

Nohlen, Dieter

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Modernization and Dependence

An Outline and Critique of Competing Theories

by Dieter Nohlen, Heidelberg*

The salient feature of the theoretical discussion of development problems is still the rivalry between two approaches. An outline and critique of the dependencia school and the modernization theory is provided in the following article which also points out possibilities of combining both these sets of explanations in an attempt to overcome the dichotomy of development theory.

The large variety of attempts to elucidate development problems in terms of dependence and modernization during the discussion of recent years have done much to give these two concepts concrete meaning and clear outlines. On the one hand it can be shown that scholars adhering to either of these two currents are exerting an influence on the other: adherents of the modernization theory in particular have heeded the criticism from the dependence camp since the early seventies and refined, revised and even abandoned certain lines of approach¹. On the other hand however the dichotomy of development theory is now in two respects more clear-cut: through the assignation of the development-theoretical ideas of the last two decades to one or other of the two schools even when this seemed quite problematic on historical or systematic grounds and by the condensation of the different value assumptions,

premises, methods and explanation patterns into two distinct development-theoretical ideal-type perspectives.

As far as the first aspect of this dichotomization is concerned, modernization theories were originally a component of the theories of social change. They focused on questions of attitudes and behaviour patterns, achievement motivation and empathy, on the changes in behaviour patterns and the so-called acculturation process – the spread of value assumptions, technical know-how and capital of the developed industrialized countries into the underdeveloped countries. They set out from an essentially social-psychological starting point, varied this in the light of communications theory and later also considered questions of social mobilization and political institutionalization which meant that additional venues of approach were provided by sociology and political science. The approaches from this side constituted a more or less explicit deviation from the economic theories, especially from the growth theories. Through the process of the dichotomization of development perspectives the various approach routes were subsumed in the category of

* Institute for Political Science of Heidelberg University. – The article is a revised version of a lecture given by the author in January 1979 at the invitation of the Geographical Institute of Heidelberg University.

¹ Cf. S. N. Eisenstadt: Varieties of Political Development: The Theoretical Challenge, in: S. N. Eisenstadt, S. Rokkan (eds.): Building States and Nations, Vol. 1, Beverly Hills/London 1973, p. 41ff.

modernization theories. The theoretical assumption common to them which justifies this categorization is that the underdeveloped societies are approximating progressively to the developed industrialized societies of the pattern of western capitalism. This underlies all modernization theories. The basic criterion of development which was originally conceived as a uniform and unilinear process stems from the antithesis of "tradition versus modernity" which is characteristic of all segments and sub-systems of the developing society. Guided by the common problem perspective of all the modernization theories that all societies have to embark on modernization different scientific disciplines and theories deal with segmental aspects of this process, i. e. with social, economic, cultural, technological, political-institutional modernization.

Break with the Theories of Imperialism

From the point of view of "dependencia" – which came into being by way of criticism of and dissociation from the modernization theories because these are proving incapable of solving the development problems which they have identified – the relationship with the older theories of imperialism, and mainly the marxist perception of them, was the principal cause of the parting of the ways which involved a theoretical differentiation between modernization and dependence. The dependence theories were initially conceived as a follow-up or adjunct of the theories of imperialism, and for this reason some critics even denied that there was a separate place for them in theory. The dependence theories differ from those centring on imperialism, so it was argued, in that they focused on the developing countries whereas the theories of imperialism were primarily concerned with the laws governing the changes of metropolitan capitalism and sought to explain its expansion to the Third World in this connection. Several authors have therefore asserted that they were marxist or neomarxist theories. As such they could however be criticized from an orthodox-marxist point of view as being no proper theories at all

as they are not incontrovertible deductions from the work of the classic authors².

The basis for the dependencia as a separate theory was the growing awareness that marxism-leninism, and the leninist theory of imperialism in particular, did no longer suffice as an adequate explanation for more recent trends and developments³. To the Latin American analysts of the problem the object of social science was an analysis of underdevelopment: "The focus is on explaining . . . underdevelopment, and not on the functioning of capitalism"⁴.

