Development & the Environment

Theories of socio-economic development and the role of the environment

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“

However, let us not flatter ourselves too much with our human victories over nature. For every such victory, nature takes revenge on us.

Friedrich Engels, Dialektik der Natur, own translation.



“On this river, so rich in magnificent natural stones, the explorer will find pleasure for a long time [...]. The animal kingdom, the plant kingdom and even inanimate nature are above the influence of the European and will retain their originality; their wealth will never run dry, and would even if Brazil's foundations were ransacked for gold and precious stone.”



Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied, 1815,
Cited in Lessenich (2016): Neben uns die Sintflut



Source: Ney Murtha | Banco de Imagens ANA

“About CO2, the question is not whether GDP can be decoupled from emissions (we know that it can be), the question is whether this can be done fast enough to stay within safe carbon budgets while growing GDP at the same time. And the answer to this is no. [...]

In sum, it is **irrational to hope**, against the evidence, that **our existing economic system will deliver the development outcomes we want** while at the same time reversing ecological breakdown.”



Jason Hickel (2020), Blogpost

> The reason that such large economic growth is necessary to reduce global poverty is that the world is still very poor. I think that those who don’t see the importance of growth are not aware of the extent of global poverty.



Max Roser (2021), Blogpost

Roadmap

The environment in four big theories of development

1. Modernisation theory
2. Marxism
3. Dependency theory
4. Post Development

Learning goals

1. Understand how ‘development’ and the ‘environment’ relate in popular theories
2. Learn how different theoretical vantage points highlight different challenges

What is development?

tweedback

Gather with your neighbours in groups of 2-3 people; talk about the following questions and post answers as keywords on the Tweedback Chatwall:

1. What does ‘development’ mean for you?
2. How does ‘development’ relate to ‘the environment’ for you?
3. What are the main open questions you have on the overall topic?



We will now explore these issues throguth the most influential approaches to development!

01

Modernisation theories

Modernisation theories: basic idea

- A (more or less) linear development in the sense of ‘progress’
- Modern society as a desirable state, realised only in parts of the world
  - Goal: realise this state for all humans
  - ‘Race for progress’ among cultures → ‘laggards’ can ‘catch up’
- Historical origin: “**catching up to Britain**” after the industrial revolution
- Earliest formulation: Rostow’s five stages of growth (1960)
  - Traditional society → Age of mass consumption
- Clear goals (Parson’s ‘**evolutionary universals**’)

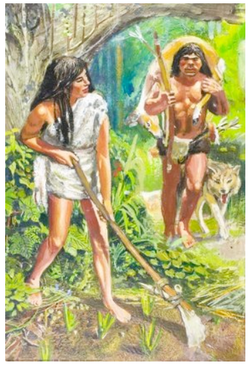
Democracy | No incest | Inclusion | ...

Modernisation theories - selected critiques

- Strongly **politicised** during Cold War, despite objectivist aspirations

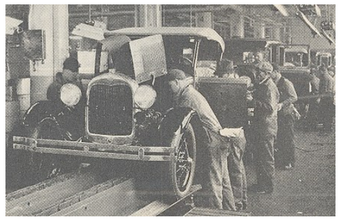






- Tendency for **ex-post idealization**
  - Neolithic revolution as beginning of civilization
  - Ambivalence: the beginning of hierarchy and oppression

- Ideals change over time
  - Example: Fordist model → neoliberal model in the US





Modernisation theories - selected critiques

- Strong focus on the nation state → ‘methodological nationalism’
  - Sources of ‘development’ to be found within a country
  - Assumes universal mechanisms and catch-up recipes





- Ecological impossibility of generalising Western living styles

Modernisation theories - selected critiques

“ Until the philosophy which hold one race superior
And another inferior
Is finally and permanently
Discredited and abandoned
Everywhere is war – me say war.”

Bob Marley, *War* (1976)



- Often instrumentalized in stabilizing ostracism and marginalisation scientifically

