

Requiem or New Agenda for Third World Studies?

Author(s): Tony Smith

Source: *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Jul., 1985), pp. 532-561

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2010343>

Accessed: 21-01-2018 21:01 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *World Politics*

JSTOR

REQUIEM OR NEW AGENDA FOR THIRD WORLD STUDIES?

By TONY SMITH

THANKS to the vigor of the dependency school's attack on the established "developmentalist" framework for studying change in the Third World, debates going on today in development studies are perhaps the most interesting and important in the field of comparative politics. The debates are interesting because, both methodologically and substantively, a wide range of new issues has been raised in a field that by around 1970 had become relatively moribund. They are important because, in the Third World especially, the mainstream developmentalist models earlier formulated in the United States—such as those sponsored by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC)—have been angrily discarded by many in favor of politically explosive explanations of underdevelopment that lay the manifold problems of these areas squarely at the feet of Western imperialism (and, in the case of the Latin Americanists heading this school, at the doorstep of Washington in particular). Thus, there are acutely perceived moral and political dimensions to this clash of paradigms for the study of Third World development, beyond the intellectual, or academic, interest that such controversy is sure to excite.

No matter how interesting and important these debates, it should be apparent that the field of Third World studies is in a state of crisis. For if the old-time religion preached by the American academic establishment has been found wanting in many respects, the new fundamentalism represented by the dependency school offers scant reassurance that a compelling new intellectual vision, with a broadly accepted set of assumptions as to what questions should be asked and how they might be answered, will soon become widely accepted. To be sure, many of the Old Guard, as well as the Young Turks writing from the dependency perspective, will deny that a crisis exists; and the continued pursuit of traditional concerns in Third World studies—ranging from the analysis of alternative paths of economic development to that of different forms of political legitimacy—may provide the appearance that they are correct, that a healthy field of development studies continues to flourish whatever (and perhaps because of) the rivalries between the dependency and developmentalist paradigms. But for those outside these charmed circles, it seems evident that the emperor wears no clothes; that no matter how

vital the debate over particular topics may indeed remain, a broad, relatively unified field of comparative study focused on the Third World no longer exists in satisfactory form. The question, then, is whether the current crisis will open the door for a fresh synthesis of work in the area, a new agenda in comparative studies, or whether instead we had better write a requiem for the effort to see the Third World in terms of any meaningful whole, having by now become rightly suspicious of the intellectual baggage accumulated by 30 years or more of "grand theory."

The first three sections of this essay lay out in schematic form the character of the current crisis; the fourth discusses what form a new agenda for the field might take.

I. THE DEVELOPMENTALIST MODEL

The field of development studies, which has always been dominated by American academics, was founded in the first years after World War II, when the United States assumed leadership of a ravaged world in which the problems of containing the Soviet Union and dealing with national liberation movements throughout much of Asia and Africa were the country's top foreign policy priorities. From the beginning, the divisions among the academic disciplines and the avowedly eclectic concerns of many working in the field made it difficult to label developmentalism a "school." Area specialization constituted one line of differentiation among these scholars, but formal training in economics and political science—as well as in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and history—tended to create other distinctions in interest and method as well. And yet, a field of study certainly existed. Formal mechanisms such as the SSRC pulled these analysts together as a group, but more informal ties also held them together: their familiarity with each other's work through their association at the country's leading universities, and their conscious effort in a larger sense to see their work as complementary, each cultivating a different vineyard for the sake of a common harvest. Thus, while economists laid out models of how productivity in the late-industrializing world might be stimulated, sociologists and social psychologists studied the group dynamics of change, and political scientists devoted themselves to the problems of state and nation-building. Whatever the rough edges, the result was indeed a unified and cumulative agenda for Third World studies, a "whole" of intellectual discourse both theoretically and empirically.

The life span of the school might be variously dated, but there seems

to be some agreement that it began after 1945, that it had what might be called its "Golden Decade" for economists in the 1950s and for political scientists from the late 1950s until the late 1960s, and that it ran out of steam in the early 1970s. Writing in 1975, Samuel Huntington and Jorge Domínguez, two political scientists, professed to find nothing particularly surprising about the fact that "in the early 1970's the initial surge, which had emerged about 1960, in the study of political development had about run its course." It was the fate of any theoretical paradigm, they maintained, to go through a set stage of phases (note the usage even here of a developmentalist style of reasoning) where an "initial surge" was typically followed by a "pause," "redirection," and a "new surge."¹ In 1983, Gabriel Almond, one of the fathers of political developmentalism, attributed the school's stagnation more to the motivation of those working in it: "Over time as the new and developing nations encountered difficulties and turned largely to authoritarian and military regimes, the optimism and hopefulness faded, and along with it interest, productivity, and creativity abated."² The developmentalist economist Albert Hirschman voiced a similar lament in 1980: "As an observer and long-time participant I cannot help feeling that the old liveliness is no longer there, that new ideas are ever harder to come by and that the field is not adequately reproducing itself."³ Hirschman's explanation of the school's failure was more self-critical than those of his colleagues in political science (reflecting perhaps a professional difference: economists frequently pride themselves on being mavericks, while political scientists are more likely to think of themselves as team players). Trying to explain the end of the earlier "easy self-confidence" and the rise of "self-doubt," Hirschman looked not only at the disappointments that developmentalists faced in dealing with the increasingly intractable problems of the South, but also at the weakness of the theoretical models they had used in their efforts to explain and influence events:

The story of development economics ... tells of progress on condition that intellectual progress is defined as the gradual loss of certainty, as the slow mapping out of the extent of our ignorance, which was previously hidden by an initial certainty parading as paradigm.⁴

¹ Samuel P. Huntington and Jorge I. Domínguez, "Political Development," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. 3: *Macropolitical Theory* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 90.

