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H-Diplo *Article* REVIEWS

Special Forum: Modernization as a Global Project, *Diplomatic History*: 23:3 (June 2009).

Contents:

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This special edition of *Diplomatic History* marks an important inflection point in the study of modernization and development as historical phenomena, broadening the study of modernization and development during the Cold War from what, until now, has been largely a U.S.-centric view of the phenomena, to a more comparative approach that, first, identifies the postwar U.S. mode of modernization as but one of

many flavors of modernization on offer,[1] and second (in part as a result), emphasizes that modernization was a fiercely contested process, in which modernizers not only were often inept, but were also resisted, co-opted, and fooled by the local elites and masses on which they were attempting to work their modernizing magic.[2]

As both ideology and process, "modernization" during the Cold War (and before, and after) has become the subject of growing historiographical interest over the last decade in part because it holds the promise of addressing a broad array of historiographical puzzles: about continuities and discontinuities across both the beginning and the end of the Cold War; about how historical transformation in the metropolis links to transformation on the periphery; about the relationship between "theory" and "practice"; about how to integrate labor and economic history, social history, intellectual history, diplomatic history, and political history; and (of particular interest to readers of this journal) about how to negotiate the move from "diplomatic" to "international" history. Modernization and development offer such hermeneutic fecundity in part because these were multi-year or even multi-decade projects that in different guises involved an enormous range of actors: from intellectuals to social workers to politicians; from industrial oligarchs to labor union leaders to peasants; from utopian peaceniks to revolutionary leaders to military counterinsurgency specialists. What I would like to do here is to clarify a few methodological points that the essays in this volume bring into relief, in order to clarify how historians of "the global project of modernization" can best proceed from here.
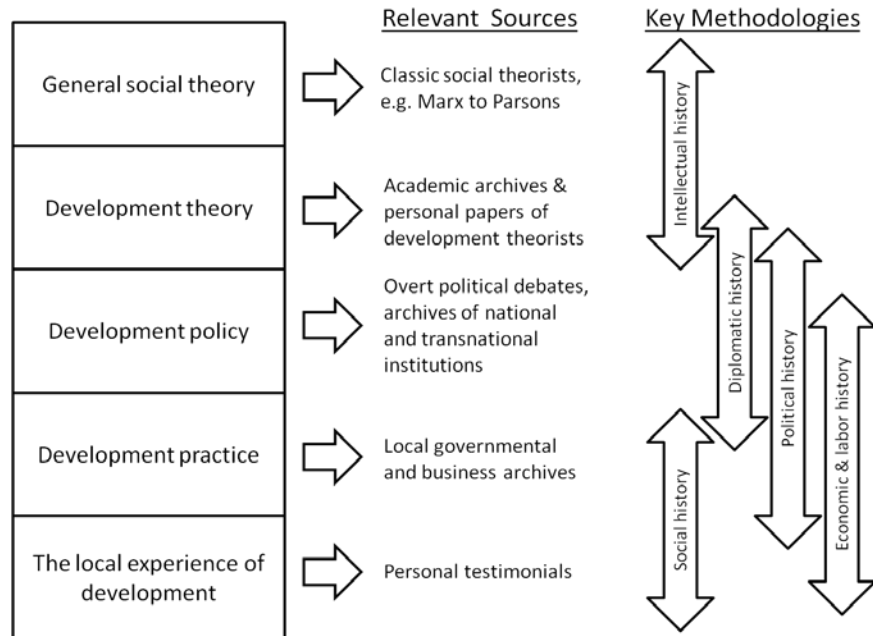
Recent historians of modernization and development have distinguished five distinct but interrelated elements of modernization and development: social theory; development theory; development policy; development practice; and, finally, the lived experience of development. Although interrelated, each of these subjects addresses a different body of evidence, and demands distinct analytic methodologies, as summarized in the chart below.

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[1] The "global turn" in the study of modernization began in earnest with the publication of David Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark Haefele, and Michael Latham eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2004) and has lately been taken up with vigor by Corrina Unger and Stephan Malinowski, "Modernizing Missions: Approaches to 'Developing' the Non-Western World after 1945," *Journal for Modern European History* (2009) and "Modernisierungskriege: Militärische Gewalt und koloniale Modernisierung im Algerienkrieg (1954–1962)," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 48 (2008).

