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## Book Reviews

**Ben Selwyn. *The Global Development Crisis*. 2014. Malden, MA: Polity. 224 pages, ISBN 978-0745660158 Paper (\$24.95).**

In his 1930 essay “Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren,” Lord Keynes declared, “for at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not.” Only then could the gods of “avarice and usury ... lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into the daylight.” Sacrificing the present for the future was at the heart of the social democratic compact. Workloads would be reduced from shared productivity gains. Capitalists’ animal spirits would be deftly managed by government lion-tamers. Fishing in the afternoon and reading Plato in the evening seemed to loom on the horizon for working classes, as long as they were patient and prudent in their demands.

In his 1952 collection *Ten Great Economists*, Joseph Schumpeter was unimpressed by Keynes’ theoretical cutlery: “A fruit knife is an excellent instrument for peeling a pear. He who uses it in order to attack a steak has only himself to blame for unsatisfactory results.” Keynes hadn’t written a *general* theory at all, Schumpeter observed, just a theory of the British economy. Actually existing capitalism did not remain within the lines airily drawn by methodological nationalism. As Perry Anderson pointed out, “The idea of capitalism in one country, taken literally, is only a bit more plausible than that of socialism [in one country].” Grandchildren of Keynes’ generation watched the global reach of capitalism shred, not fulfill, the social democratic compact.

Like Schumpeter’s collection, Ben Selwyn’s *The Global Development Crisis* focuses on a set of pioneering economists and social thinkers in order to put forth a series of theoretical propositions about the world economy. Compiling and updating recently published articles, the welcome result is a Marxian analysis of historical capitalism more syncretic than dogmatic. Selwyn is an insightful and prolific scholar. He is not looking for the pear peeler but for the steak knife. Where does he find it?

Selwyn begins by mapping out the unequal structures of the world economy. He highlights the inherent conflicts within processes of capital accumulation and class formation. The book relies on the concept of exploitation as the “pre-condition and basis of the capital-labor relation,” operating through the extraction of surplus value through waged labor (p. 5). Selwyn argues capitalist exploitation takes place in multiple social arenas: the workplace, labor market, household, cultural/racial formations, and nature. This seems like conceptual stretching, and makes for a bit of trouble later on; Selwyn admits he mostly pays attention to the first two areas in the book (p. 15). Yet the underlying point is to show the weakness of “residualist” theories which assume solutions to global poverty and underdevelopment can be sought in more economic growth and market inclusion. “Relational” theories investigate how relative and absolute poverty are produced in conjunction with capital accumulation and wealth. To shape his analysis, Selwyn turns to thinkers outside of the straitjacketed neoclassical tradition which Albert Hirschman once labeled “monoeconomics”: List, Marx, Gerschenkron, Trotsky, Schumpeter, Polanyi, and Sen.

Friedrich List, based on his experiences in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century United States, theorized the “infant industry” approach to state-led development. The laissez-faire cosmopolitanism espoused by British political economy did not ensure catching up to the imperial hegemon but rather guaranteed peripheral impoverishment by kicking away the development ladder. States

needed to shelter nascent manufacturing, promote educational-technical cadres, and collate together a national market economy through infrastructural projects. List is thus the father of what Selwyn calls the “Statist Political Economy” approach to development studies: here we find Alice Amsden, Robert Wade, Ha-Joon Chang, Atul Kohli, and Peter Evans. This school was the loudest critic of neoliberal proclamations that a country could simply trade its way out of poverty. Drawing from Marx’s own writings on List, however, Selwyn teases out two contradictions in the Statist school. Where successful, state-led development relied on heightened repression and exploitation of local workers. Indeed, in his 466-page tome, Kohli (2004) essentially admits that fascism is the best way of fostering industrialization in poorer countries (he relegates the starkness of the comparison to footnotes). Selwyn also points out that List’s unabashed advice for German state-builders was protection at home and military imperialism abroad. These were structurally linked in practice. Thus contemporary state theorists whitewash both the historical record and the theoretical implications of List’s thought. They may hope for a social democratic model, but their own cases show that state-led development, from Stalinist industrialization to East Asian tigers, regards workers as no more than “fuel for the accumulation of capital” (p. 51).

Marx would be a logical source for moving beyond such contradictions, but which Marx? Largely devoid of tiresome Marxology, Selwyn continues in the tradition of Andre Gunder Frank and Giovanni Arrighi by reconstructing Marx as theorist of a global, uneven, contingent, and historically non-linear capitalist system. It is time to take down the barricades from such non-debates as Robert Brenner vs. Immanuel Wallerstein, Selwyn shows, and instead synthesize the 1970s transition debates into a useful theoretical apparatus. Selwyn also constructs a handy typology on the developmental impact of class struggle from Marx’s writings: workers in colonial frontier zones escaping the reach of states and capitalists (the Australian hinterlands); communal peasant organizations resisting the penetration of capitalism (the Russian *mir*); emergent workers’ structural and associational bargaining power forcing the improvement of livelihoods under capitalism (English trade unionism); and the creation of political-economic institutions which undermine capitalism (the 1871 Paris Commune). This is the kernel of a “labor-centered perspective,” which Selwyn argues should replace our current development theories.