² Gabriel Almond, "Comparative Politics and Political Development: A Historical Perspective," Joint Seminar on Political Development, Harvard - Massachusetts Institute of Technology, October 26, 1983, p. 7.

³ Hirschman, *Essays in Trespassing: Economics to Politics and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

Yet the early objectives of the developmentalist school were sensible enough, even if ambitious. They sought first to specify general categories which, despite their universality, would allow analysts to distinguish essential elements of the chief social processes that interested them; or, alternatively, to differentiate various types of social organization and stages, or sequences, in their development. These general categories were to be heuristic tools, "metatheoretical" classificatory schemes, promoted most successfully by Talcott Parsons along the lines of Max Weber's ideal types. Such models or paradigms of social action were labeled "structural-functionalism" in sociology and political science, and were intended to be both basic and comprehensive enough to provide the vocabulary and concepts allowing any society to be described in comparative terms. Thus the individuality and the specificity of the various forms of social life in Africa, Asia, and Latin America would be respected, while these lands would at the same time be recognizable comparatively (in terms of the advanced industrial countries as well as of each other).

Hirschman may have been correct when he maintained that "the compulsion to theorize . . . is often so strong as to induce mindlessness."⁵ But the effort in question must be understood to lie at the heart of the social sciences, concerned as they are to establish general verifiable explanations of human action. Led particularly by sociologists like Parsons, and working on the basis of earlier men of genius such as Durkheim, Toennies, and especially Weber, the developmentalist school was deliberately doing what was expected of it. And, as we shall see presently, the Marxists in their efforts to offer a better analysis of the Third World than that of the developmentalists were engaged in a strikingly similar heuristic undertaking.

Although the descendants of Weber and Marx were alike in their concern with establishing a general framework for comparative historical analysis, the similarity ended there. For, whereas the Marxists held to a single analytical category in their belief that the force of the class struggle swept all else before it, the followers of Weber were more avowedly eclectic in the variety of theoretical tools they brought to an understanding of the Third World. General heuristic categories provided a common vocabulary, a common set of problems, and the promise of readily exchangeable information, so that an integrated, cumulative understanding of the Third World could proceed; developmentalism intended to apply insights or theories developed independently by the

⁵ Hirschman, "The Search for Paradigms as a Hindrance to Understanding," *World Politics* 22 (April 1970), 329.

various social sciences to explain the logic of social action in the South. The general categories did not, then, claim the status of scientific theories, but acted instead as intellectual guidelines that assured some connect-edness to the host of empirically verifiable theories that were anticipated. The result was a proliferation of books written by teams of specialists, often from different backgrounds or dealing with very distinct issues, whose unity presupposed or confidently anticipated commonly shared models—for instance, Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, eds., *Toward a General Theory of Action* (1951); Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States* (1963); Max F. Millikan and Donald L.M. Blackmer, eds., *The Emerging Nations* (1961).

In retrospect, it is difficult not to empathize with the excitement of those years. Scholars anticipated not simply a better understanding of the Third World, but the growing unification of the social sciences around their increasingly common understanding of a set of particular issues. The various “cultures” of sociology, anthropology, economics, history, political science, and psychology might keep their separate identities, but their interdisciplinary pursuits would allow them to draw strength from one another, to pull them away from their narrow (often parochial) concerns, to the level of the wholeness of social life. One might even say that a bit of American pluralism was involved here, for no single discipline (much less theorist) was expected to have the answer to the entire puzzle (although some surely came to think they did); instead, the truth would emerge as the result of the collaborative efforts of quite dissimilar kinds of work. The outcome would be a unified social science able not only to criticize but finally to replace Marxism.

The obvious question we must ask of this approach today is whether the products of its labors were at the level of its ambitions. Without denying the importance of some of the work, the answer must surely be negative—even in the minds of those most active in the field. Today, it is rare indeed to see any of these books cited other than critically; library shelves are invariably fully stocked with the numerous (unused) copies of each volume that were once the standard fare of graduate students the country over.

In my opinion, there are two principal reasons developmentalism failed in its efforts, reasons that at first glance might appear contradictory. One problem was that the models in many cases were so formal and abstract that they proved too stifling, too tyrannical, and ultimately too sterile for the empirical work they sought to organize. The other problem was that the models were too loose, too incoherent, and too incomplete to act as adequate guidelines assuring the interconnectedness of research. Let us look at each of these shortcomings in turn.

The most frequently heard, and the bitterest, charge against the developmentalist paradigm is that it was “unilinear” or “ethnocentric” in its concept of change; that is, it projected a relatively inflexible path or continuum of development in which social and political forms would tend to converge, so that the developmental path of the West might well serve as a model from which to shed light on transformations occurring in the South. As a result, developmentalism might be accused of being too “formalistic” in the sense that it sought to reduce the histories of the various countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to the terms of models or ideal types and jargon that distorted the true logic of social change in these areas. Thus, although Gabriel Almond adamantly denies that the charge that developmentalist literature was unilinear can “survive even a casual reading” of its authors, his own evocation of this school of thought at its inception indicates otherwise:

The “new,” the “emerging,” the “underdeveloped” or “developing” nations, as they were variously called, challenged the classificatory talents and theoretical imaginations of Western social scientists. They brought to this effort to illuminate the prospects of the Third World the ideas and concepts of the enlightenment and 19th century social theory which at an earlier time had sought to make sense out of European and American modernization. What had happened in Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries was now, more or less, about to happen in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. The progress promised by the enlightenment—the spread of knowledge, the development of technology, the attainment of higher standards of material welfare, the emergence of lawful, humane, and liberal polities, and the perfection of the human spirit—now beckoned the Third World newly freed from colonialism and exploitation, and straining against its own parochialisms.⁶

