

Theory Talks

Presents

THEORY TALK #10

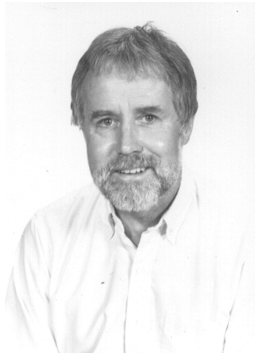
TIMOTHY SHAW ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BRICs AND UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Theory Talks

is an interactive forum for discussion on actual International Relations-related topics for both students and specialists. Theory Talks frequently invites cutting-edge specialists in the field to open a debate, discuss current issues or elucidate a theory.

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TIMOTHY SHAW ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BRICS AND UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL SOUTH



Timothy M. Shaw focuses his work on the 'Global South' or the Third World and the New Regionalism Approach. Based on his experience, Shaw challenges classical approaches to IR Theory while emphasizing the importance of the informal in International Relations. In this *Talk*, he argues that the future of IR (both in theory and in practice) will be shaped in large part by the rise of emerging economies and explains how Sub-Saharan Africa should be understood as a region.

What is, according to you, the biggest challenge / principal debate in current IR?

In my point of view – and I am of course influenced because of where I am and what I am doing – the rise of emerging economies, the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China and others going through a comparable growth), is very important; I am sure that they will change the structure of world economics completely. Already, the current crisis in world food prices can be traced back in part to the growth of demand which is pushed by these countries, and in part to the fear of the unknown consequences of this rise. Observers tend to express themselves in terms of just the economical or ecological consequences of this challenge, but such a change in the international balance of power does not have such a simple foreseeable impact: apart from world economics, their rise will change the nature of the global civil society and international capital flows, both in the North and in the South. The key lies in the direction these rising powers will look: will they stay 'south', do they want to become part of the 'north', or do they aspire to a little of both. That is not something economical, but rather cultural and, if you will, political.

Just to give an example of why this is very important: China has let over half a million of its inhabitants migrate to Africa, and is on its way to becoming one of the biggest trade partners of the continent, forcing Europe to rethink its 'good governance' conditionality in trade with Africa. This shows how fundamental it is to understand how the BRICS look at Africa; not only – but especially – for Africa: if they all adopt the vision China currently holds, Africa might not overcome its resource curse. Luckily, Brazil and India are different than China and Russia, in the sense that in those first two, civil societies actually play a role; if these countries show some kind of south-south solidarity (and I think they will), Africa's future might well be a lot brighter.

While China's benefiting from Africa is a complex issue, even more difficult is the fact that we in the West want it all: Russian oil, Brazilian soya and biofuels, African raw materials, a nuclear India and democracy and good governance in the rest of the world... How can you expect a consistent policy that reaps benefits when your objectives are so diverse?

What is your position or answer to this challenge / in this debate?

My position is similar to that of Goldman Sachs, which, in a series of papers <http://www2.goldmansachs.com/ideas/brics/BRICs-and-Beyond.html>, explains the potential influence of these emergent economies. As they state, by 2025, the BRICs may make up half of the GDP of the G6 (US, Japan, UK, Germany, France and Italy). Subsequently, we have to think through what we think they are – I mean, there's three nuclear powers amongst them (Brazil, Russia and India), all have transnational companies, there's two democracies (Brazil and India); and big part of the populations of these 'new spenders' have cultural norms completely divergent from ours. This raises very interesting issues, to which we cannot formulate definitive answers.

How did you arrive at where you currently are in IR?

I was born in 1945, the end of the Second World War, and have been heavily influenced by the context of postwar reconstruction and decolonization. It might be hard to imagine, but Europe was not a rich place. Through an early British NGO called VSO ('Voluntary Service Overseas') I eventually ended up in Uganda in the late sixties, where I got in touch with the work of such people as Dick Falk, Paul Theroux, V.S. Naipul, and Ali Mazrui, although I did not agree with the latter. The whole transition Africa went through started in Uganda; when Idi Amin came to power, and the economy declined sharply, I left.

Living in such a country in such a historical context influenced me heavily; I think I can say that my comprehension of what I call the 'Global South' came in to being there.

What would a student need to become a specialist in IR?

I think that to be a very important question. My advice to students would be: 'be global!' The world is bigger than just the United States or Europe. A good student needs open eyes, noses and ears. Don't get fooled and stuck into some framework like Van der Pijl at Sussex or any other. Here in Trinidad, where I currently work, I live in a multicultural context, while 80% of its inhabitants are catholic. That once again sharpens my sense of the power of worldviews or discourses that exclude others. My message to students would be: don't search for that Big Answer, because if you think you've found it and you stop learning, you die.

You're a scholar specializing in, amongst others, Sub-Sahara Africa, and co-edited a volume called *The African Challenge to International Relations Theory*. What's the biggest (occidental) misconception about African IR?

What I find especially affronting, is that in the North, there seems just to be one 'Africa', a pathetic and problematic one, a sort of lost Heart of Darkness.

I try to introduce people to the 'Global South', because there is Africa in Toronto, London, Paris and surely in Madrid. In some strange way it seems easier for people to accept that there is Coca Cola everywhere, that the North globalizes. Well, in the same way, Africa doesn't stop at the Mediterranean – even if they try to make it so. Global migratory forces will not be curbed that easily, just like you cannot pull a country out of the global economy. Actually, I prefer to speak about 'global souths', in plural, because they are everywhere, and different everywhere. 'Global souths' consist of culture, migration, religion, drugs, weapons, music – anything you relate to what makes up a contextualized human being.

