

Latham, Michael E.: *The Right Kind of Revolution. Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-0-8014-7726-3; 246 S.

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Historians of development and modernization have good reason to thank Michael Latham. Not only did Latham's first book, *Modernization As Ideology*, constitute part of the first wave of exciting recent scholarship on development and US history in a global context; now, in his new *The Right Kind of Revolution*, Latham has produced a concise and intelligent history of development and US foreign policy. In spite of some of my reservations about Latham's methodological framework regarding modernization as 'ideology', I can recommend it for teachers of courses on development in history and American foreign policy during the Cold War.

Latham alternates in the book's chapters between a thematic focus and individual case studies of some of the many countries which saw American developmental interventions. In Chapter One, Latham traces the roots of development earlier to the experience of 19th and early 20th century American colonialism and changing ideas about race, 'backwardness', 'modernity' that become more prominent in the 1920s. Chapter Two, evocative of Nils Gilman's work, explores how modernization theory came out of both this American tradition as well as contemporary American liberalism<sup>1</sup>, setting the stage for Chapter Three, which explores how this vision was repeatedly disappointed by 'nationalist encounters' in India, Egypt, and Ghana. While US policymakers and academics may have initially been sanguine about the possibility of modernization theory to vault these countries forward, by the mid-1960s, relations between with Delhi and Cairo had plummeted, and 'the Johnson administration watched with satisfaction when [Nkrumah] was overthrown by a military coup in February 1966' (p. 89).

As Latham continues in Chapter Four, perhaps sobered by some of these initial encounters (most obviously in Vietnam), American

modernization theorists, turned to a 'technocratic faith' that saw overpopulation, disease, and starvation as the core issues. If dreams of democratization and Third World alliances were out the window, Washington could at least manage a 'population bomb' of angry, non-white, post-colonial populations. While innovations in agriculture ('the Green Revolution') largely avoided the nightmare of mass Asian famine and some of the worst abuses of contemporary birth control programs, these technological interventions frequently produced unintended consequences. In Pakistan, for example, increased agricultural productivity, and the increased capital costs necessary to run efficient farms, arguably obviated the need for land reform and pushed impoverished small peasants into slums. (p. 117f.)

Moreover, as Chapter Five shows, in those cases where the US did support supposedly modernizing dictators like the Shah, Carlos Manuel Arana Osorio, or Nguyen Van Thieu, the results were arguably even worse. By the 1970s, as Chapter Six shows, neoliberal economists questioned whether developmental interventions – as opposed to 'structural readjustment', international investment, and fiscal austerity – were really the solution. Simultaneously, environmentalists and critics of income inequality questioned whether the obsession with 'growth' was worth the ecological and social costs readily seen in the slums of the Global South.

Yet as Latham concludes in Chapter Six, the end of the Cold War provided new momentum to the modernization project. Even if the rush of the 'end of history' led to a series of interventions – Panama, Somalia, Bosnia – which produced, at best, mixed results, the events of September 11th overwhelmed the short-lived American skepticism to nation-building. 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones', announced the Bush Administration's 2002 National Security Strategy.<sup>2</sup> The results of this policy framework – the wars in

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<sup>1</sup> Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future. Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore 2003.

<sup>2</sup> 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 'Overview of America's International Strategy', available online at: <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nss1.html>

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Iraq and Afghanistan – are, fittingly, where Latham ends his narrative.

As this summary should show, Latham takes the reader through an exhilarating journey. Yet I have two reservations about Latham's concept of 'modernization as ideology' as an organizing framework for the story of American-led development in the 20th century. For one, while any account of development cannot miss the influence of America's 'civilizing mission' in the Philippines, the American West, or even the Tennessee Valley had on Cold War ventures, I worry that Latham's focus on ideology may lead students to miss what we might call the administrative history of development: how was policy actually internally decided in Washington? How did intellectuals tailor scholarship or ideas to the bureaucratic apparatus?

Consider a few examples. In both his memoirs, for example, Rostow wrote about the extent to which he and CENIS colleagues labored to 'present its notions in ways that working politicians and bureaucrats could recognize as potentially realistic'.<sup>3</sup> Can such pragmatic thinking about 'policy relevance' really be reconciled with the claim of development as an 'ideology'? More recently, following the troubled experience of the IMF, the Treasury Department, and the World Bank in Russia and East Asia in the 1990s, former World Bank Chief Economist Joseph Stiglitz penned a critique of economists like Robert Rubin and Larry Summers.<sup>4</sup> Reading the piece with Latham in mind one might conclude that the real problem was neoliberalism as an ideology. That, surely, is part of the story. But insiders like Stiglitz concluded that the real problem was actually the administrative culture of secrecy that metastasized in Treasury and the IMF during the period. In short, while frameworks of economic thinking clearly mattered for figures like Rostow, Summers, or Rubin, neglecting the administrative and personal histories behind the implementation of development can lead to an account in which 'ideology' appears to flow with minimal viscosity from Cambridge to Washington to Vietnam, Iran, or Guatemala.

Second, I wonder how much we might refine our account of American development by putting it in a more explicitly comparati-

ve context. Recent works, from the recent edited volume by Andreas Hilger on the USSR and the Third World<sup>5</sup>, or Bastian Hein's book on West German development policy<sup>6</sup>, or David Engerman's 'state of the field' essay on 'the Second World's Third World'<sup>7</sup>, offer glimpses into how countries other than the United States devised their own development programs, balancing between pragmatic needs (the opening of export markets for West German goods) and ideology (most visibly so in the case of the Soviet Union or the PRC). Only by putting the American development experience in global context – seeing it not as something 'exceptional' but reflective of broader trends that Moscow, Bonn, Beijing, and Tokyo alike had to react to – can we really understand what was unique about it. This is especially true vis-à-vis Latham's claim of modernization as 'ideology.' Soviet economists and development experts, for example, were often surprisingly pragmatic about the development of the Third World – one thinks here of Ragna Boden's work on Soviet *Indonesienpolitik* – something that might only underscore a skeptic's account of how much 'ideology' really mattered in Cold War development projects.<sup>8</sup>

Still, these are tough criticisms of a book that accomplishes much in under three hundred pages. While one can take issue with Latham's 'ideology' paradigm and the lack of a comparative framework, *The Right Kind of Revolution* represents an invaluable teaching resource for scholars of development's history. The onus is now on critics of Latham's approach to produce an alternative history of this episode in 20th and 21st century history.

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<sup>3</sup> Walt Rostow, *Concept and Controversy. Sixty Years of Taking Ideas to Market*, Austin 2003, p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Stiglitz, 'The Insider – What I Learned at the World Economic Crisis', in: *The New Republic*, April 17, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Hilger (ed.), *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt. UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945-1991*, Munich 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Bastian Hein, *Die Westdeutschen und die Dritte Welt. Entwicklungspolitik und Entwicklungsdienste zwischen Reform und Revolte 1959-1974*, Munich 2006.

<sup>7</sup> David Engerman, 'The Second World's Third World', in: *Kritika* 12 (2011) 1, pp. 183-211.

<sup>8</sup> Ragna Boden, *Die Grenzen der Weltmacht. Sowjetische Indonesienpolitik von Stalin bis Breznev*, Stuttgart 2006.

Timothy Nunan über Latham, Michael E.: *The Right Kind of Revolution. Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present*. Ithaca 2011, in: H-Soz-Kult 26.10.2012.