[2] That first imperialists and later modernizers were often far less effective than they would have wished has become a popular scholarly theme of late, which one suspects has more than a little to do with the West's contemporary difficulties in promoting a renewed version of muscular developmentalism in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere as part of the "global war on terror." (Consider that a recent Freiberg Institute for Advanced Studies call for papers for a January 2010 conference on the topic of "Helpless Imperialists: Imperial Failure, Radicalization, and Violence between High Imperialism and Decolonization" received more than 100 paper proposals!) See also Jenifer Van Vleck, "An airline at the crossroads of the world: Ariana Afghan Airlines, modernization, and the global Cold War," *History and Technology* 25:1 (2009).

	Relevant Sources	Key Methodologies
General social theory	Classic social theorists, e.g. Marx to Parsons	
Development theory	Academic archives & personal papers of development theorists	
Development policy	Overt political debates, archives of national and transnational institutions	
Development practice	Local governmental and business archives	
The local experience of development	Personal testimonials	

Key Methodologies (vertical axes): Intellectual history, Diplomatic history, Political history, Economic & labor history, Social history.

Few historical studies of development and modernization play across all of these levels. Consider some recent historical texts: James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine*; Michael Latham's *Modernization as Ideology*; my own *Mandarins of the Future*; and James C. Scott's *Seeing Like a State*.[3] Closest to the ground was Ferguson, who focused on development practices and to a lesser extent on the local experience of development in Lesotho, using this narrative as the basis for a scathing indictment of development policy, and (largely by implication) of the theories which presumptively justified those policies. By contrast, Latham's book, which initiated contemporary historiography on Cold War-era U.S. modernization theory, deployed a nutshell account of modernization theory to interpret the development policies, mainly in Southeast Asia, of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, but did not closely examine how these policies played out on the ground. *Mandarins of the Future* focused on how Parsonian social theory informed U.S. modernization theory, and how this latter theory helped to define U.S. development objectives, but eschewed any discussion of how these policies were implemented or received in the postcolonial world. Broadest in scope (and, not coincidentally, influence) was Scott's *Seeing Like a State,* which offered a *longue durée* account of the emergence of "development" that connected a profound critique of the deep social theory subtending a wide ideological range of state modernizers, to the operation of local bureaucracies, to

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[3] James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

the local practices of peasants bent on resisting the "authoritarian high modernist" steamroller.[4]

While not every historical work can or should aim for the synoptic scope of Scott's, let me propose that historians should attempt to write more broadly across the various levels of modernization and development theory and practice. That is, the more historians range across different kinds of sources and methodologies, the more likely we are to write broadly compelling accounts of how modernization and development worked, and the more likely we are to find answers to the sorts of historiographic puzzles I mentioned earlier. Such broad and integrative works might be described as "strategic" scholarly interventions, in contrast to "tactical" interventions that focus mainly on one dimension of the scholarly puzzle. Within this frame, let me briefly discuss the individual essays in this volume.

Half the essays here—including Daniel Maul's on the International Labor Organization, Jeffrey James Byrne's on revolutionary Algeria, and Daniel Speich's on post-independence Kenya—present targeted histories of specific development policies. Maul's essay on the ILO's development policies under the leadership of David Morse during the 1950s and 60s only briefly addresses questions of theory and scarcely touches on implementation issues, much less the actual experience of laborers. Likewise, Byrne's account of the local and transnational context for the formation of Algerian development policy offers only the briefest nod to the intellectual context for those policies, or to how common Algerians experienced those policies. Finally, Speich's discussion of the contrasting development visions of Kenyan politicians Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga shows their struggle to reconcile "modernity" with African community values, but is oddly vague about exactly how they absorbed their "modernist" commitments or what those commitments were, other than a veneration of scientific expertise and a desire to build some sort of welfare state. Moreover, it is unclear from the essay whether these men's ideas or actions translated into any results on the ground.

