Critical Social Studies

Editors: JOCK YOUNG and PAUL WALTON

The contemporary world projects a perplexing picture of political, social and economic upheaval. In these challenging times the conventional wisdoms of orthodox social thought whether it be sociology, economics or cultural studies become inadequate. This series focuses on this intellectual crisis, selecting authors whose work seeks to transcend the limitations of conventional discourse. Its tone is scholarly rather than polemical, in the belief that significant theoretical work is needed to clear the way for a genuine transformation of the existing social order.

Because of this, the series will relate closely to recent developments in social thought, particularly to critical theory – the emerging European tradition. In terms of specific topics, key pivotal areas of debate will be selected – for example, mass culture, inflation, problems of sexuality and the family, the nature of the capitalist state, natural science and ideology. The scope of analysis will be broad: the series will attempt to break the existing arbitrary divisions between the social studies disciplines. Its aim is to provide a platform for critical social thought (at a level quite accessible to students) to enter into the major theoretical controversies of the day.

Critical Social Studies

Trade Unions and the Media Peter Beharrell and Greg Philo (eds)

A Theory of Semiotics Umberto Eco

Capitalism in Crisis: Inflation and the State Andrew Gamble and Paul Walton

Policing The Crisis Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clark and Brian Roberts

The Anthropology of Pre-Capitalist Societies Joel S. Kahn and Josep R. Llobera

Theories of Underdevelopment Ian Roxborough

Marxism, Ideology and Literature Cliff Slaughter

The Two Marxisms Alvin W. Gouldner

Theories of Underdevelopment

Ian Roxborough

M
MACMILLAN

© Ian Roxborough 1979

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1956 (as amended).

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

First published 1979

Reprinted 1981 (twice), 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986

Published by

THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London

Companies and representatives
throughout the world

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Roxborough, Ian

Theories of underdevelopment – (Critical social studies).

1. Underdeveloped areas – Economic conditions

2. Economic development

I. Title II. Series

330.9'172'4 HC59-7

ISBN 978-0-333-21190-8

ISBN 978-1-349-16338-0 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-16338-0

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
1. The Original Transition	i
2. Replicating the Transition?	13
3. Internal Obstacles	27
4. The World System	42
5. Imperialism and Dependency	55
6. Social Structure	70
7. Rural Social Structure	91
8. Politics, the State, the Military	107
9. Revolution	131
10. Varieties of Bourgeois Revolution	142
<i>Bibliography</i>	164
<i>Index</i>	171

Acknowledgements

The most gratifying, but perhaps the most humbling, part of writing a book is to sit down at the end of the process and acknowledge the many debts incurred by the author. First, thanks are due to Adriane Thompson, Hazel Lewis and, particularly, Judith White, for their invaluable assistance in typing the manuscript.

Over the last few years I have benefited from the comments of a number of friends and colleagues, though not always in the ways they might have wished. While formally exonerating them from responsibility for the shortcomings of this book, I would like to thank Angus Stewart, Nicos Mouzelis, Chris Rhodes, Ian Buchanan, Ronaldo Ramirez, Richie Kronish, Ken Mericle, Tom Bossert, Cris Kay and Joe Foweraker.

I have had the good fortune to study with Nigel Harris and Maurice Zeitlin. Although neither had a hand in the preparation of this book, such merits as it may have are, to a greater extent than they perhaps realise, a result of their influence.

Preface

The principal concern of this book is to explore some of the theoretical and methodological issues which arise in the study of major social change, particularly as it occurs in the contemporary Third World. However, the central premiss of the book is that a critique of theory (at least, a critique of those theories concerning social change in the Third World) cannot be adequately carried out purely at the level of theory.

The central defect of a great deal of writing on the Third World is that of overgeneralisation. It seems as if many analysts believe that one can construct a model of an underdeveloped society and its problems, as though there were some unique situation of underdevelopment, and all empirical situations were merely variations on this ideal type. There are two objections to such a procedure. The first is that the range of variation among contemporary underdeveloped societies is so great that one might reasonably baulk at trying to describe them in terms of a single model. This objection is easily met by developing several models so that no empirical society is too unlike one of these ideal types. Indeed, one might reasonably question the utility of talking about a single 'Third World', given the tremendous range of variation among the underdeveloped countries.