In cases where the West was not self-consciously posited as a model of the future the South might come to enjoy, the heuristic models of “modern” and “traditional” societies performed much the same function. Here the work of Talcott Parsons proved to be particularly influential—especially his so-called pattern variables, with their assumption that cultural values are of a whole with economic, social, and political systems in such a fashion that social organization should be conceptualized as a self-reinforcing unity. This kind of thinking resulted in the unfortunate tendency throughout much of developmentalism, first, to exaggerate the congruence of elements within a given social organization (a preference for static equilibrium models which often classified contradiction and change as “dysfunctional”), and second, to separate “traditional” from “modern” societies as if such a dichotomy made not only heuristic but empirical sense.

⁶ Almond (fn. 2), 2.

The models that emerged were too confining to be of much use in actual empirical investigation. When the past of the West or the model of traditional society was projected onto the Third World, too much disappeared from sight. The formalism of these paradigms often turned out to be as reductionist as Marxism—a turn of events developmentalism had hoped to escape by virtue of its avowed disciplinary eclecticism. There is, then, some justice to the charge leveled by many radical as well as by some conservative writers who felt that the reality of the Third World was simply not being grasped. Reinhard Bendix, for example, formulated some of these charges quite early; Howard Wiarda has stated more recently:

The critique of the Western model as particularistic, parochial, Eurocentric, considerably less than universal and hopelessly biased, as not only perpetuating our lack of understanding regarding these areas but also of wreaking downright harm upon them, seems to this observer devastating, valid, and perhaps unchallengeable.⁷

Yet if formalism of the sort described above was a real problem with developmentalism—as the work of Daniel Lerner, Cyril E. Black, and W. W. Rostow suggests⁸—it was not a completely endemic disease. I think there would be wide agreement, for example, that the two most influential books by political scientists on development were Gabriel Almond and James Coleman's *Comparative Politics of Developing Countries* (1960) and Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). True, in his introductory essay, Almond favorably mentions Parsons' pattern variables, but he also disputes the notion that there are such things as "all modern" or "all primitive" societies; he favors seeing political systems as more complexly "mixed." Moreover, the volume was written by a group of area experts whose primary accomplishment was their ability to match a rich sensibility toward local Third World issues

⁷ Wiarda, "Toward a Non-Ethnocentric Theory of Development: Alternative Conceptions from the Third World," paper presented at the meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 1981, p. 25. For a more accessible version of this position, see Wiarda, "The Ethnocentrism of the Social Sciences: Implications for Research and Policy," *The Review of Politics* 42 (April 1981). For an earlier statement of this view by a Weberian, see Reinhard Bendix, *Embattled Reason: Essays on Social Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), esp. 268 ff., and *Nation Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), chap. 8.

⁸ For example, in the 1964 Preface to *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), Lerner writes: "The 'Western model' is only historically Western; sociologically it is global . . . the same basic model reappears in virtually all modernizing societies of all continents of the world, regardless of variations of race, color or creed" (pp. viii-ix). Two other well-known examples from an abundant literature are Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960); and Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

with more general, theoretical questions of change and development. Although the classificatory schemes proposed to each of these area specialists appear to do little more than to give them a common vocabulary with which to work—no empirically verifiable “science” of political development is forthcoming—it would be quite unfair to accuse these contributors of ethnocentrism or formalism. For its part, Huntington’s book rests on such an explicitly damning criticism of a unilinear approach to the study of history that on this account alone it deserves to be seen as one of the classics of political science during the period. In economics, there is equal agreement that Alexander Gerschenkron’s *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (1962) is a classic statement on the development process similarly free of formalistic bias. In short, some excellent comparative historical work has been free of the problems of formalism. Moreover, it is important to insist that formalism as a reductionist mode in the social sciences must not be confused with the effort to establish general theoretical frameworks for the understanding of change in the fashion of Weber or Keynes. This latter enterprise is the hallmark and the promise of the social sciences; it must not be repudiated simply because some of its practitioners have given it a bad name.

Indeed, rather than lambasting developmentalism for models that were too rigid and writers who were overly concerned with methodology, we might complain that it did not generate stronger general categories to integrate research and that it did not concern itself adequately with producing a set of robust “middle-range” theories of development, or general analytical propositions established empirically, that could serve to organize the field. At the time, prominent developmentalist writers certainly seemed to sense the problem. Thus James Coleman admitted in 1960 that, “Given the array of disparate systems . . . it is only at the highest level of generalization that one can make statements about their common properties.”⁹ In 1963, Harry Eckstein offered a much more biting commentary. While he welcomed the return to fundamental questions of comparative study as a healthy event, he nonetheless complained of the “bewildering variety of classificatory schemes” his colleagues had produced, whose “disconcerting wealth” was “almost embarrassing”: “The field today is characterized by nothing so much as variety, eclecticism, and disagreement . . . particularly great in regard to absolutely basic preconceptions and orientations.”¹⁰

⁹ Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, eds., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 535.

¹⁰ Eckstein, “A Perspective on Comparative Politics, Past and Present,” in Harry Eckstein and David Apter, eds., *Comparative Politics: A Reader* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1963).