This change of formulation is considered essential but does not of course rule out studies and theories on the development of capitalism on a world scale. The dependence theory began to employ new terms and conceptions which only a few authors still tried to support metatheoretically by derivations from the marxist classics. In general the advocates of the dependence theory left the intellectual acrobatics involved in applying the ideas of the classics to Third World societies to the orthodox marxists. One of the latter, Tilman T. Evers, admitted frankly: "If the historic parameters of these societies do not match the theoretical premises, this means ("only", it may be added) that application of the pure concepts is inconceivably difficult"⁵. Common to all "dependencistas" are two problem perspectives for which specific terms have been coined:

Specific Problems of the Dependence School

□ *Structural dependence*: The developing countries are structurally dependent upon the industrialized countries. This fact can manifest itself in different ways depending upon the sphere or level of the relations between the First World and the Third World in view. The structuralistic approach puts the emphasis on "the communication of the demand structure and the reproduction dynamics of the dominant capitalist metropolises to the internal sphere of the Third World societies"⁶ and thus on the internal consequences of dependence.

² Cf. T. T. Evers, P. von Wogau: "Dependencia": Lateinamerikanische Beiträge zur Theorie der Unterentwicklung ("Dependencia": Latin American contributions to the theory of underdevelopment), in: Das Argument 15, 4-6 (July) p. 439f. Communist parties taking the Moscow view assessed the dependence school as petit-bourgeois radicalism.

³ Especially F. H. Cardoso: Imperialism and Dependency in Latin America, in: F. Bonilla, G. Girling (eds.): Structures of Dependency, Stanford 1973.

⁴ J. S. Valenzuela, A. Valenzuela: Modernization and Dependency. Alternative Perspectives in the Study of Latin American Underdevelopment, in: Comparative Politics, July 1978, p. 544.

⁵ T. T. Evers: Bürgerliche Herrschaft in der Dritten Welt (Bourgeois rule in the Third World), Cologne/Frankfurt 1977, p. 40.

⁶ D. Senghaas: Elemente einer Theorie des peripheren Kapitalismus (Elements of a theory of peripheral capitalism), in: D. Senghaas (ed.): Peripherer Kapitalismus. Analysen über Abhängigkeit und Unterentwicklung, Frankfurt 1974, p. 28.

□ *Structural heterogeneity*: In consequence of their structural dependence the underdeveloped societies are internally characterized by structural heterogeneity; i. e. different production conditions (capitalistic ones, crafts, large landholdings, primitive collective ownership) exist side by side in a hierarchic interrelationship, with capitalistic conditions of production playing a dominant role⁷.

These two concepts are however derived and defined in various ways. This adds to the diversity of the dependence-oriented theories, and so do the differences about the sociological instruments for social analysis or about the conclusions for a development strategy. Besides there are terminological differences between the dependence-oriented theories.

Status in a Scientific System

At this point, if not earlier, the scientific classification of modernization and dependencia has to be considered. For neither can it be claimed that it is a theory. Both correspond rather to what Thomas Kuhn has termed a paradigm: they are basic theoretical and methodological convictions which determine opinions and value judgments about given facts⁸. To Kuhn the social sciences are however pre-paradigmatic so that it is possibly more to the point to speak of problem perspectives⁹. Otherwise there is – as Horst Büscher's essay¹⁰ showed – a danger that a "short-cut" Kuhn is used for the analysis of the development-theoretical discussion.

Below the level of these problem perspectives dwell various theories marked by metatheoretical differences not only between the problem perspectives but within the ambits of modernization and

dependencia. Starting with a triad of metatheories¹¹, we find an underlying *normative-ontological* development concept, especially in regard to the modernization. Crucial for the research process is here the *empirical-analytical* theory concept which focuses on data, logical argument and confutability of theories.

Predominant in the ambit of the dependencia perspective is the *critical-dialectical* theory concept, whereas the underlying development concept has also a *normative* bias. According to this theory concept data have to be interpreted in their historical-structural context; the thrust of argument is historical-political. "The test of the correctness of a theory" is undertaken "by a comparison of the description of the structural conditions and possible solutions for contradictory situations with the socio-political processes actually taking place"¹². Researchers working with the dependencia perspective in mind are however making increasing use of the *empirical-analytical* theory concept¹³. A further twist is given to the plurality of theoretical concepts – on another level – by the presence of economists and dogmatic marxists: the former are thinking mainly in terms of models when they speak of theory while the latter derive their theory from the classic authors.

