

21L.488 Literature and Development
MIT Spring 2008
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Brief Notes on Theories of Development
(from class on Thursday, Feb. 7, 2008, and Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2008)

Marxist Approaches

- Karl Marx: arguably the first to see development as a COMPREHENSIVE process involving the economy but everything else besides: as the means of production and exchange change (the base), so do social and cultural milieus (the superstructure)
- Marx saw capitalism as the most advanced mode of production in history, to be supplanted by socialism in a final revolutionary event
- Saw capitalism as production for markets, ending always in accumulation of profits: the capitalist class owns the means of production and the proletariat sells its labor power for wages. Capitalists make profits, and appropriate them for themselves, often to invest again in innovation and growth for more accumulation
- It is a system premised on constant growth; when limits are reached, one must export abroad (hence colonies). Under colonialism, the capitalists don't trade with pre-capitalist societies, but plunder their wealth
- Capitalism is "progressive" in a historical sense: it is necessary for the development of "backward" societies, which need to be capitalist before they can be socialist
- The Marxist model is linear and teleological: societies not only do BUT SHOULD pass through successive stages before reaching their apotheosis in socialism

Modernization Theories

- also teleological: advanced capitalist societies are the models here, and others pass through "stages of growth" to "catch up with them" (to, in a sense, bridge the gap between the past and the present)
- Modernizers wonder how to bridge the divide between rich and poor countries; how could economies stop being traditional and poor and start being modern and rich?
- Modernization theories proliferated particularly amongst US-based scholars during the Cold War era (this also happens to be when development studies gained first footholds as a coherent discipline); they provided a rationale for

making aid, in the form of money and machines and knowledge, available to the Third World, accomplishing the political objective of preventing those nations from getting aid (and ideological leanings) from communist countries

- Modernizers learned a lot from distinctions between traditional and modern societies espoused by Emile Durkheim, who held that the transition from limited economic relations to innovative, complex associations depended upon comprehensive and important changes in attitudes and norms (and note, as well, how often a binary opposition between simplicity and complexity is evoked by modernizers): “primitive” “social norms” (his favorite phrase) would be replaced by modern ones.
- Durkheim claimed that in traditional societies people were more or less all the same – same values, same norms, and a “**collective consciousness**” reigns supreme. In modern societies people are tied together based more on their employment and “specializations,” and they are tied together by complex relations of need: in essence, I can’t make my own bread, so I rely on someone to do it for me, but I can pay them with the money I make serving other people through my own specialized expertise. According to Durkheim these divisions of labor mean that individual consciousness departs from (and then often conflicts with) collective consciousness. The modernizers position this individualization as a positive thing, but Durkheim wasn’t so sure: he thought that in complex societies people could become confused by “normlessness” – how to behave, when there are so many options? He uses the word “anomie” to describe the disaffection that comes from increasing separation from one another and from collective mores
- ISSUES with modernization theory?
- Well, it is too much based in binary distinctions, defining the traditional as the dark underbelly of the modern. Both become ideal types (in the Platonic sense) with no in between
- It is Eurocentric – seeing development as change towards social, economic and political systems evolved in the West
- It suggests there is only one “destination” for development; other societies are simply infant or deviant from the path toward the “modern” era.

Dependency theories

- The center-periphery paradigm is a kind of dependency theory (though not the only kind). It separates two sectors of the world economy: 1. the periphery, which is backward, with low production levels mostly, an economy based on basic resource extraction, and a small range of economic functions. 2. the centre or core, with a wide range of products, high levels of production all over, lots of manufacturing and complex industry

- Advanced central economies extract surpluses to share between foreign capitalists and local (“comprador”) elites who reside at the periphery (but in rich enclaves).
- Surpluses from what? Cheap raw materials at the periphery; lower wages; and when wages allow, for some reason the periphery demands imports (rather than local products...why?)
- THUS poverty and underdevelopment are caused by exposure to advanced economies
- underdevelopment is “intrinsic” to capitalism, which is hardly inherently progressive (even in the Marxist sense)
- societies are NOT traditionally underdeveloped (as modernization theorists hold) but get that way because of the SAME shared history that leads to the developed world being developed; a grand system

Debates Ensur...

- many feel capitalism has a positive effect on peripheral economies; and think that hindrances to development are internal rather than external
- There is no resolution to these debates, leading to...

“The Impasse “

- In a key article, “The Irrelevance of Development Studies” (1989), Michael Edwards claims that “development has become a spectator sport, with a vast array of experts and others looking into the ‘fishbowl’ of the Third World from the safety and comfort of their armchairs” (this resonates with Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room,” perhaps)
- Edwards’ complaint was that amidst all these debates between modernizers and Marxists the people remained objects of study rather than subjects of their own development
- He (hardly alone) thought there was too much distance between the researcher and local knowledge
- Also, the world was a different place by 1989. Why?
- No more “Three Worlds”! The 2nd world had collapsed. Also, in the so-called First World the welfare state collapsed, and free market capital was running rampant (Reaganomics, Thatcherism, etc.); and in the Third World issues of development were being displaced by basic questions of survival: there were droughts and

famines (as Derek Walcott's poem attests) – so, forget development, what the Third World needed was CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- As a result of thinking like Edwards', empirical research was starting to be more attentive to the diversity of situations in the Third World, and to the diversity of experiences, and more attentive (at least in theory) to the perspectives of local population
- Edwards' ideas relate to postmodernism (the subject for a later class), for which a founding statement is Jean-François Lyotard's claim that postmodernism is an "incredulity toward metanarratives," including the grand stories of Enlightened Modernity toward which development policy and development experts...ur, developed people.
- [Side note: a *metanarrative* is a grand or "master" narrative that tries to be a comprehensive explanation of history. Meta means "beyond" and, in a sense, a narrative is just a story, so a metanarrative is a story that is about or beyond other stories – a story that helps to explain all the other stories within its encompassing logic. Postmodernists distrust metanarratives, the story goes.]
- Literary narratives might have a role precisely here: recording unheard voices; indicating complexities and nuances; showing the real experience of development policy for societies living within it. Or, is that too utopian?

Sources:

1. Kambhampati, Uma. *Development and the Developing World*. Polity Press, 2007.
2. Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Masumi. U of Minnesota P, 1984.
3. Sen, A.K. *Development As Freedom*. Harvard UP, 2000.