Why was the modeling not better? The quickest answer is that no theorist emerged of the status of Weber or Durkheim, a person of genius who could pull the entire field together into a coherent whole. Brave attempts may be cited—the work of David Apter, for example—but they proved unable to impose themselves intellectually on the community of developmentalists. Instead, there was a kind of happy anarchy, where writers seem to have labored to invent jargon and classificatory schemes in the manner of a Freud or a Durkheim—as much to ensure their professional standing as to advance the discipline. And here the highest accolades would be reserved for the theorist who could establish a “general theory of action,” to recall the title of a book Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils edited in 1951. Or, as Shils put it in 1965:

There is at present no systematic, dynamic general theory of society of universal comprehensiveness; nor is there, as yet, any analytical or empirical comparative theory of society. . . . We exist at present in a middle ground in which the general theory has begun to reveal its main lines and in which empirical comparative analysis, influenced by this theory—and influencing it—has begun to show how it is going to develop.¹¹

It would be an error to explain the limitations of developmentalism by placing too much emphasis on the skills of the individuals involved. The striking shortcoming of the school was its inability to articulate a unified model of comparative political economy, just as it lacked any broad-based comparative historical perspective into which the problems of mid-20th-century development could be placed. It must be emphasized that the obstacle was not individual mediocrity, but institutional and ideological impediments best studied in terms of a sociology of knowledge. Two sets of factors emerge as important in this respect: the structure of the social science disciplines in American universities, and the place of the academics concerned with it in American political life.

Whatever the attraction, rhetorically, of interdisciplinary studies in the United States, the various fields of the social sciences jealously insisted on their autonomy, on an identity based on a body of theoretical propositions over whose integrity they stood guard. In this context, development studies represented virgin territory, not only for the unification of the social sciences, but more immediately for the carving out of new, discrete domains of analysis. Thus, Gabriel Almond proudly declared in the introduction to *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, “This book is the first effort to compare the political systems of the ‘developing’

¹¹ Shils, “On the Comparative Study of New States,” in Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1963), 18.

areas, and to compare them systematically according to a common set of categories. . . ." He considered it to be "a major step forward in the nature of political science as science."¹² From the viewpoint of political science, economics in particular represented a threat, for it had an apparent sophistication as a science that many political scientists longed to duplicate. For this reason, for example, the Harvard-M.I.T. Joint Seminar on Political Development, founded in 1963, has always deliberately excluded economists from its membership. The ambition, then, of political scientists was to elaborate the logic of political processes in a manner that would establish their analytical independence and their social importance. At the same time, they would strike a blow against Marxism, which had constantly sought to reduce political factors to reflections of more decisive socioeconomic processes. One can exaggerate the extent or the impenetrability of these barriers between academic disciplines; these scholars knew each other's work and felt themselves to be engaged in a collaborative enterprise. And one can fail to do justice to the cogent reasons that underlay the decision to draw these distinctions in the first place; a genuine flowering of an understanding of political processes may be said to have occurred in part *because* of this divorce. In any case, many of the crucial issues of Third World development continued to be ignored simply because they fell outside the purview of the subject as it was perceived from its many different angles.

To derive at a different sociological explanation for the lack of adequate modeling, one may look at the place of the American academics involved in Third World studies in terms of American political life. For example, Irene Grendzier has recently suggested that many of these scholars intended their writing to be policy-relevant, and that their interests included fostering the spread of capitalism and an elitist brand of democracy in the South while blocking the expansion of communism. These concerns limited the agenda and biased the arguments of many developmentalists in a way unappreciated at the time.¹³

I see no reason to quarrel with this argument so long as it is not presented (as it is by Grendzier) as the sole explanation of the logic of developmentalism. It is not persuasive even as a primary explanation. Too many Americans who were the products of this school emerged as harsh critics of American imperialism; one has only to recall Henry Kissinger's repeated complaints about all the regional specialists who

¹² Almond and Coleman (fn. 9), 3, 4.

¹³ Grendzier, *Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985). For a powerful early attack along these lines, see Noam Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

knew nothing of the requirements of “geopolitical equilibrium” to realize that the school cannot be understood this easily.

In view of the ideological and institutional concerns of those working in developmentalism, it is difficult to see how, as a group, they might have sponsored the kind of work in comparative history or political economy that at one and the same time would have ensured more broad-range model building at the level of heuristic typologies and more robust constructions of theories at the level of aggregate empirical analysis. Take, for example, the volume that most North American specialists (including this writer) would agree to be the finest work in developmentalism by a political scientist—Samuel Huntington’s *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). The book has little economic perspective. True, “participation” is on the upswing; “mobilization” is taking place. Yet the forces of the industrial revolution, even those of agricultural development, go virtually unmentioned. Sections of the book may deal with the urgency of land reform, but there is not a clue as to why this problem has arisen now and not a century earlier; any number of key questions ranging from productive effectiveness to distributive justice are deliberately avoided. Though class conflict is implied at times, the topic is never systematically addressed. Nor does the impact of foreign actors on events in the Third World get much of a hearing. Indeed, the hypothesis that military interventions in the politics of these areas are linked to foreign penetration and encouragement is specifically discounted (chap. 4). Certainly the book’s sense of political institution building is masterful in scope and nuance, assuring it the status of a classic in modern political literature. Yet the fact that the intricacies of this process occur in a world of class struggle and imperialism finds no recognition here. Countries have self-contained histories, and political problems have political explanations. Period. Albert Hirschman reports that a similar narrowness of focus typified most of the developmentalist work done by economists.¹⁴