Somewhat more "strategic," in the sense laid out above, are a second set of articles that focus on how development theories or policy programs were implemented programmatically. Jason Pribilsky's essay on Cornell's "Vicos project" in highland Peru in the fifties and early sixties argues that the choices that Cornell researchers made about how to implement the project can best be explained by their epistemic framework, specifically, their scientism. Both U.S. and Peruvian policymakers are oddly absent from the essay, which may reveal an important insight: that development, as it has actually unfolded, often took place outside (perhaps despite) any explicitly articulated state policies. Massimiliano Trentin's paper on the two Germanies' developmental competition

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[4] Then again, Scott's very ambition also opens him to criticism over whether he gets his story right at all these different levels. For two trenchant critiques of Scott, see James Ferguson, "Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa," *American Anthropologist* 107:3 (2005): 377-382; and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005): 140-142.

over Syria demonstrates that East Germany's gradual displacement of West Germany's influence in Ba'athist Syria had less to do with relative Syrian sympathies for capitalism versus communism as economic systems, than with the perception that the authoritarian political model of the Communists had more to offer Ba'athists bent on displacing religious and feudal authorities, on the one hand, and with Bonn's support for Israel, on the other. Finally, Bradley Simpson's discussion of Indonesia's place in global development discourse in the sixties and seventies makes a different point about the slip between the cup of development policy and the lip of development practice: while Indonesian development policy was cast in terms designed to please Western aid providers, replete with paeans to the virtues of democracy, on the ground, Indonesian development practices had much more to do with local political conditions, culminating in Suharto's establishment of a sanguinary "developmental dictatorship" after 1966.

While each of the articles in this volume has its merits as a history of a discrete moment of development policymaking or implementation, a "global history" of modernization and development must strive for a more synthetic understanding of how these different moments connected together. My own plea would be for historians of modernization and development to spend more time trying to compose narratives that connect theory, policy, and action, and to do so comparatively. I believe there will be two great benefits from such an effort. First, understanding how similarities at one level of analysis (say, at the level of development theory) led to very different results at another level of analysis (say, at the level of development programs), will allow us to untangle more fully the relationship between ideas and action, and the relative causal impact of ideas and ideologies as opposed to local condition in producing specific real-world examples of "development." Likewise, understanding how very different theoretical or policy programs (e.g. capitalist v. communist) may or may not have produced similar experiences for the human "objects of development" will allow us to critically assess the impact of the Cold War ideology on subalterns' material lives.

The second benefit of "multi-level" analysis is that it will help to clarify the theoretical limitations of earlier histories of modernization theory and development. In the early historiography of modernization theory, particularly in Michael Latham's and my own work, and in the historiography of "development" more generally, the assumption often was that the causal arrows between these different analytic levels in general ran from top to bottom: that is, social theory (e.g. Parsonianism) informed development theory (e.g. "modernization theory"); which in turn was used to create development policy (e.g. "counterinsurgency"); which then resulted in development practice (e.g. "modernization on the Mekong"); which produced an experience ("modernity" – or perhaps "genocide"[5]). Let's call this assumption the "intellectualist" hypothesis. Part of what made the
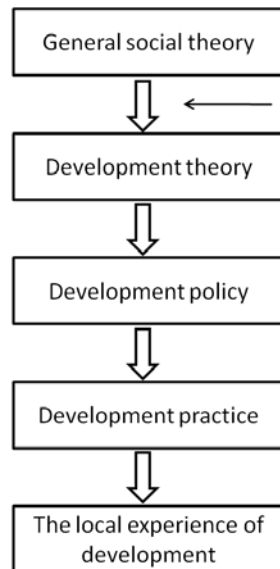
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[5] The reference here is to Eqbal Ahmad's quotation of an unnamed colleague of Samuel Huntington, who claimed that Huntington's defense of carpet bombing rural Vietnamese villages (on the grounds that it would drive the peasant population into the "non-Communist" cities), demonstrated that, "Sam simply lost the capacity to distinguish between urbanization and genocide." Eqbal Ahmad, "Theories of Counterinsurgency," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 3:2 (1971)

intellectualist hypothesis compelling is that many of the leading U.S. participants of early postwar development theory and policy, such as Walt Rostow and Robert McNamara (not to mention their communist counterparts in the USSR, China, and Vietnam), themselves subscribed to and promoted this hypothesis. For them, ideas came first, policies followed, and the peasants that were their object were expected to fall into orderly line. Of course, things in the field often didn't work out as the wonks had intended, but to earlier scholarship on modernization and development (including Ferguson, Latham, Scott, and myself), these failures spoke testified more to the bankruptcy of the ideas than to the nature of the causal relationship between ideas and action.

