

Frederique Appfel Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin (eds). *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture, and Resistance*. WIDER (World Institute of Development Economics Research) Studies in Development Economics. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1990. 293pp.

This is a collection of seven original and intelligent essays which question the ethnocentricism implicit in the uncritical advocacy of modernization and development in non-*Europeanate*¹ societies, and argue for a greater sensitivity to their cultures. In the intellectual footsteps of Michel Foucault (1980), the authors show a special sensitivity to the power politics implicit in the generation of truths and theories of development and in the process of implementation of the project of modernization. Finally, the authors discuss the remarkable tenacity with which the targeted societies have attempted to defend their cultures against the onslaught of alien values, knowledge, techniques, and lifestyles.

In his overview, "Towards the Decolonization of the Mind", Stephen Marglin sets out the hopes and fears of the authors of this volume. Hope, that by decoupling technology from its cultural and political entailments, indigenous cultures may be strengthened, and the process of the dismantling of empire may be brought to its logical conclusion, the decolonization of the mind. Fear, that "If experience is any guide, the authors of the chapters that follow will, singly and collectively, be accused of promoting superstition, religious obscurantism, and even barbarity".

From a conceptual point of view, perhaps the most significant contribution of Stephen Marglin's essay is his critique of Arthur Lewis's venerable apology for the pursuit of wealth – not as a source of happiness but as the basis for the expansion of human choice and, hence, freedom – which has well served the profession for the last thirty five-years (Lewis 1955:421). Marglin points out that while development does add to the choice set, in practice it also does away (often irrevocably) with the choices associated with an earlier lifestyle. As a result, the choice of the modern over the traditional takes place with some degree of coercion, and no moral valuation can be placed upon the 'preferences' which are 'revealed' in this way.

In his two essays, "Development and the Politics of Knowledge" and "Modernization and its Discontents", Tariq Banuri provides a highly readable and useful critical survey of the vast literature on modernization and 'development, not just in economics but also in anthropology, sociology, and political science. In the first essay, Banuri notes the present crisis of confidence about the task of social

¹With apologies for the barbarism, the double adjective *Europeanate* is used to refer to societies located in and out of Europe, which exhibit features of European societies. The term seeks to improve upon unsatisfactory expressions like Western, modern, industrial, Europe and her settlements overseas, etc., all of which are in popular use. The coinage is adapted from Hodgson's 'Islamicate' [Hodgson (1974), 1: 57-60].

engineering so optimistically taken up after World War II, and attempts to provide an explanation of why what was written was written, and how it all came to this state of affairs. In the second essay, Banuri explores the cultural (especially, the cognitive) premises which underlie the arguments of the protagonists in the debate over modernization (as reviewed in his first essay), in an attempt to provide an alternative perspective on both the debate and the issues involved.

Banuri's contribution lies in demonstrating that the triumph of Europeanate theories of development, generated in a dialectical process of challenge and response from its proponents and critics, reflects not inherent truths but the relative power position of the protagonists. The links between power and truth, however, are becoming increasingly obvious. As a result, the cultural agenda of modernization and development, manifest under early colonialism but later concealed under the garb of social scientific truths, is increasingly being exposed, and hence more easily resisted. The conflict on culture, in Banuri's view, arises from the difference in the Europeanate and traditional societies in the valence placed on the personal and the impersonal – as a way of looking at things, relating to people and society, arranging the public space, etc. The distinctive trait of the Europeanate culture, in Banuri's view, is the absolute priority accorded to the impersonal in the Europeanate society (he calls it the "impersonality postulate of modernity"). Europeanate theorists have seen this tilt in favour of the impersonal as a progress from the primitive to the modern; Banuri would have us evaluate both the modern and the traditional (but especially the modern) as departures from a balanced mix of the two. The theme is picked up in subsequent essays.

Frederique Apffel Marglin, in "Smallpox in Two Systems of Knowledge", poses a challenge to "the entire project of modernization", by contesting the proposition that science is superior to the more traditional systems of knowledge. She does so by looking closely at the antecedents and consequences of the decision of the British government in India in 1865 to outlaw the ancient and traditional practice of variolation (*tika*) against smallpox and attempt, instead, to make vaccination compulsory. The main differences pointed out are that vaccination, which uses cow pox, is effective 100 percent but requires refrigeration; while variolation, which used human matter, did not require refrigeration but was effective only 80 – 90 percent – and the variolated person was fully contagious. The transition from an "effective, cheap, popular, and grass-roots method of disease control" (which was also integrated with local religious beliefs of the Hindus)² to an authoritarian,

²Given their sensitivity to the cultural issues and the central role that culture occupies in their analysis, it is surprising that the essays in this volume dealing with India do not distinguish Indian culture from Hindu culture. In disallowing Muslim culture any room in their discourse on India (including Nandy and Visvanathan's choice of three indigenous vantage-points on medicine without a mention of the *unani* tradition), they provide a good illustration of the coercive use of knowledge/power, which is not without relevance to current political controversies in India.

impersonal strategy of surveillance, containment, and control of disease (implicit in all projects of modernization, as argued by Banuri also) was of limited efficacy: it was not until the 1970s that India achieved the level of effectiveness which prevailed in 1865. Apffel Marglin's view that the traditional practice embodied "*implicit knowledge* of infection and contagion" or "*knowledge of some sort of viral infection and of contagion*" (italics mine) may not be acceptable to some scientists but her conclusion that "today's post-colonial governments have made the colonial governments' mode of thought their own", as supported with her insight and conviction, will be shared by most.