Developmentalist paradigms were, then, loose and incomplete at a heuristic level on the one hand, and deficient in genuinely interdisciplinary empirical propositions at the level of comparative theory on the other. Since there was no intellectual center of gravity holding together all the disparate undertakings that characterized the field, specialization proliferated, spin-off leading to spin-off, with some perhaps holding Shils’s happy illusion that eventually it would all add up to a unified movement. Instead, however, the focus shifted increasingly to more

¹⁴ Hirschman (fn. 3), 24.

modest and manageable models targeted on particular issues or areas. In many of these instances, a deeper understanding of the process of change did occur. But as the field became more complex, questions of its unity became more difficult; memories of the common origin of it all, in the Big Bang of trying to establish order amid the chaos of the postwar world, grew increasingly dim. An essential reason for the stagnation of the field around 1970, therefore, was what was coming to be seen as its chaotic diversity. If developmentalism's *formalism* (the reductionist tyranny of its models) was a real problem, it was relatively minor. The major cause of its debilitation lay in its *fragmentation* (the weakness of its models).

This fragmentation emerged as an acute problem when it became evident to many that developmentalism was impotent in the face of many of the terrible trials through which the Third World was passing. The growth of poverty and the attendant human misery; the spread of repressive, authoritarian regimes; the waste and suffering caused by wars both civil and regional—all combined to disillusion those working in the field, especially as the realization began to grow that in fact there was no theoretical, commanding height from which to make sense of these awful realities. The fragmentation made it difficult to get more than a partial understanding of the range of forces at work in the South.

The disillusion grew more acute in the mid- and late-1960s with the growing realization that American foreign policy had a tremendous influence on the course of events in the Third World; this influence had seldom been explicitly addressed by developmentalism and now could not be dealt with satisfactorily. To be sure, many developmentalists opposed American imperialism in Latin America and in Southeast Asia; but that is not the point. It is rather that developmentalism no longer had anything particularly interesting to say about the conduct of American policy one way or another. Thus, it is far from accidental that this school of thought entered into crisis just as American policy with respect to the Alliance for Progress and the Vietnam War proved so wanting. Although there were those like W. W. Rostow or Samuel Huntington who never felt this to be a problem, and who indeed explicitly intended to make their work an instrument of American foreign policy, a more general feeling was one of impotence—or betrayal. For here, at a critical juncture in the international life of the United States, the school of study most intimately concerned with the character of the Third World had fallen silent. It was, most felt, the bankruptcy of the field. The fact that the point is seldom candidly admitted today shows that the wound is still festering.

With “emotion recollected in tranquility,” one can certainly see that such an observation should not lead to an across-the-board condemnation of developmentalism’s achievements. As we shall see in section IV, it is possible to recognize the professional sophistication that characterized much of the field and to learn from its insights. Yet one should not expect that the field will recover, either from its conceptual fragmentation or from its loss of innocence. The vigor it experiences at present is much like that of Medieval Europe—a vitality that was scattered, slow in germination, but real—after the fall of the Roman Empire: by analogy, after the heyday of grand theory, as it existed in the 1950s and 1960s, has become a thing of the past.

II. THE DEPENDENCY PERSPECTIVE¹⁵

For many, the void left by the demise of developmentalism as a unified theory of change in the Third World was filled in the 1970s with the analytical categories provided by the dependency perspective. The term “dependency” grows out of writing on Latin America; related works dealing with Asia and Africa have until recently been more comfortable using the term “neocolonialism” to describe the world that concerns them. Whatever the preferred nomenclature, these *dependencistas*, if we may use their Latin American name, share the view that the power of international capitalism setting up a global division of labor has been the chief force responsible for shaping the history of the South. Originally as mercantilism, then as free trade, later as finance capital, and most recently under the auspices of the multinational corporation, capitalism over the last five centuries has created a world economic system. The profound changes this process has generated in every part of the world offer, then, a common historical experience that is the basis of a *unified comparative* model of social life in the Third World. Dependency literature is therefore properly viewed as a subset of the so-called “world system” approach, whose terms have become increasingly prominent in the United States in the field of international relations. To be sure, as in any broad-based intellectual movement, debates within the dependency school are many and sharp. The clear dominance of Marxism within the literature has not prevented fierce differences over such far-ranging matters as how to establish the identity of classes in widely disparate settings; what degree of autonomy to accord the state as a political

¹⁵ The discussion here draws on my contribution on dependency thinking in Howard Wiarda, ed., *New Directions in Comparative Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, forthcoming 1985).

institution charged with providing coherence in circumstances typified by rapid domestic change and extensive foreign penetration; and how to argue for typologies of stages or degrees of dependency. However acute these differences, they are overshadowed by the common allegiance of the writers in this school to an approach whose roots run back to the 1920s, even if it was not until the 1970s that the dependency perspective made itself felt in force within American academia. And the fundamental premise of this approach—the uncontested proposition on the basis of which all this writing has been constructed—is that, to understand the chief forces of change in the Third World (or “on the periphery”), one must see them ultimately as a function of the power of economic imperialism generated by the capitalist “core” of world affairs.¹⁶

Indeed, it is the emphasis on imperialism that constitutes a recognition on the part of many *dependencistas* themselves that their approach cannot claim the status of a theory. For dependency literature studies the *effects* of imperialism, not the *nature* of imperialism itself. Its focus is therefore on a part and not on the whole—the latter providing the “totality” of experience on which sound theory can be based. Traditional matters, such as the character of capitalist accumulation with its “anarchy of production” combined with such modern forces as the logic of multinational corporate competition, must ultimately escape the purview of the dependency approach (only to fall into the domain of the related world system analysis); the primary agent of change in the South thus escapes direct study. As explained by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto in a book that has found a wide audience throughout the Americas, “it seems senseless to search for ‘laws of movement’ specific to situations that *are dependent*, that is, that have their main features determined by the phases and trends of expansion of capitalism on a world scale.”¹⁷ Relying on a theory of imperialism proposed by their colleagues doing world system analysis, dependency writers content themselves with explaining the logic of capitalist expansion on the periphery. The result is a powerful, unified theory of imperialism: the

