differ: in Latin America, debt is the problem; in Africa, food; in Asia, identity (*sic*).

All these specific problems derive from trying to follow European models of development, which Hittne skilfully and authoritatively condenses under two paradigms—modernisation theory and dependency theory.

The failure of the very First Development Decade exposed the limitations of the first school. The second, whose varieties he carefully explores, generated an impressive body of research, largely in bodies like CLACSO, but, unlike the more technocratic CEPAL, failed to formulate any concrete economic programmes, and are now 'no more'. All that remains is a rather thin list of national schools such as India's *swarajist* writing in the 1970s ('no longer in the forefront of . . . intellectual debate'), China's 'aborted indigenization of social science', or 'African socialism', a politicians' ideology. The indigenisation of theory, he concludes is 'far from being fulfilled'.

Instead, globalisation dominates theory and practice: 40% of world trade now takes place between subsidiaries and parent companies of TNCs. World system theory, however, he finds excessively structured and a form of economic reductionism. He looks with a much more cautious eye, therefore, than those who proclaim the 'end of the Third World', upon the experience of the NICs, and points to those who did *not* make it, like Sri Lanka. Yet 'de-linking' has not proved any more successful, in many cases because the Western superpower has intervened politically and militarily to frustrate such attempts in countries like Jamaica or Grenada. As for the NICs that have made it, no general theory can be deduced and no universal cures.

His prescription is 'Another development'—'small', ecologically oriented, and based on popular involvement and on the local community, with basic needs and self-reliance as the guiding principles. The region, rather than the world or the nation-state would be the appropriate unit. Such a body of theory and policy would be equally applicable to the overdeveloped West.

Samir Amin's argument is much more world systemic. He is opposed to both 'culturalism'—the assumption of immanent, invariable cultural heritages—and to the hegemony of world capitalism.

With bold, sweeping strokes, he reduces the variety of polities, economies and cultures to three: primitive 'communalism', the 'tributary' state, and capitalism. When he stands on his home ground, Egypt and the Mediterranean/Arab world, he is impressive, showing that both Hellenism and Christianity were heavily impregnated with ideas borrowed from Egyptian civilisation, notably the doctrines of the individual, immortal soul, and of immanent, moral justice, conveyed via the neo-Platonist writings of Plotinus and, in a later epoch, of Origen. Again, his discussion of later Arab thought, including its triumphs in the domains of mathematics, medicine and the sciences—during a period which the West experienced as the 'Dark' Ages—needs saying, as Bernal has done recently (though Pharaonic Egyptians would have been horrified to find themselves labelled 'Black'!). After this flowering, however, Arab thought, confined ultimately within a metaphysical straitjacket, 'went peacefully to sleep'. The West, *per contra*, experienced a Renaissance.

Nevertheless, I find the assumption that Egypt, for all its importance, was somehow unique in generating conceptions of the individual, the soul, and or moral justice simply parochial, for the belief that individual behaviour in this life affects one's fate in the next life (or world) is the stuff of religious thought everywhere, whether Great or Little Traditions, all of which he ignores apart from some interesting pages on religions in China and Japan. (Hinduism is mentioned only as an asceticist deviation from universalism and this-worldliness.)

I find Amin's concept of the 'tributary state' very useful, since in both Oriental bureaucratic empires and Western feudalism it was political power that gave those who possessed it control over productive resources (centralised in the East, decentralised in the West)—an inversion of Marx's formula for capitalism. (If an equivalent of *Capital* were to be written for the tributary state, he perceptively remarks, it would have to be entitled *Power*.)

But the notion that there is a 'tributary ideological construct' (or rather, *the* tributary ideological construct, as he constantly puts it) immanently required by the tributary state, is unconvincing. As he himself acknowledges, ideas do not change in some one-to-one way in accordance with changes in modes of production: 'the religious revolution takes place on its own terms'. But to observe simply that 'neither Protestantism nor Catholicism [were] the specific ideology of capitalism' avoids the kind of precise analysis of the interplay between religious and economic ideas, and between those and social behaviour, that preoccupied Weber. Nor is religion the only source of thought: he points to the interplay in the West, over centuries, between materialism and empiricism in science and technology, religious legitimation of the social order (and the cosmos), and the economism which he sees as the essence and ultimate outcome of capitalist thought.

Amin's theoretical difficulties arise from allowing his hostility to 'culturalism' (particularly Muslim fundamentalism) to stand in the way of using the perfectly valid concept of culture (which he finds 'mysterious and unknown') and of the recognition that cultures do persist and have very important implications for social life even if they do also change and can be deconstructed.

Finally, he relates all this to his plea for economic and cultural 'de-linking' from the West. Revolution against capitalism, he notes, has only come from the periphery, for which the socialist countermodel 'remains a growing force of attraction'.

The North–South divide does contain explosive potential for the future. Amin rightly points to major upheavals in favour of democracy in the Philippines, Brazil and Korea. But socialist revolution, as he acknowledges, is in a 'barren phase'; after Tienanmen Square, Nicaragua and the collapse of Eastern Europe, those kinds of state socialism will be even less attractive models. And as the experience of Iran shows, there are other modes of very hostile confrontation with the West which do not entail rejection of Western capitalism. Capitalism, Amin says, is also at an 'impasse'. Well, full of problems it may be, but, viewed from Europe, where it has just experienced an historic expansion at the expense of communism, the impasse does not look so terminal or unresolvable, while the rise of the NICs suggests that revolution is not the only possibility on the cards for large parts, at least, of the Third World for a good long time to come.

PETER WORSLEY

London

Communist Agriculture: farming in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe edited by Karl-Eugen Wädekin

London: Routledge. 1990. 131pp. £25.00hb

Agriculture is undoubtedly a great economic failure of Soviet central planning, just as its origins in forced collectivisation is a great crime in history. The collection of essays in *Communist Agriculture* is a refreshing departure from the triumphalist rhetoric that has dominated Western commentary in recent months. Those advocating 'free market' solutions to the intractable social and ecological problems of the most highly regulated sector of advanced capitalism will find little support in this volume.

Except for one Polish and one Hungarian scholar, the essays are written by a group of Western researchers. Most are US and German academics, but several work for the US government. They are part of a network which began to meet in 1962. The papers in this collection were written for the 8th Conference on Soviet and East European Agriculture, held at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1987. They have been updated for this volume, sometimes at the proof stage. As a result, this volume is at once remarkably up-to-date and historically grounded.