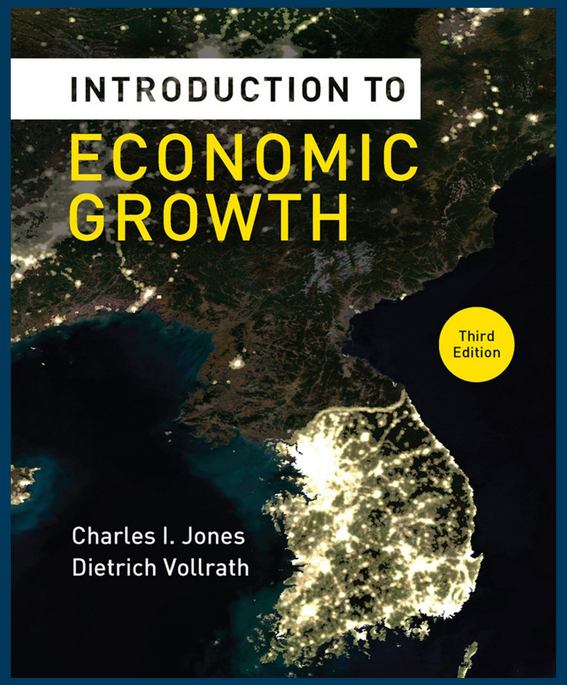
“Not only are poor countries lacking in capital and education but the productivity with which they use the inputs they possess is low as well.

[...]

Corruption, bribery, theft, and expropriation can dramatically reduce the incentives for investment in an economy, with devastating effects on income. Taxation, regulation, litigation, and lobbying are less extreme examples of diversion that affect investments

[...]

[A]dvanced countries are advanced precisely because they have found ways to limit the extent of diversion in their economies.”



Modernisation theory - Taking stock

- Sit together with 2-3 neighbours and chat for about 5 minutes
- Make notes about the following:
  - What are the most important key takeaways on modernization theory?
  - What did we not understand?
  - What is the role of the environment in this theory?
- Note your results and post answers to the first two questions on the chatwall!



02

Marxism

The core of Marxism

- The core of (capitalist) development is **accumulation**:

Replace capital by more capital! (M → C → M′)

- Marx focuses on capitalism:
  - **Pre-capitalist societies**: wealth was used for consumption
  - **Capitalism**: wealth must be used for more accumulation
- Capitalist societies emerge from pre-capitalist societies
- History one of conflict between classes
  - In capitalism: workers and capitalists
  - Ultimate state of development dispenses with classes → Communism

Commodification and primitive accumulation

- Requirement for capitalism: wide **commodification**, especially of labor

Only then workers...

can sell their labor such that it can be used efficiently

must buy subsistence goods on the market

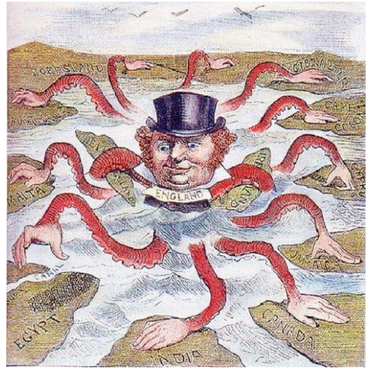
- Required violent expropriation in **pre-capitalism**:
  - Separation of producers from means of production
  - Enclosures in the UK: workers bereft of their lands → vagabonds without means to ensure their subsistence
- Exploitation usually without force, but violent exploitation in colonies

The exploitation of non-capitalist strata

> “Capitalism, even in its full maturity, depends in every respect on the simultaneous existence of non-capitalist strata and societies.”



- A non-capitalist sphere (“**Außen**”) to be exploited
  - Capitalism only works by exploiting non-capitalist spheres
  - Struggle among capitalists for non-capitalist regions → **imperialism**
- Broad interpretation of ‘spheres’: gender, race, the environment

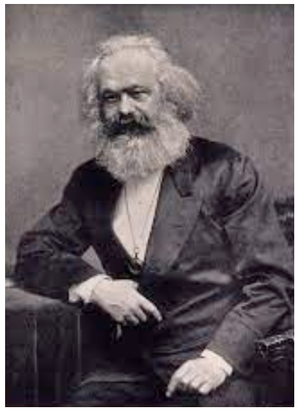


The role of the environment



Labor is the source of all wealth and all culture."

Gotha Program (1875)
Foundation document of the
Socialist Workers' Party of Germany



"Labor is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values [...] as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power."

Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875)

→ Nature usually considered a source of value that capitalists must exploit

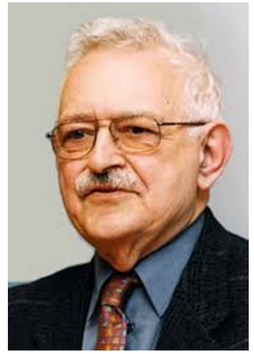
The structuralist character of Marxism

- Relevance of non-capitalist spheres for capitalism endures
- Marxism: **relationships of exploitation** are central
  - Brings them more to our attention than modernisation theories
- **Methodological structuralism**: skeptical with regard to catch-up processes:



> "The development of economic Centers, and the history of the underdevelopment of the Third World, are moderated via the international system, they are **complementary developments**."