¹⁶ For the debates within the dependency camp, see, among others, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “The Consumption of Dependency Theory in the United States,” *Latin American Research Review* 12 (No. 3, 1977); Richard R. Fagen, “Studying Latin American Politics: Some Implications of a *Dependencia* Approach,” *Latin American Research Review* 12 (No. 3, 1977); and Ronald H. Chilcote, ed., *Dependency and Marxism: Toward a Resolution of the Debate* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981). The most influential writer on world system analysis in the United States is Immanuel Wallerstein; see his *The Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), and *The Modern World System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

¹⁷ Cardoso and Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), xxiii.

world system analysts establish the logic of the “whole” or core of historical change while the dependency scholars lay out the working of these forces on the periphery.

In this undertaking, their most important conceptual tool is the analysis of the dual economy. The notion of the dual economy itself did not originate with these writers, but in their hands it has acquired a character particular to their analysis.¹⁸ In brief, the argument is that—as capitalist penetration has occurred successively in Latin America, Asia, and Africa under the impetus of northern imperialism—one part of the local economies of these regions has come to be a modern enclave. By virtue of these historical origins, the basis of the modern sector is export trade (even if subsidiary manufacturing or service interests grow up to sustain it). Here capital accumulates, skills are learned, and class interests are formed whose innermost needs tie them tightly to foreign concerns. The culture of the modern enclave may be of the periphery; but its economic and political character make it a child of the international system. Root and branch, it is dependent.

Alongside this modern economy, there exists a subsistence sector—whence the term *dual* economy. To some extent, the technology, culture, and social institutions of the subsistence sector are inherited from the past. But this is not a simple traditional world slumbering in a millenary torpor, as writers from the developmentalist school have so often depicted it. Today as yesterday, the modern sector is constantly at work disintegrating this subordinate sector, try as the latter may to preserve its integrity. Thus, cheap manufactured goods destroy the traditional artisanry; the expansion of plantation agriculture displaces large numbers of peasants, forcing them onto poorer land; and elites in the subsistence area invest such capital as they possess in the modern enclave, thereby intensifying the lack of investment funds for projects that might directly benefit the poor. Through the linkages between the two sectors, the modern acts like a leech on the body of the subsistence economy—ever increasing the difficulty of life there, while by its very exploitation it consolidates its own power. In short, the terrible misery of so much of the Third World derives not from a locally generated, traditional resistance to modernity—for example, the lack of appropriate skills, attitudes, or resource endowments of the poor, where developmentalist

¹⁸ For an indication of the history of the concept, see Benjamin Higgins, *Economic Development: Principles, Problems, and Policies*, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), chaps. 12 and 14. For a comprehensive application of the notion of the dual economy in dependency terms, see William W. Murdoch, *The Poverty of Nations: The Political Economy of Hunger and Population* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), chaps. 8 and 9.

economics had us look—but from the operating forces of modernity itself, as it has historically implanted itself on the periphery. The misery of the many and the affluence of the few have their common origin in an international division of labor spawned and maintained by the forces of capitalist imperialism.

As the foregoing account implies, economic forces do not live in a social vacuum, but express themselves in class formations on the periphery. Here the key development is the modern sector, where class interests form in symbiosis with the interests of international capitalism. A class alignment thus takes shape in the South wherein the power of the dominant groups derives from their role as intermediaries between the international order run by imperialism and the local peoples over whom they must secure their rule. Although this collaborating class may have local concerns, its reliance on the world economic system ultimately decides its conduct. At different times or in different countries the character of these elites may vary, but their common identity lies in their dependence on the rhythms of the international economic order to ensure their survival as a class. There is an international political dimension to this as well. These local bourgeoisies have struck the main political bargains that concern their well-being not with domestic forces, but with foreign capitalists. The result is that the collaborating class is not only particularly exploitive in historical terms, but it is particularly weak at home as well. For these reasons, it is subject to being overthrown by local revolutions when those in the subsistence sector try to save themselves through force of arms. It is at this point, of course, that the United States intervenes today by suppressing such uprising in the name of anticommunism, when its real interest is to preserve a certain established form of economic organization locally as well as globally. Just as poverty in the Third World must ultimately be understood in terms of the international division of labor, so authoritarian governments there must in the final analysis be seen as products of foreign imperialism.

From the preceding discussion it should be apparent that the dependency school's primary intellectual debt is to Marxism (which is not to say that all Marxists subscribe to this view). First, the division of labor is seen as the prime social reality, the engine of change that drives all else before it. The originality of dependency writing lies in its tying the dynamic of economic life on the periphery into that of the world system beyond; to see it as *dependent*, that is. The dependency approach thus works on an ambitiously large canvas, linking the pace of life on the periphery to movements at the core. Second, political activity is understood to take place through social groups or classes antagonistically

related to one another around ownership of the means of production. In this respect, the originality of dependency writing lies in its capacity to seize on the function of the collaborating class and to plot the changes in its conflicts and alliances over time, including those that link it to political forces abroad. Finally, the dependency approach shares with Marxism a bias against certain other considerations: that ethnic rivalries may have a life quite their own (hence, for example, the denigration of the term "tribe" in relation to groups in Africa); that the state may play a relatively autonomous and enormously significant role in the process of great historical transformations; and that, in foreign affairs of powerful states, balance-of-power considerations are a primary calculation of leaders at critical historical junctures. To be sure, there are individuals who are not Marxists who have contributed to this school: John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson with their idea of the "informal empire" of "free trade imperialism"; Gunnar Myrdal with his descriptions of how dual economies create "backwash effects" that systematically disadvantage the traditional sector; Raúl Prebisch with his work concerning the way in which unequal exchange in international trade acts to handicap the South.¹⁹ Such ideas are not held eclectically by the dependency school, however. They have been adopted because they strengthen the tools of analysis of an approach that enjoys a fundamental unity of orientation through a reliance on Marxist analysis.