This complex situation indicates how misleading talk of *the* modernization theory or *the* dependence theory can be. For reasons of scientific logic it is inadmissible to comprehend the "paradigmatic" maxims of the adherents of the dependence theory for instance, which determine their theoretical orientation and the corresponding problem perspective, as a theory and to use it directly for the explanation of historic processes in various countries and eras. This is one of the methodological weaknesses of the criticism of the dependencia by historians¹⁴; the dependencia is much more susceptible to misunderstandings of this kind because it focuses on macrosociological and structural

⁷ According to A. Cordova: Strukturelle Heterogenität und wirtschaftliches Wachstum (Structural heterogeneity and economic growth), Frankfurt 1973, p. 26ff.

⁸ Cf. T. S. Kuhn: Die Struktur wissenschaftlicher Revolutionen (The structure of scientific revolutions), 3rd ed., Frankfurt 1978.

⁹ Cf., e.g., J. S. Valenzuela, A. Valenzuela, op. cit., p. 543. Also P. J. O'Brien: Zur Kritik lateinamerikanischer Dependencia-Theorien (On the critique of Latin American dependencia theories), in: H.-J. Puhle (ed.): Lateinamerika. Historische Realität und Dependencia-Theorien, Hamburg 1977, p. 50.

¹⁰ Cf. H. Büscher: Handlungsorientierung, Bezugsgruppen-erwartungen und Erkenntnisfortschritt in der Entwicklungstheorie (Action orientation, group expectations and epistemological progress in the development theory), in: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 31st year, 1979, p. 25ff.

¹¹ Cf. K. von Beyme: Die politischen Theorien der Gegenwart (The political theories of the present time), Munich 1972; F. Nashed: Politische Wissenschaft (Political science), Freiburg 1970.

¹² F. H. Cardoso, E. Faletto: Abhängigkeit und Entwicklung in Lateinamerika (Dependence and development in Latin America), Frankfurt 1976, p. 215.

¹³ Cf. D. Nohlen, F. Nuscheler (eds.): Handbuch der Dritten Welt (Handbook of the Third World), 4 volumes, Hamburg 1974-1978; A. Boeckh: Interne Konsequenzen externer Abhängigkeit (Internal consequences of external dependence), Meisenheim 1979, and other analyses in: M. Mols, D. Nohlen, P. Waldmann (eds.), series: TRANSFINES – Studien zu Politik und Gesellschaft des Auslandes, Meisenheim.

¹⁴ Cf. H.-J. Puhle's reader, op. cit., his introduction and, in particular, the essay by H. Sautter: Unterentwicklung und Abhängigkeit als Ergebnisse außenwirtschaftlicher Verflechtung. Zum ökonomischen Aussagewert der Dependencia-Theorie (Underdevelopment and dependence as results of external economic ramifications. On the economic relevance of the dependencia theory), p. 61ff.

phenomena¹⁵; it differs in this respect from the microsociological and behaviourist research of the modernization school.

Dependence Versus Modernization

In the following attempt to expound the essential differences between the two problem perspectives, modernization and dependencia, use is made of ideal types. The objections to all such methods which involve misleading simplifications must be borne in mind.

□ *Demarcation of the Problem:*

From the point of view of modernization underdevelopment is an early stage of social development. Underdeveloped societies have the earmarks of transient societies on the way from the traditional to the modern¹⁶.

Under the aspects of dependencia underdevelopment and development are partial and interdependent historically synchronous structures in a single global system¹⁷. Underdeveloped societies are not societies in transition.

□ *Genesis of the Problem:*

The problem of the genesis or causation of underdevelopment is hardly ever accorded thematic treatment in the ambit of the modernization perspective. The fact of underdevelopment is taken as the starting point. Inquiry is made into the factors which prevent social change and these factors are considered to be in the main endogenous. Hence modernization theories put the emphasis on the internal dimensions of the problem. External influences are held to perform essentially positive functions (as exemplars, inputs, dynamic elements) but not to be important either for the origin of underdevelopment or for the development process.

According to the dependencia underdevelopment ensues from the asymmetrical relations between the part components of the unitary global system.

□ *Pattern of Relations between Developed and Underdeveloped Countries:*

In the modernization perspective the industrialized countries are the exemplar and end in view of the development process which is seen as "emulative"¹⁸.