The second objection is of a different order. The assumption that one can take a model of an underdeveloped society and thereby analyse social processes is ahistorical. It is ahistorical in that it de-emphasises two things. On the one hand, such a model plays down the importance of the changing international context in which development takes place. As the sections on imperialism and dependency (Chapters 4 and 5) seek to illustrate, the changing international context is a key determinant of change in the Third World. Change in the social systems of the Third World is primarily exogenous, rather than endogenous. Hence, all endogenous paradigms of change are inherently suspect.

On the other hand, most models of underdeveloped societies de-emphasise the extent to which the changing economic structure produces qualitative structural changes in the class structure and gives rise to changing patterns of class alliance which have repercussions at the level of politics and the state. The forms and histories of the class structures of underdeveloped societies vary greatly and form a central part of any explanation.

The failure of much writing on the sociology of development to consider adequately the above objections results in an attempt to develop theoretical propositions at too global a level. The literature on the sociology of development is replete with propositions of the type: 'the military is a modernising force', 'the introduction of capitalism precipitates peasant revolt', 'states in the Third World are Bonapartist', 'imperialism prevents economic development', and so on.

By and large, if you take any one of these propositions, there is as much evidence for it as against it. By treating the Third World as though it were composed of a number of essentially similar units, this approach ignores the varying and differing histories of the countries of the Third World. For these propositions to have any utility, they need to be made historically specific, both in terms of the development of the world capitalist system and in terms of the way in which the articulation of the underdeveloped country with that system has generated, over time, a specific class structure and set of political institutions with their own history. To explain, for example, the relationship between military intervention and economic growth, or between peasant revolt and the commercialisation of agriculture, one must first locate the society in an historical-structural model of the development of world capitalism and then focus on the way in which the specific history of that country has affected the interrelationships between social processes. (That is, the causal relation between the variables in a theoretical model will vary from society to society in a determinate way depending on the historical process of class formation.)

This does not mean that no generalisation is possible, that we can only write a series of individual histories. Theoretical generalisation is possible, but the process is a complex one. Until it is much further advanced, it would be prudent to be modest in our attempts at generalisation.

What this book sets out to do, therefore, is to examine some

common theories about development which are prevalent today and indicate the ways in which overgeneralisations need to be modified in order to produce a reasonably adequate historical and contextual explanation. The aim is not exhaustively to review all important theorists or bodies of theory. It is to take illustrative examples and use them to indicate what an adequate explanation might look like. Furthermore, the need for historical specificity has meant that I have attempted to support my arguments with concrete historical examples. Because I have worked primarily in the study of Latin American societies, most examples will be drawn from that part of the world. In general terms, I believe the analysis is applicable to most other parts of the Third World, at least as a methodological example. However, considerable substantive modifications are necessary. This is not a textbook on the problems of Third World societies because such a book is not possible at this stage of our knowledge. Nor is this book an attempt to replace one theoretical framework with another. It is not primarily an argument for the superiority of one particular set of theoretical propositions, though of course, there is a specific theoretical framework which organises the book. The main concern of the book is not with theory *per se*, but rather with a set of meta-theoretical or methodological issues, that is, what would an adequate theory look like?

At this stage I should say something which ought to be obvious. In this book I criticise a number of works; some of them, in my opinion, are quite poor, and others I think are excellent pieces of work. The fact of criticism itself says nothing about what I believe the merits of the book to be. It is through criticism that one learns, and it would be churlish of me not to acknowledge the great debt I owe to many authors criticised in these pages (and many others who have, perforce, been omitted).

Much of what goes under the label of social science plays an immediately ideological role. In many cases this is manifested in the nature of the language employed. It is unnecessarily obscurantist and esoteric. Its obfuscation shrouds reality in a mist of misperception and ambiguity. In some cases, recourse is had to semantic barbarisms in order to disguise a lack of substantive content or a confusion on certain points of interpretation. In this book I have tried as far as possible to dispense with sociological jargon and the private languages of particular schools of social thought.

I have not always succeeded in this. But I hope I have been sufficiently clear so that the ambiguities, errors and confusions into which I have lapsed are easily apparent to the reader. If indeed the emperor has no clothes, let this be acknowledged openly. Of course, it is my hope that this is not the case at all, and that in these pages the reader will find, if not a wardrobe of clothes for his conceptual armoury, at least the design and pattern so that he can cut his own bolt of cloth from the ever-changing reality of the world we find ourselves in.