The foregoing sketch of the dual economy was too brief to suggest certain crucial refinements that have added enormously to the sophistication of the dependency approach during the last decade. Three relatively new conceptual qualifications are of particular importance. The first is the argument that the dual economy is not actually as rigid as was once believed. Spurred on especially by the work of Cardoso, many dependency writers have come to see the abundant evidence that a genuine industrial base is being laid in parts of the South, and that economies there are becoming far more diversified, integrated, and advanced than earlier spokesmen of this persuasion had thought possible. For, although both Marx and Lenin had anticipated that the worldwide spread of the industrial revolution would take place under capitalist auspices, the first generation of *dependencistas* talked of "growth without development" and of the way the southern countries would forever be, in their favorite cliché, the "hewers of wood and drawers of water" of

¹⁹ Gallagher and Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review*, 2d series, 6 (No. 1, 1953); Gunnar Myrdal, *Economic Theory and Underdeveloped Regions* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1957). On Prebisch, see Joseph L. Love, "Raúl Prebisch and the Origins of the Doctrine of Unequal Exchange," *Latin American Research Review* 15 (No. 3, 1980).

the world economic system. But facts are a hard thing, and in due course, dependency analysts had to face the mounting evidence that heavy industry was growing in the Third World; that the manufacturing component of exports was steadily mounting there; and that internal, integrated markets were beginning to pulse with a life of their own. Indeed, statistics are readily at hand to show that the vigor of economic growth in large parts of the Third World is substantially greater than in the North. As Peter Evans describes it, "classic dependency" is giving way to "dependent development."²⁰

A second (and related) conceptual innovation made by dependency writers during the last decade lies in their new emphasis on the crucial role of the state in this changing order of things. Whereas *dependencistas* had previously viewed Third World politics as little more than an auxiliary function of the international economic system, they have now begun to argue (and here the work of Guillermo O'Donnell is especially important) that the growing complexity of class and economic relations locally as well as internationally calls for more assertive action on the part of the state on the periphery. As the diversity and integration of these local economies grow, new groups arise that have to be controlled politically, just as some old groups must be divested of their power or find ways to reconstruct it. In a parallel manner, foreign actors have come to be more closely supervised than before. Their investments have been made a part of local plans involving the creation of backward and forward linkages, and their action has increasingly been harmonized with more fine-tuned domestic fiscal and employment measures. In a word, the growing complexity of local economies calls for new demands for a more competent state. In conceptual terms, the result is that the dependency literature now possesses a far richer political vocabulary that has substantially expanded its range of analysis.

The two preceding conceptual refinements in turn prepare the ground for a third: the recognition of the diversity of Third World countries and a growing appreciation of the significance of local factors in determining the pattern of long-term development processes. Not all countries on the periphery are industrializing, and not all have states aggressively determined to promote domestic interests. Different natural resource

²⁰ Evans, *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State and Local Capital in Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). An early and especially strong statement on this matter can be found in Bill Warren, "Imperialism and Capitalist Industrialization," *New Left Review* 81 (1973). See also Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "Dependent Capitalist Development in Latin America," *New Left Review* 74 (1972), and Cardoso, "Associated-Dependent Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications," in Alfred Stepan, ed., *Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Politics, and Future* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973).

endowments, preexisting lines of class or ethnic group conflict or coalition, political culture and the structure of inherited political institutions—all of these are acquiring a new relevance in analysis. As a consequence, stages or degrees of dependency may now be discussed, whereas previously not much more could be said than that a country was or was not dependent.

As we have seen, then, the dependency perspective is not only coherent and complex, but it is capable of conceptual self-criticism and development. In the wake of the demise of developmentalism, it offers an alternative paradigm of study. The fact that it has not only survived sharp internal dispute, but that it has actually grown in conceptual acuteness as a result, is the most conclusive evidence that as a school of thought the dependency approach has come of age. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that its core argument is appearing in other intellectual activities. We find Edward Said, for example, criticizing longstanding Western cultural interpretations of the East:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point, Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.²¹

At this point, the reader may well anticipate the final trump in the dependency deck: the charge that developmentalism itself was the ideological handmaiden of imperialism and the ruling elites in the Third World. For even if the charge were only implied, it was frequently enough asserted that the very categories with which American academics analyzed the South were—as the quotation from Edward Said suggests—instruments in the subjugation of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Such an argument might be constructed along the following lines. In its “classic” form, economic developmentalism posited a modern sector acting as a pole of development from which the industrial revolution would eventually diffuse out to the rest of Third World society. Although the modern sector might initially be in league with the international system, it would invariably turn toward the local market—first for food and labor, later for intermediate manufacturing products, and finally as a source of demand for larger-scale manufacturing. Eventually, an integrated local economy should form, still a part of the world economy

²¹ Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978), 3.

producing in line with comparative advantage, but reflecting throughout the characteristics of economic modernity, including a generalized modern skill structure. Where obstacles to development occur, they should be understood as having a nonmarket origin: inadequate resource endowment; a population base that is too small or growing too rapidly; inept governments unable to oversee capital formation because of weakness or corruption, or misguided notions about the merits of state planning; inherited ethnic prejudices making the free mobility of economic factors especially difficult.²² In this light, the job of political development becomes more comprehensible. It is to engineer solutions to these obstacles to economic diffusion through the use of force or by the building of consensus, so that institutions are ultimately created that can make the process of change self-sustaining.