Senghaas (1974, p. 18)



Marxism - Taking stock

- Sit together with 2-3 neighbours and chat for about 5 minutes
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  - What did we not understand?
  - What is the role of the environment in this theory?
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03

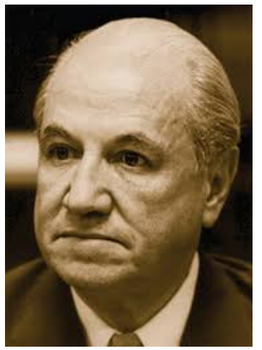
Dependency theory

The origins of dependency theory

- Origin: Latin America in the 50s and 60s
- Response to the failure of Latin American countries to ‘catch-up’
- Historical context: crises in the 1930s, dependence on colonial states
- The focus was on countries of the Global South
  - Vantage point different to modernisation theories → **interdependencies**
- Main critique: infeasibility to repeat ‘Western successes’ in Latin America

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

CEPAL, founded in 1948



Raul Prebisch

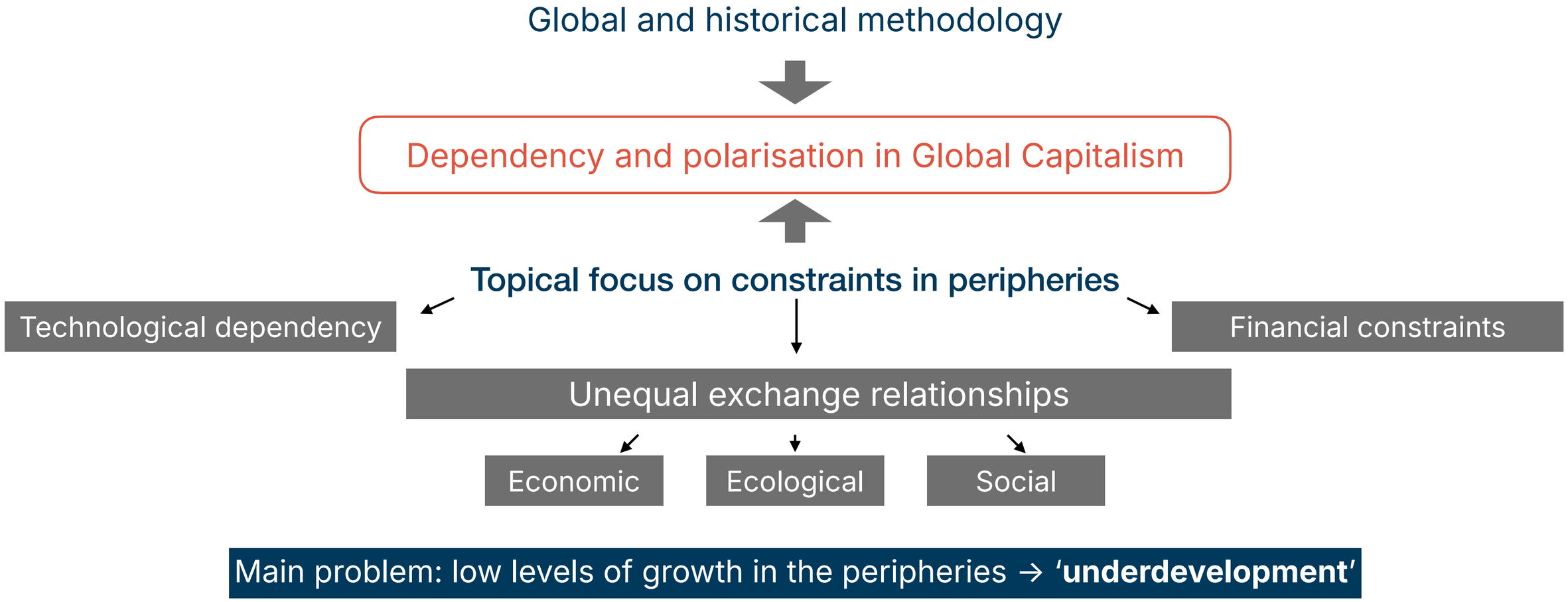
Dependency as a critique of modernity

> “[dependency is] a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another.”
>
> Dos Santos (1970, p. 231)

Development in LA only understandable against the historical genesis of dependency, especially through colonialism → Critique of positivist research approach