Leon Trotsky and Alexander Gerschenkron take us a step further. They both show how state attempts to catch-up in the world economy reshape domestic class relations, which, in turn, can effect and even undercut state efforts. Gerschenkron went beyond List by identifying why particular advantages of backwardness for poorer countries are not replicable over multiple iterations. New institutional innovations, which cannot be predicted beforehand, create the pathways for each generation of late developers. This is the theoretical insight from Gerschenkron’s analysis of German banking vs. Russian statism: each successful case of catch-up development forces changes in the global political economy, resulting in “continual divergence from earlier cases of industrialization” (p. 85). The process makes the Statist school’s advice to repeat late developer examples of the past, Selwyn suggests, mostly irrelevant for policy in poorer countries. Gerschenkron partly developed his thought by reading Trotsky, whose notion of “uneven and combined development” has been resurrected by International Relations scholars such as Justin Rosenberg. Peripheral countries like Russia benefitted from the advantages of backwardness, Trotsky claimed. Yet by rapidly integrating into world economic relations under the “whip of external necessity,” the result was not a mirror of earlier developmental paths. Rather, a combination of new and old forms of social organization ensued. This would likely produce new forms of social conflict as well. High levels of capitalist

exploitation and state repression in late developers made for more explosive cross-class mobilization in response from below. Changes in global political economy after rounds of successful late development also meant that the *disadvantages* of backwardness would multiply. Unmentioned by Selwyn, this is Peter Evans' well-known argument in *Embedded Autonomy*: that state-led development produces its own gravediggers via "the social constituencies that it helps bring into being" (1995: 229). (Given that Evans evokes Marx to make his point, Selwyn is perhaps a bit uncharitable towards the Statist school.)

Selwyn then weaves together Joseph Schumpeter and Marx in a commodity chain perspective of global economic dynamics. Innovations by leading economic sectors not only result from firm-level competition and entrepreneurial search for super-profits, but also from labor struggles along the production nodes of commodity chains. Technological changes and their resultant rents are spatially clustered within wealthy countries. Organizations such as the WTO buttress the borders of an "upgrading club" to which only Northern states can belong. Meanwhile, the spatial disaggregation of production allows transnational corporations to subcontract out high levels of labor exploitation to poorer states. Selwyn is firmly in world-systems territory here, summarizing work by Arrighi, Beverly Silver, and Denis O'Hearn. To tease out Selwyn's point further, one can characterize his argument as such: capitalist creative destruction does not produce an irrevocable race to the bottom or convergence towards a flat world, but rather a global process of uneven and combined development which generates social conflict in new and unexpected locations.

Two chapters devoted to Karl Polanyi and Amartya Sen are impressive but less satisfying. They repeat well-known assessments of these authors' work. Polanyi's conception of an organic double movement against commodification and market society ignores the power dynamics of capitalist social relations. Sen's call for human development along multiple axes beyond economic growth is laudable, yet his benign view of market inclusion is more "residualist" than "relational." Selwyn's critique of both: it's the exploitation, stupid!

Here lies the problem. In placing various mechanisms of domination and exclusion into the conceptual kitchen sink of exploitation, Selwyn is a bit of a residualist himself. Theorists such as Arrighi (also drawing from Marx) identified relational yet separate processes of exploitation and exclusion as mutually constitutive mechanisms of global capitalist dynamics. We cannot explain the one without the other. To lump it all together under a bridging concept of exploitation may be satisfying for critics of capitalism, but it also can be analytically confusing and politically frustrating. Yet by noting how labor struggle is a constitutive element of historical capitalism, Selwyn is pushing in the right direction. His theoretical cutlery is far sharper than the current wave of left-leaning handwringing which sees a blob-like neoliberalism behind every form of social change. By taking these essays into consideration, perhaps our grandchildren will not, to paraphrase Keynes, become enslaved by some defunct economists.

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~~**Nicole Constable. *Born Out of Place: Migrant Mothers and the Politics of International Labor*. 2014. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 259 pages, ISBN 978-0520282025 Paper (\$29.95)**~~

~~In *Born Out of Place*, Nicole Constable sets out to write about “babies born of migrant worker mothers abroad” (p. xii) and the experiences of migrant mothers living and working in Hong Kong. The contradictions are numerous for these families: temporary migrant workers suddenly tied to a foreign country, domestic workers disciplined privately by their employers and again publicly for their sexuality, currents of opinion from their home societies and the families left behind which at once celebrate migrant women’s contributions yet chastise their babies born abroad. These paradoxical narratives make for a captivating read, as Constable pairs her analysis with rich ethnographic evidence that delves deeply into the intimate and difficult details of the lives of children “born out of place” to their migrant mothers. The book is a fascinating exploration into migrant motherhood from a vantage point that has yet to be studied and theorized—that is, the experience of migrant women who have children during their migratory experience.~~

~~Constable situates the experience of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong who have children while working and living abroad in the problems of contemporary neoliberal migration schemes. She opens her study with a critical analysis of the policies, institutions and cultural logics that have profited from feminized migrant labor, both in the Global North and the Global South. In her succinct and valuable preface, Constable delineates the three main arguments she aims to tackle in her book. The first is that migrant workers are rarely seen as anything but laboring bodies whose services are available for the consumption of their employers. They are shipped out from home countries and received by host ones who accept them as workers only. This restricted conception of migrant women workers makes the possibility of interpreting their lives in a holistic and humanized way impossible. Therefore when migrant women workers have babies or relationships, they are deemed failed workers or immoral women.~~

~~Gender is a central analytic in producing the tension between “good migrants” and “good mothers” as it shapes the stigmatized idea of single migrant motherhood. In chapters four and five, Constable writes in-depth profiles of the women and men, the parents of the babies born in Hong Kong, showing how gendered ideas about marriage and motherhood ultimately conflict with the reality of migrant parents’ lives. In chapters six and seven, Constable explores the legal advantages and disadvantages of migrant mothers whose babies are born in Hong Kong. She~~