Critical Social Studies

Editors: JOCK YOUNG and PAUL WALTON

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Dans l'oeuvre de la science seulement
on peut aimer ce qu'on détruit,
on peut continuer le passé en le niant,
on peut vénérer son Maître en le contredisant

Gaston Bachelard

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Preface

The recent development of Marxist approaches to pre-capitalist societies, a response in part to the general crisis in the social sciences which became evident in the 1960s, has elicited a growing multidisciplinary interest in the topic. Although the trend originated in France, it has also made an important impact in Great Britain, the United States, Scandinavia and elsewhere. This multifaceted movement has often been seen to be the emergence of a Marxist anthropology by supporters and critics alike. The reality is, however, somewhat different. 'Marxist anthropology' is far from being consolidated, the very concept may well be a contradiction in terms, and it seems to be headed for unavoidable fragmentation.

The purpose of the present volume is not difficult to discern. The editors felt that it was time for stocktaking, for making an inventory of the different approaches, themes and problems that have been encompassed within the label Marxist anthropology. It is because we are concerned with the future that we have decided to present a critical examination of the different lines of evolution up to the present. The book is critical in intent, since new developments must rest on a scientific evaluation of the past.

We are, of course, far from being 'neutral observers'. For a number of years we have been associated with the editorial group of the journal *Critique of Anthropology*, a journal which has been, we believe, a non-sectarian platform for the discussion of Marxist, radical and vanguardist approaches to pre-capitalist societies. It is therefore natural that this reader should reflect an involvement with this group. Indeed many of the contributors to this book have either contributed to or had their views discussed in *Critique of Anthropology*.

Although most of the contributors to this volume are, professionally speaking, anthropologists, the issues raised are not

limited by the strict boundaries of any discipline of the social sciences. It is in the nature of any approach which takes its inspiration from Marx to break disciplinary boundaries and aim at a unified human and social science in history.

The book is divided into two parts, followed by an extended conclusion. The section on 'Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production' contains three chapters especially written for the book, and a fourth which has recently appeared in the journal *African Studies*. The articles on hunting-gathering and pastoralism, by Jeremy Keenan and Pierre Bonte respectively, examine specific Marxist interventions in traditional anthropological areas. The question of the existence of a primitive communist mode of production looms large in the background of these discussions. The lineage mode of production represents a distinctive contribution of the recent French school (Meillassoux, Terray, Rey, etc.) and Joel Kahn summarises its main contributions. The final chapter, by Anne Bailey, is a brief discussion of the concept of the Asiatic mode of production, an area of research where work has been particularly abundant and polemics have raged for a long time. In this part reference should also have been made to the discussions on slavery, feudalism and peasantry, but because of the complexity of the subjects, the limitations of space and the fact they they are covered in other books we have decided to leave them out.

The second part of the book, 'Some New Directions of Research', also consists of chapters written specially for the book. Our aim here is to pinpoint a number of areas of recent work which we find fruitful, and which attempt to incorporate the progress made by Marxist anthropology in the past twenty years, while at the same time attempting to go beyond them and overcome some of the shortcomings which are set out in the conclusions. In their joint contribution on the problem of conceptualising women, Olivia Harris and Kate Young expose important weaknesses in some texts of 'Marxist anthropology' and raise a number of crucial points on the question of the subordination of women by focusing on the concept of 'reproduction'. Bob Scholte's paper is an impassionate and well-argued plea for a critical and reflexive anthropology, that is, a normative discipline aware of the fact that knowledge is not context-free. Joel Kahn's discussion of the relations of

production in colonial Indonesia is an attempt to combine some of the insights generated by recent developments in world-systems theory with a critical reading of French Marxist contributions to the analysis of pre-capitalist societies. Josep R. Llobera's article on the Durkheimian misinterpretation of Marx is an example of the new directions he is attempting to open up in the history of the interplay of the social sciences and Marxism. Finally, the paper by Kajsa Ekholm is an attempt to use the world-system perspective in the study of pre-capitalist societies.

In the concluding section, 'Towards a New Marxism or a New Anthropology?', we have tried to present the more personal view of the editors on the whole development of Marxist approaches to pre-capitalist societies from the early publications of Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillassoux to the most recent contributions and criticisms. This section analyses the conditions for the emergence of a Marxist approach to pre-capitalist societies, the main conceptual issues in this field, and then seeks to evaluate the main presuppositions upon which a 'Marxist anthropology' is presently being based. In evaluating these presuppositions we attempt to criticise some of the major shortcomings, and expose both economistic and positivistic tendencies in recent work aimed at developing a Marxist anthropology. It is important, at this time, to assess which approaches have proven fruitful and/or have elicited important research. But it is also of paramount importance to uncover the dead ends, to criticise the muddled conceptualisations and to exorcise old dogmas which appear in new guises.

The scientific enterprise is always provisional, nothing is acquired for ever. Marx's contributions to the development of a human and social science were crucial, but friends and foes alike have often engaged in polemics at the wrong level. The recent Marxist approaches to pre-capitalist societies have been, on the whole, a creative trend. But the dangers of reification and stale orthodoxy are always present, and there have recently been signs of complacency and dogmatism.

In the history of Marxism and the social sciences there have been periods of divergence, but also of fruitful convergence. A unified human and social science cannot exist without being inspired by the theoretical insights and theoretical contributions of Marx; Marxism cannot survive as a creative endeavour

without constantly borrowing from new developments in the social sciences. This book is intended to provide an examination of the way in which the particular relationship between Marxism and anthropology has developed recently, knowledge of which is essential to any attempt to move forward.

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