In the dependencia on the other hand developed and underdeveloped countries play different roles in the global system: the former are dominant or metropolitan, the latter (depending on whatever variant of the theory is favoured) dependent or peripheral. They differ also in internal structure: the former are politically, economically, socially, culturally relatively homogeneous and autonomous while the latter are heterogeneous and heteronomous. In other words, the underdeveloped countries are subject to foreign decisions and structurally dependent.

□ *Internal Structural Problems of Underdeveloped Societies:*

As seen by the modernization theories, the internal structure of the developing countries is dualistic. There are modern and traditional sectors and modes of conduct. They exist relatively unrelatedly side by side.

The dependencia regards underdeveloped societies as structurally heterogeneous with great and growing disparities (in labour relations, capital intensity, use of technologies, income trends) between economic sectors and regions and also between particular industries and with a close but changing relationship between developing segments of society and others which remain underdeveloped. The structural heterogeneity abides in the fully capitalized parts of the economy, too.

□ *Strategies against Underdevelopment:*

In the view of the modernization school the underdeveloped countries duplicate by comparable steps the course taken by the – by now – developed countries. The pace of the development process is determined by differences in factor endowment and its activation (which can be measured by socio-economic and political indicators). The internal dualism is overcome through acculturation, extension of the urban culture, expansion of the modern sector into the traditional segments and areas, and full capitalization of the economy.

According to the dependencia underdevelopment is a structure to be overcome by attenuation of the structural heterogeneity through mitigation of the dependence, establishment of a homogeneous economy based on self-reliance and redetermination

¹⁵ Cf. J. S. Valenzuela, A. Valenzuela, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

¹⁶ Cf., amongst others, D. E. Apter: *The Politics of Modernization*, Chicago/London 1965; D. Lerner: *The Passing of Traditional Society*, Glencoe 1958.

¹⁷ Cf., amongst others, O. Sunkel, P. Paz: *El subdesarrollo latino-americano y la teoría del desarrollo* (The Latin American underdevelopment and the development theory), Mexico 1970, p.6.

¹⁸ H. C. F. Mansilla: *Entwicklung als Nachahmung. Zu einer kritischen Theorie der Modernisierung* (Development as emulation. On a critical theory of modernization), Meisenheim 1978.

of the exchange relations with the industrialized countries or dissociation from the world market.

Numerous Weak Points

The two theoretical schools have both come in for criticism – even from their own camp followers – on various grounds. The most important ones are summarized here:

The *modernization theories* are criticized on the grounds of

- Preoccupation with the industrial society of western capitalism as the exemplar of modernity.
- Analytical misconception of tradition by (1) treating it as a residual category of anything and everything that is not modern in which are thus subsumed a number of highly diverse socio-political structures and modes of conduct, and (2) taking no notice of colonial deformation when applying the concept to post-colonial structures and situations.
- Concentration of the problem perspective on the internal structures and endogenous factors obstructing development, and thereby distraction from the international dimension and external factors obstructing development.

Focalization of individual disciplines on segmental factors (achievement motivation ignored in studies of modernization theories employing social-psychological arguments, disregard of domestic capital formation as a hypothetical explanation in economically oriented inquiries) and a tendency to attribute underdevelopment to singular causal factors.

Lack of practical success owing to unrealistic strategies against underdevelopment¹⁹, e. g. the strategy of integration into the world market on the basis of the neoclassic theory of international trade regardless of the asymmetrical structure of the world economy.

The *dependencia* is criticized on account of

“Negative obsession with the traditional capitalistic development model not only by inflationary use of the term capitalism with invariably negative shades of meaning but by retention of the thus repudiated model for purposes of comparison”²⁰.

¹⁹ Cf. J. A. Silva Michelena: Diversities among Dependent Nations. An Overview of Latin American Developments, in: S. N. Eisenstadt, S. Rokkan (eds.), op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 245.

²⁰ H. C. F. Mansilla, op. cit., p. 92.

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IN DER BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND**

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The present study is to reveal the central bank policy's chances of influencing the monetary sphere of the national economy in the course of the cyclical trend. During the period inspected by the author these chances have changed considerably not least due to the altering framework conditions of monetary policy. The monetary policy principles have changed, too. Although the empirical investigation has thus been impeded the opportunity has been taken to examine a great number of monetary experiments regarding their effect on the money supply process. (In German.)