Ashis Nandy and Shiv Visvanathan ("Modern Medicine and its Non-Modern Critics: A Study in Discourse") provide alternative critiques of the medical discourse, first in its own vocabulary (distinguishing between the manifest and the latent critiques) and then from three indigenous vantage-points. Under the first, the manifest critiques, they address the problems of clinical iatrogenesis (diseases caused by medical intervention), the growth of mutant organisms (like drug-resistant strains of bacteria), the growing cost of treatment, environmentally induced health problems due to the spread of urban-industrial lifestyles, and what has been called the pharmaceuticalization of health. Under the latent critiques, they also address some of the issues raised by Banuri and Apffel Marglin: the shift of the medical gaze from the patient and his social context to the disease as a disembodied autonomous phenomenon. Then, they re-examine some of these issues from the alien vantage-points of theosophy, Gandhi, and *ayurveda* (as exemplified in the work of the Sanskrit scholar and physician, Srinivasmurthi), and find a remarkable convergence in both the modern and the non-modern critiques of modern medicine.

Like Apffel Marglin, Arjun Appadurai ("Technology and the Reproduction of Values in Rural Western India") examines a concrete event, the electrification of traditional open-surface wells in a village in Maharashtra, to assess the moral and political benefits and costs of technological change. Informed by a sensitivity to the historical context and a close reading of local (Marathi) texts of agronomic discourse, Appadurai finds that the commercialization of agriculture, induced by technical change, has not only disrupted the reproduction of community values and culture, but has also increased the poorer farmers' dependence on the cash nexus while depriving them of the insurance provided by a closer communal existence. The argument is not without implication for rural development schemes based on credit cooperatives.

The last essay ("Losing Touch: The Cultural Conditions of Worker Accommodation and Resistance" by Stephen Marglin) examines the role of culture in the conflict between the labourers and the capitalists on a meaningful organization of work. He distinguishes between *holistic* societies, in which culture (rather than the worker on his own) provides the meaning of work by the common consent

of the community, and *individualistic* ones, in which this is rarely the case. In individualistic Western society, the worker needs control over his work, in order to invest it with personal meaning. This has been denied to him, culturally, by the disembeddedness of work from its context of symbols and meaning; and historically, by the division of labour, the rise of the factory, and the evolution of production relations (in which the worker has sought to conceal his knowledge from his bosses). Marglin distinguishes between *episteme*, or analytical knowledge that the bosses possess, and *techne*, which is the knowledge of the craft and technique possessed by the workers. While the two are complementary, Marglin finds that *episteme* attempts to exert its hegemony over – and so displace, marginalise, and devalue – *techne*. He applies this framework to contrast Western work patterns to the symbols, meaning, and social relations which arise from the deeply embedded *techne* of the handloom weavers in Orissa, now threatened by technical changes.

“The point of my argument”, writes Marglin, “is not to glorify but to rediscover and legitimize *techne*” and, as he tries, to argue for a balance between the two. In practical terms, Marglin holds that, irrespective of the costs and benefits of the economic encounter between India and the West, “the cultural consequences seem to me to be much more clear-cut. If India is to build a society on the foundations of democratic and participatory work organization, it will do better to follow the impulse of Mohandas Gandhi and his kind to look to India’s own tradition than to follow the impulse of the ilk of Rajiv Gandhi to look to the West”.

Collectively, these essays, located centrally in the Europeanate tradition though subversive of its aims and purpose, plead the cause of indigenous culture against the onslaught of modernization. But culture, in the Europeanate tradition, is but “a way of preserving something like religion without talking about it”, “a synthesis of reason and religion, attempting to hide the sharp distinction between the two poles” [Bloom (1987), p. 197]. As such, the idea of culture, in its Europeanate sense, may itself be an alien intellectual imposition. *Din* (among the Muslims), however, may be a contextual translation, the closest parallel in the indigenous schemes of thought; and perhaps *dharma* among the Hindus. Thus, in exposing the conflict between development and culture, the contributors to this volume may have exposed the fundamental conflicts between reason and values [Kung (1981)]. In this conflict, their sympathy with culture will no doubt be seen by the secular fundamentalists as a triumph of superstition and obscurantism. Others will be much amused at seeing modernization hoist with its own petard.

Arshad Zaman

The Planning Commission,
Government of Pakistan,
Islamabad.

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