The New Regionalisms Approach (NRA) parts from the observation that regions other than Europe, can and should be studied in a different way in order to be able to say anything about their meaningful 'region-ness'. Still, most texts about Sub-Sahara Africa (or on one of its sub regions) insist on negative tendencies: its international organizations are 'old boy clubs' and if something is 'transnationalizing', it is conflict, etcetera. How can we understand Africa as a region?

Europe can learn something from Africa, and vice versa. If you want to define what crosses borders in Europe, you take the Eurovision Song festival, Ryanair and the likes; in Africa, its rivers, language patterns, and religion who travel. In order to understand the regional integration of Europe, you have to find its roots, and they lie beyond the formal. What subsequently interests me in Africa, are its regional brands, logos, logistics, banks, and cell phones: it is the non-state actors that define it as a region.

I'll give you some examples. Take, first of all, the border between Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Some time ago, Ghana was richer, and people from its neighbor would flow in and out of the country, doing business, buying, establishing companies... Now, it's the other way around, and the Ivory Coast is now very rich, and because of their permeable borders, when one country is going down, business just as easily goes the other way.

Another type of example consists of the high number of East African companies, which transcend the national. There's East African Airlines; a regional newspaper, the East African Standard; tax is being collected regionally; companies and international organizations have regional headquarters; infrastructure is arranged regionally as well – people identify with those kind of things.

A key example of why it is so important to consider the informal, as does the NRA, consists of the new states that are emerging in Africa. Take Southern Sudan, who has diplomatic connections with Uganda. Somaliland is another of example of a nation, a country, that, while not recognized, is functioning – in this last case even better than its 'parent', Somalia. The Western Sahara is recognized by the African Union while its fight against Morocco is far from over. So this is a clear regional tendency, of regions that function very well yet they are very difficultly comprehended by formal standards.

There's a huge policy implication here: if you want to connect to the regional in Africa, you have to look at not just state, but also at media, the informal, and the market. In that respect, we can learn so much from business schools in Africa, because they have to deal with the African reality. But unfortunately, these schools are often considered by their world ranking.

As Basil Davidson has convincingly argued in his book *The Black Man's Burden*, Africa suffers from its national borders. Would regional integration (through, for example, the African Union) be a way to lighten the weight of these borders?

I don't think so. Borders are by definition porous and open, even if some states(men) insist in the opposite. Water, energy and languages are transnational, so by nature peoples and markets subvert borders.

There are a lot of people claiming that infrastructure lacks in Sub-Sahara Africa, which is why business cannot flourish and why humanitarian aid doesn't arrive. But in case of a

conflict, all parties seem to be armed immediately and with a lot of ease. How to explain that discrepancy?

After Idi Amin there were no cars in Uganda. So what happened: they started importing second-hand cars from Japan, and in a short amount of time, Uganda had wheels again. Also, out of necessity, they learned how to fix these cars. Another example. While Manuel Castells argues that there are more telephone lines in New York or Tokyo alone than in any Sub-Saharan country, there are more cell phones in the Democratic Republic of Congo or in Somalia than in New York or Tokyo. Like guns in a conflict, these kinds of things arrive when demand increases. So if humanitarian aid does not arrive, you should search for someone who impedes it from arriving: in the case of Darfur, it is clear that the central government of Sudan doesn't want it to get to the refugee camps. There is meaningful politics in Africa, and if you forget that, your policy will fail. Africa is not another planet. People tend to take Africa and look at it like it has this monolithic culture consisting of some fixed ethnicity, religion and linguistic identity. But any kind of identity is very fluid; these people also choose a cell phone company instead of another, because they identify with one and not with the other.

How do you see the future of Sub-Sahara Africa on a short term? More of the same or radical change?

I think change will come, because the world economy changes. In our globalized world, simple Neoliberalism is over, and the nightmare of the Washington Consensus is left behind and supplanted by an emerging Beijing Consensus. Now that Europe is rebuild, and the States is clearly over its peak, other countries get space and they take advantage by growing enormously – and the biggest growers are in Africa: Angola, for example, is going at a two-digit rate.

What would you *like* to see?

I would like to see civil society expand; not only in Africa, but in the whole world, in terms of more media, more think tanks... In Africa, we should think about stimulating the creation of an environment in which to flourish; about the international waters; the protection of African species, patents, and resources including cultures.

Also, I would like to see NGO's that deepen the connection between the Diasporas in the North to the South: Guinea Bissau depends for nearly 50% of its GDP on remittances! The British from Uganda care about what's happening at home, and could play a bigger role in shaping what's going on.

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- Faculty Profile at the University of the West Indies
<http://sta.uwi.edu/iir/staff/tshaw.html>
- Read Shaw's *African Development and Global Governance: Canadian and European Contribution to Human Development/Security at the Turn of the Century* here (pdf)
<https://depot.erudit.org/retrieve/1600/Texte-Shaw.pdf>
- Read Shaw's *Two Africas? Two Ugandas? An African 'Democratic Developmental State'? Or another 'failed state'?* here (pdf) <http://centreforforeignpolicystudies.dal.ca/pdf/fff-mbabazi.pdf>
- Read the Goldman and Sachs 2007 book *BRICs and Beyond* here (pdf)
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