The essays in this volume revise this intellectualist hypothesis in favor of what might be called a more "reflexive" causal hypothesis. Taken collectively, the essays here suggest that in creating the total historical quantum called "development" the causal arrows ran *both* from top to bottom—that is, from ideas to action to experience—*and* from bottom to top. In other words, the experience of working with the peasant "objects of development" caused amendments to developmental practices on the ground, which in turn drove policymakers to redefine their objectives and methods.
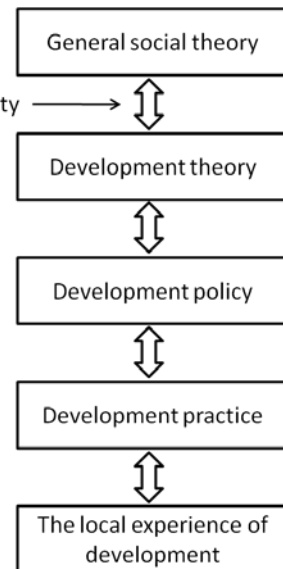
Bottom-up-driven changes in developmental policy in turn drove changes to development theory,[6] and finally, in recent years, reflections on the way that developmental theory has had to be revised in light of empirical developmental reality has percolated to the core of contemporary philosophical discussions of modernity.[7] In sum, the revised consensus seems to be: yes, the theorists and often also the policymakers

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[6] For a recent example of the revision of development theory in light of development experiences, see Michael Woolcock, "The next 10 years in development studies: From modernization to multiple modernities, in theory and practice," *European Journal of Development Research* 21:1 (2009): 4-9. Then again, modernization theory in virtually unreconstructed form continues to circulate prominently, as for example with the work of Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, "How Development Leads to Democracy: What We Know about Modernization," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2009). Ingleheart and Welzel's work is an almost cartoonish example of the belief, to paraphrase Peter Wagner, that epistemological obstacles are "solvable by methodological fiat alone, in particular quantitative-empirical research" (*Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity* [Malden: Polity Press, 2008], p. 137).

[7] For example, Peter Wagner, *op cit.*

wanted ideas to drive action, wanted to believe that they could treat the developing world as a sterile "laboratory" where they could run "repeatable experiments"; but that faced with the crooked timber of Third World humanity, intent on shaping the experience of development to their own desires, officials and wonks alike were often forced to redo their theories and justifications. Exploring these bi-directional causal dynamics presents a panoply of productive research opportunities for historians.

If there is anything about this collection that gives me pause, it is the apparent blurring of the historical specificity of "modernization" within the broader history of development. One of the key conceits of American modernization theory was its practitioners' belief that they were producing a "universal" social science.[8] In fact, as a broad literature now shows, modernization theory was a *particular* strand of a *particular* national intellectual tradition, in association with a *particular* political agenda, namely the application of the supposed lessons of the New Deal to counter Third World radicalism. By contrast, "development" (both as theory and as project) has a much longer and broader pedigree, stretching back at least to the nineteenth century, and continuing up to the present day, with highly distinctive features in different countries. Although the essays in this volume focus on events during the first half of the Cold War, during the most hegemonic phase of classic "high modernist" modernization theory in the United States, none of them address the critical question of how these other discourses and traditions of development contradicted, ignored, displaced, or capitulated to the uniquely postwar, liberal American flavor of social science called "modernization theory." Lumping these diverse languages of development under the label "modernization" risks capitulating to the bid for epistemological hegemony that the original modernization theorists proposed.

Accepting such hegemony is particularly dangerous when considering the level of development practice, where it makes even less sense to inflate the concept of modernization beyond the specific realm of American social scientific knowledge production. Even during the heyday of U.S. high modernist developmentalism, not all "developmental" projects were necessarily themselves manifestations of modernization theory. Many developmental initiatives during the Cold War (including even some initiatives by 1960s Democratic administrations) had little if anything to do with "modernization," whether as theory or practice. Indeed, the fact that the "causal arrows" run from bottom to top indicates the degree to which non-high modernist elements introjected themselves into developmental policies and indeed back into the theories themselves. In sum, developing a more reflexive understanding of the causal relationship between developmental ideas, policies, and experiences should underscore the historical specificity of the discourse of "modernity" within the broader field of the history of development. None of this, of course, is to say that the history of "development" is not an eminently worthy topic; rather, it is merely to say that the history of "development"

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[8] For a particularly subtle version of this argument, see Edward Shils, "The Calling of Sociology," in Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, Kaspar D. Naegle and Jesse R. Pitts, ed., *Theories of Society* (New York, Macmillan, 1965): 1405-1448., eds.

should not be conflated with the history of "modernization," that peculiarly postwar U.S. vision of development.

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—Commissioned for H-Diplo by Thomas Maddux