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Book Review of Contract and Domination & The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World

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Book Reviews

Historicizing Inequality

Contract and Domination. By Carol Pateman and Charles Mills. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007. 306 pp. hardcover, \$69.95; softcover, \$26.95.)

The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World. By Vijay Prashad. (New York and London: The New Press, 2007. 364 pp. hardcover, \$26.95; softcover, \$19.95.)

In distinctive ways, the two works under review grapple with injustice in an age of formal equality between countries and among people within countries. Prashad's book concerns efforts by leaders of the 'darker nations' to make good on the formal international equality achieved through political independence by advancing an agenda consisting of economic sovereignty, international peace, and a democratic UN. Prashad traces the rise of the Third World – a project to advance this agenda, not a place – details its weaknesses, and analyzes its demise due to internal and external forces.

Through eight place-based chapters, part one shows how the Third World project (TWP) was stitched together. Three chapters capture the essence of the TWP. Meeting in Bandung in 1955, representatives of more than two dozen recently independent countries issued a strong condemnation of racialism and established "one of the milestones of the peace movement." This meeting helped to shift Soviet policy away from a two-pole approach. The wealthy capitalist countries were less impressed, but six years later leaders of the darker nations convened in Belgrade for the first meeting of the non-aligned movement (NAM), the TWP's answer to the US-Soviet conflict. Remaining non-aligned required achieving economic independence, an issue taken up in the Buenos Aires chapter. Argentine Raul Prebisch and other development economists rejected for the darker nations the policies that the richer nations pretended to follow – free trade, a non-interventionist state, etc. – arguing that these would only perpetuate

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colonialism's legacy of structurally disadvantaging most of the world's population. Pushed by Third World leaders, this thinking received institutional expression with the establishment of UNCTAD.

Parts two and three analyze the unraveling of this program. The conservative social classes, never overturned because leaders de-mobilized the populace after independence, allied with external forces (mainly, the IMF, CIA, and US military) to block the social transformation necessary for realizing the promise of the TWP. Because this alliance of internal and external forces undercut economic sovereignty, political leaders turned to disuniting discursive frames (e.g. xenophobia) unknown to anti-colonial movements – which further reinforced the power of the conservative social classes. In developing this argument, Prashad considers the authoritarian state, militarism, mono-economies, and the role of the debt crisis in engendering “IMF-driven reforms” that eviscerated the hollowing corpse of the TWP. A chapter on the Asian tigers shows how the success of a few post-colonial countries created a presumption of possible success for the many, an idea pushed by the First World, but whose siren song drew many darker nation elites. The legacy of colonialism and promise of solidarity were wiped from the agenda, leaving each of the darker nations to go it alone.

This book would make an excellent addition to any undergraduate seminar on a range of topics concerning post-colonialism and globalization. Its engaging style and breadth of coverage make it a fruitful point of departure for discussions of inequality. At least two major issues would arise in any such discussion. One is the relationship between argument and evidence: the sheer scope of the book makes it inevitable that the former outpaces the latter, at times to a considerable extent. The second concerns what lessons and meaning one should derive from the history of the TWP. Prashad shows repeatedly how the pursuit of self-interest undercut the solidarity necessary to advance a substantive agenda; however, by emphasizing the failure to transform internal class relations, Prashad implies that such a transformation could have solved this self-interest problem. In a world where specific states represent specific peoples, the problem seems much less tractable than such a proposition would imply.

In *Contract and Domination*, Carole Pateman and Charles Mills build on their widely read works, *The Sexual Contract* and *The Racial Contract*. This stimulating book consists of a jointly written introduction, a dialogic chapter, and seven others that are individually authored, including two in which the authors each respond to critics of the previous works. In two chapters, Mills writes mainly about gender and Pateman about race. In

two others, they each write about the links between the racial and sexual contracts. In one additional chapter, Mills uses contract theory to make the case for reparations for African Americans in the United States.

Although both authors use contract thinking to theorize historical foundations of injustice based on race and gender, they disagree about the usefulness of contract theorizing for contemplating a more just order. Mills believes that Rawlsian contract theory should be reformed to take into account the history of groups written out of the contract, and on that basis, to theorize how a more just social order can be constructed by correcting the wrongs of that history. Pateman thinks it would be best to move away from contractual thinking altogether in theorizing freedom and democracy. This difference is reflected in their respective contributions. Pateman, for example, uses contract theory – specifically the “settler contract” forged in the European conquest of what today are Australia, the United States, and Canada – to argue that the very legitimacy of states founded on conquest is questionable. However, in both the dialogic chapter and her response to critics, Pateman argues against using contractual thinking to theorize the formation of a new, consensual order. Her basic claim is this: “Contract, in particular contracts about property in the person, is the major mechanism through which . . . unfree institutions are perpetuated and presented as free institutions” (20). A reader might regret that this work does not contain more elaboration of this claim, but one can look forward to Pateman’s future work on this topic and back to some key references in the bibliography.

Mills’ contributions aim to reshape the Rawlsian tradition of contract theory toward greater realism. In one chapter, Mills introduces the concept of “domination contract” to capture the kind of non-ideal theorizing that he and Pateman have done, and contrasts it with a mainstream contract. There are many important differences, but a crucial one is this: Historically constituted groups, and a system of domination among these groups – not the abstract individual of mainstream contract theory – are the basis of society. Mills builds on this analysis in a subsequent chapter (“Contract of Breach”), making a case for reparations. But perhaps the most analytically innovative effort is Mills’ chapter on “Intersecting Contracts.” Mills did not invent the concept of intersectionality, nor does he claim to have done so (as ample references attest), but he does make a convincing case that gender and race need to be integrated into social contract theory, and he shows how they can be integrated with a lexicon and detailed visual model for doing so.

Decades into the age of formal equality, substantive inequality has only increased. By historicizing inequality, these two works advance understanding of this state of affairs while also providing insights and analytical tools for thinking beyond it.

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