The unequal relationships between core and periphery countries determine the development prospects of the latter → Critique of methodological nationalism

The core tenets of dependency theory



Taking stock

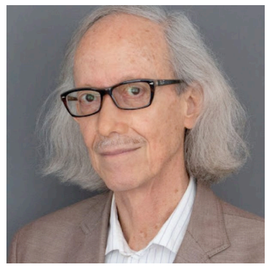
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- Make notes about the following:
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04

Post-Development

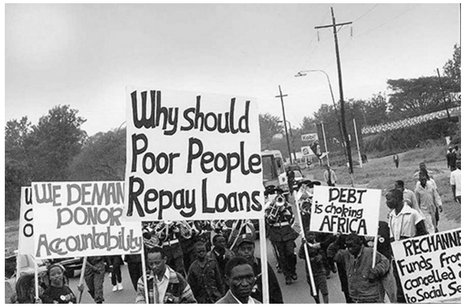
The vantage point



> [We] are interested not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development, and that is, **the rejection of the entire paradigm**."
>
> Arturo Escobar (1995, p. 215)



- Emerges during the second half of the 1980s
  - Development aid fundamentally questioned
  - 1970s and 1980s: 'Lost Decades of Development'
  - Structural adjustment programs by IMF and the World Bank
- Questions the idea of 'development' itself
  - 'Development' as a social construct → Used to establish a hierarchy
  - Construction of the Western state as the ideal → domination of alternatives



> The ‘treatment of nature as a resource which **acquires value only in exploitation for economic growth** has been central to the project of development’ and is certainly not unrelated to the ‘fundamental dichotomizing between male and female, mind and matter, objective and subjective, the rational and the emotional’ which has been a central feature of European modernity at least since Bacon.”



Vandana Shiva (1992)

Eco-Feminism as an influential movement within the discourse

“

Skeptical PD does not generally reject all elements of modernity but promotes cultural hybridization, is critical towards cultural traditions, abstains from articulating desirable models of society and employs a dynamic, constructivist concept of culture.

Neo-populist PD does reject modern industrial society altogether and promotes the return to (often idealized) subsistence communities, employing an essentialist concept of culture.



Whereas sceptical PD thus leads to a radical democratic position, neo-populist PD potentially has reactionary consequences.

Aram Ziai (2015)

The PD movement is heterogeneous!

Key aspects of Post Development

- An academic as well as activist field
  - High relevance of local communities (‘grassroots’)
  - Both as actors, as well as contributors of knowledge (embodied in practices)
- It is here where ‘alternatives to development’ are produced
- Critisized as a romanticisation of hierarchical and patriarchal systems
- Attention on implications of ‘development’ as a discurse and practice
- Related: post-colonial studies as analysis of enduring practices of domination

Post Development - Taking stock

- Sit together with 2-3 neighbours and chat for about 5 minutes
- Make notes about the following:
  - What are the most important key takeaways on post development?
  - What did we not understand?
  - What is the role of the environment in this theory?
- Note your results and post answers to the first two questions on the chatwall!



05

Summary & Outlook

Taking stock

- Four influential theories (or ‘approaches’) on ‘development’ and the environment
- Many policy views continue to be influenced by them
- To wrap up, gather in groups and discuss the following table:

Taking stock

	Modernisation theories	Marxism	Dependency theories	Post-Development
Idea of progress				
Methodological focus				
Possibility for Catch-Up / Global Equality				
Role of the environment				
Core topoi				

Taking stock

	Modernisation theories	Marxism	Dependency theories	Post-Development
Idea of progress	Linear	Stages	Non-linear	Non-linear, no universals
Methodological focus	Nation states	Mainly classes, also practices	Structures, relations	Communities
Possibility for Catch-Up / Global Equality	Possible and desirable	Contested	Impossible	Rejection of catch-up, endorsement of equality
Role of the environment	Mean to the end of development	Non-capitalist sphere to be exploited	Valuable sphere, subject to extractivism	Valuable in itself, fundamentally important
Core topoi	National institutions	Exploitation relationships	Structural dependencies, unequal exchange	Normative reference points, sufficiency, public vs. private services

Outlook

- Development and the environment linked via the **twin challenge of social and ecological problems**
- A wide array of environmental and developmental indicators
- The choice of indicators depends on ones theoretical vantage points
- Usually related to one of the general approaches to development
- **Goal**: approach twin challenge in a pluralist way → comprehensive & balanced
- You'll never be neutral, but you can be **explicit** and **self-reflexive**