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V E R L A G W E L T A R C H I V G M B H - H A M B U R G

□ Vagueness in the definition of key terms such as structural dependence, structural heterogeneity, marginality, etc., and frequent shortcuts in the theoretical association of dependence, underdevelopment, dependent development, etc.

□ Lack of historical concreteness and particularizing differentiation; a tendency to propound rather general and in part quite vaguely formulated hypotheses incapable of empirical verification due to epistemological objections to their effective application; a tendency also to resort to unempirical deductions and mechanistic opinions as for instance concerning the role of the state (agency theory) and the native elites (bridgehead theory).

□ Exaggeration of the exogenous factors (dependence) as causes of underdevelopment; underestimation of the potential for development of dependent capitalism; undervaluation of internal factors, especially local class interests, with class analysis overrating marxist deductions and underrating empirical evidence; obliviousness to the role of the dependencia as an apologia for internal deficiencies and an ideology for the exoneration of ruling elites in particular which is used to obscure the internal class conditions by means of a foreign policy couched in nationalistic terms and claimed to be justified by the dependencia theory²¹.

□ No linkage between the theory and a strategy to overcome underdevelopment; indifference to the question how (by which internal class alliances) the supposedly necessary reorientation (e. g. dissociation from the world market) can be politically brought about; failure to offer concrete analyses of the situation and concepts for action (e. g. rearrangement of the dependent relationships into functions of national development objectives) instead of which instantaneous revolutions are apotheosized in a few cases on such assumptions as that fascism and revolution are the only alternatives²².

Since the two theoretical schools offer only partial explanations, it may well be asked whether it is not possible to combine elements of the dependencia and modernization theories in an "integrated development theory for the whole society". For the standard analysis in the country studies of their "Handbuch der Dritten Welt" Dieter Nohlen and Franz Nuscheler have tried to combine the investigative instruments for quantitative analysis employed in the modernization theories with the dependencia view of externally induced and internally transmitted development conditions. Such an

attempt cannot be faulted on the ground that in the social sciences, as elsewhere, "paradigms" can only compete with and replace each other but cannot merge – as is erroneously assumed in a shortcut derivation from Kuhn²³. Moreover, it is not even intended to put a new "integrated paradigm" in the place of the two competing problem perspectives. The aim is rather to probe more complex explanations by examining where they differ and where they link up.

Integrated Research Perspectives

Integrated research perspectives would have to include questions posed by either the dependencia or the modernization theories: on one side inquiry would have to be made into the causes of underdevelopment and the conditions which tend to perpetuate it in the typical relationship patterns of Third World countries with the industrialized countries and into their internal consequences; on the other it would be necessary to identify the endogenous obstacles to development.

We agree with Franz Nuscheler's view that the modernization theories can help greatly to answer the question "which abilities people have to acquire in order to be able to advance the development process themselves. They are . . . essential elements of a comprehensive social development theory"²⁴. It must also be realized however that modernization may have negative effects. It must be admitted that "in many peripheral countries modernization processes have been incapable of providing an impetus for self-sustained growth and structural diversification of the economy"²⁵. Mention may be made in this context of a number of processes – marginalization, national disintegration (and transnational integration of sectors and elites), overtierization, hyperurbanization, overspecialization of exporting industries – involving problems which have been taken up by the dependencia school. Integrated research perspectives would leave no room for unempirical deductions or for the attribution of complex problems to single causes.

²¹ Cf. A. Boeckh, op. cit., p. 61ff.

²² Cf., e. g., T. Dos Santos: Dependencia económica y cambio revolucionario en América Latina (Economic dependency and revolutionary change in Latin America), Caracas 1970; H. R. Sonntag (ed.): Lateinamerika: Faschismus oder Revolution (Latin America: fascism or revolution), Berlin 1974.

²³ Cf., e. g., H. Buscher, op. cit., p. 46f.

²⁴ F. Nuscheler: Modernisierung – Entwicklung – Industrialisierung (Modernization – development – industrialization), in: Grundprobleme der Entwicklungsländer und der Entwicklungspolitik (II), Vortragsreihe des Akademischen Auslandsamtes der Technischen Universität Berlin, Berlin 1978, p. 34.

²⁵ H. C. F. Mansilla, op. cit., p. 129.