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Neil Smith. *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space.* Third edition, with a new afterword. Foreword by David Harvey. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008. xvii + 323 pp. $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-3099-0.

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The Geography of Capitalism in Crisis

Early in his introduction to *Uneven Development*, Neil Smith argues that the book's title phrase refers to "the hallmark of the geography of capitalism" (p. 4). He sets himself the ambitious task to explain this geography at multiple scales, from the urban to the national to the global. Writing in the early 1980s, Smith noted a widespread interest in uneven development, which he attributed to a resurgent interest in Marxism inspired by social tumult in the 1960s, but he found treatments of uneven development lacking in specificity and grounding in political economy. He situates his contribution in the context of dependency theory and world-systems analysis, arguing that his explanation of inequality stands apart through its integration of multiple spatial scales rather than focusing solely on the global scale. Capitalism, he argues, fosters inequality at all scales in an expanding pattern.

It is impossible to read Smith's book now without thinking about the recent economic maelstrom, and Latin America's comparatively successful weathering of the crisis. Fortunately, the new afterword (the book's second) touches on this issue, though Smith devotes more space to the Asian economic collapse of 1997. He affirms an intuitive truth, that "periods of crisis are also periods of dramatic restructuring," and points to the geographically uneven effects and influences of the recent economic crises as confirmation of the general soundness of his original theory (p. 208). In the main text, from 1983, Smith describes the impending inclusion of the Third World into international capitalism. In contrast to Marx's prediction, Smith observes that "Capital, rather than using the underdeveloped world as a source of markets, has instead used the Third World as a source of cheap labor, thus preventing its full integration into the world market." He goes on to ask, "Could a massive migration of capital to the Third World act as even a partial spatial fix?" (p. 209). The "spatial fix" is here seen as capitalism's attempt to resolve its contradictions spatially, through geographic movement.

Of course this question was (mostly) rhetorical and the 1997 and ongoing crises give their own answers. Readers will need to do their own work to systematically connect these processes and earlier ones with Smith's theory. He acknowledges that his book "can in no way claim to be a precise historical account of the complexity of uneven development" and he expresses hope that his theoretical analysis will be rendered obsolete by empirical studies that go beyond treating uneven development as a gap and treat it instead as a systemic feature of the logic of capitalism. He also notes that the "articulation of modes of production" is a historically prior process to the moment of uneven development under capitalism (p. 207). So the processes he describes pertain to the twentieth century and beyond. These are important caveats to keep in mind, since they provide a framework for reading the book, and they tell the reader of what Smith does *not* intend to cover. We get more detail in the new afterword, dated 2007, and the one from the second edition (1990). Together, these reflections amount to almost a fifth of the 2008 edition's text and they are in some ways the most immediately engaging parts of the book, since they provide concrete examples of the theories that appear in the body of the book in almost wholly abstract terms.

Uneven Development builds on the work of Marxist geographer David Harvey (Smith's doctoral advisor) and engages, as Smith puts it, both "the geography of politics and the politics of geography," in an attempt to spatialize Marxist theory (pp. 1, 133). History and geography have intertwined intellectual histories and Smith hopes to suture the separated lines of inquiry back together, to undo the split between chronology and chorology that began with Immanuel Kant. Simultaneously, Smith advocates

for the importance of spatial knowledge as a counterweight to what he and other geographers see as a more generalized preoccupation with temporal analysis. He argues that if the end of the twentieth century brought the end of history (a reference to Francis Fukuyama's much-parodied declaration), it also brought the beginning of geography.

Because he thinks we have a better understanding of the dynamics of capitalism than we do of the nature of space, Smith provides three long chapters exhaustively describing the ideology of nature, the production of nature, and the production of space. He casts these detailed explanations as necessary to understanding uneven development, but even apart from this connection, these enlightening geographical exegeses offer keen insight into the dynamics of societies' characterizations of and engagements with their material surroundings (though the overwhelming focus is the United States). Capitalism's rise, Smith writes, fostered a perception of nature as an external field, something separate from society, but another view exists at the same time of "universal nature," encompassing humans. These dual views persist, he argues, and both serve the interests of capital. The view of nature as external facilitates the ideology of the domination of nature; the view of nature as universal facilitates a discourse that depoliticizes social forces–such as exploitation in class relations–as "natural." Our contradictory understandings of space prevent us from recognizing that capitalist production actually "produces" space, through environmental transformation.

A key contribution of Smith's book lies in his explanation of the tension in capitalist production between equalization and differentiation, a contradiction that manifests itself spatially as uneven development. While neoliberal theorists trumpet the equalizing force of capitalism, the pull of differentiation exerts greater power. This insight, and the lesson that we should look at multiple geographical scales to track these forces, resonates with some work–Greg Grandin's and Aviva Chomsky's recent books come to mind–that indicate a sense among some Latin Americanist historians of the centrality of geographical analysis to understanding capitalism, especially in the twentieth century[1] Interestingly, "spatialized" historical analysis, or environmental history, has developed "unevenly" between the North Atlantic and Latin America. To generalize, Latin American environmental history (i.e., produced in the region) has been more integrated with social and economic analysis than scholarship from the North Atlantic. Latin Americans have shown a great deal of recent interest in the field and draw energy from the Sociedad Latinoamericana e Caribeña de Historia Ambiental (SOLCHA), active since 2003.

Given the dissatisfaction some have felt with the application of world systems analysis, for instance, to Latin American history (addressed by Steve Stern in 1988), Smith's book could be seen as one more sweeping theory with limited purchase for our region of study.[2] Since all of his examples come from the North Atlantic (except in the afterwords), one could predict problems with detaching it from that region. His modesty about the lack of historical narrative balances, on this count, with his claim that uneven development structures the context for production in places that do not yet have industrial capitalism, meaning the theory's relevance extends to areas that have yet to experience later stages of development. Claims like these raise the question of the model's falsifiability. Though Smith argues that development takes place unevenly at all geographic scales, an example of "even," or distributed development at a regional scale, for instance, could be attributed to the power of equalization under capitalism.

Smith's book could join Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Falletto's and Immanuel Wallerstein's on a graduate syllabus that grapples with theories of regional disequilibrium, underdevelopment, and twentieth-century economic history. It could also be assigned alongside selections from the burgeoning Latin American environmental historical literature. Undergraduates would struggle with the density of Smith's writing and with his assumption that readers are well versed in Marxist theory. Pieces of the book could also be used productively; the initial chapters on the production of nature and the more empirical afterwords could complement other readings from a unit in a graduate course.

Notes

[1]. Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2009); and Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[2]. Steve Stern, "Feudalism, Capitalism, and the World-System in the Perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 4 (1988): 829-872.

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