From a dependency perspective, the problem with this diffusionist approach is that it fails to recognize that its alleged solutions to problems in the Third World—the intensification of market relations there—are in fact at the origin of all the difficulties. That is, political instability in the Third World comes not so much from the recalcitrance of the traditional world in the face of change as from the brutality of change inflicted on the traditional world. When peasants are dispossessed of their land and herded into urban slums; when traditional artisans find their means of livelihood destroyed; when old patterns of power that provided at least some security are removed and the nuclear family is left to determine its fate as best it may—then one may indeed expect conflict. But it is modernity, not tradition, that is at the origin of the struggle. From the dependency perspective, therefore, the authoritarian governments typical of a large portion of the Third World are perceived as a necessary concomitant of capital exploitation rather than as the inevitable response to traditional backwardness. As we have seen, the fragility of these authoritarian regimes may be understood in terms of the weakness of the local classes they represent. Since these classes are the product of international economic forces and not the consequence of indigenous development, the political pacts they have made at home are relatively flimsy. The result is a ruling class ideologically unsure of itself (“denationalized”) and only shallowly rooted in local social forces. The governments that represent the interests of such classes will of necessity be particularly reliant on the use of force to ensure their rule.

²² For a standard neoclassical economics text, see Higgins (fn. 18). For a more current restatement in particularly sharp language, see the writings of P. T. Bauer, most recently *Reality and Rhetoric: Studies in the Economics of Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). For a standard dependency critique of such an approach, see Michael Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1981).

In this undertaking, such Third World governments can usually count on the support of the United States. For just as the international economic system lays down the social bases of much of southern development, so the international political system will attend to shifts in the political balance of power. Where the International Monetary Fund cannot travel, we might say, there the Marines will tread. From a dependency perspective, then, the consistently counterrevolutionary cast of American foreign policy is entirely in line with what one would expect. When the power of collaborating states in the Third World proves unequal to the task of containing the enormous pressures released by capitalist economic development in these areas, Washington will aid them in repressing popular uprisings and so protect the international economic system from the challenge of socialist economic nationalism.

It should thus be understandable that, in the eyes of the *dependencistas*, developmentalists in the United States were responsible for much more than inadequate model building with respect to affairs in the Third World. This very “inadequacy” was nothing more than an ideological smokescreen behind which North American imperialism freely operated. Developmentalist economists presented models of the beneficent spread of the industrial revolution throughout the world and denounced obstacles to such progress as being caused by backwardness. Their colleagues in political science presented institution building as one of organizational techniques, and often sanctioned the establishment of military governments for periods of “transition.” The separation of economics from politics was not an artificial, but rather a logical, expression of the needs of advanced capitalism. So was the developmentalists’ failure to credit imperialism with the force it has had. In their work, the developmentalist intelligentsia of American universities had given the lie to all their protestations of academic freedom and value-free or progressive theorizing, revealing instead their true character as apologists for the established international division of wealth and power. The attack was now complete: the dependency school not only had established a paradigm for the study of the Third World, but it had provided an explanation of its rival, developmentalism, powerful enough to complete the latter’s disintegration.

The self-confidence of the dependency perspective is now so firmly rooted that we find fairly well-known social scientists writing vulgarizations of the approach for mass audiences—books in which the central methodological premises of the school are taken as needing no further discussion. Thus, L. A. Stavrianos opens his book *Global Rift* declaring:

The Third World emerged in early modern times as the result of a fateful social mutation in northwestern Europe. This was the rise of a dynamic capitalist society that expanded overseas in successive stages, gaining control over widening segments of the globe, until by the nineteenth century it had established a world-wide hegemony. . . . What were the roots of this European expansionism? . . . This central question in Third World history [comes from] analyzing the dynamics of European expansionism.²³

In the same vein, Eric Wolf begins his study *Europe and the People without History* by stating:

The central assertion of this book is that the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes, and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fail to reassemble it falsify reality. Concepts like "nation," "society," and "culture" name bits and threaten to turn names into things. Only by understanding these names as bundles of relationships, and by placing them back into the field from which they were abstracted, can we hope to avoid misleading inferences and increase our share of understanding. . . .²⁴

The coherence, complexity, flexibility, and self-confidence of the dependency approach should be clear. When we add the important consideration that it can serve as a powerful political force uniting Marxism ideologically with Third World nationalism—as is clear in the case of Liberation Theology in Latin America—we must recognize that dependency thinking has established itself as an intellectual force with which we must reckon. Quite unlike developmentalism—which lives on in the wide variety of studies it spawned earlier, but which today lacks a center of gravity in a well-anchored, broad-based theory of change—the dependency school is in its prime.

III. CHALLENGING THE DEPENDENCY APPROACH

It is no easy matter to determine from where critical assaults on dependency thinking should come. Because of the fragmentation of the field described in section I, developmentalism by the 1970s lacked the conceptual unity and vigor to mount an attack. Without a broad historical perspective and an integrated study of political economy, what serious hope was there that this school could rally, particularly after a fuller verdict on the Alliance for Progress and the engagement in Viet-

²³ L. A. Stavrianos, *Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age* (New York: William Morrow, 1981).

²⁴ Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

nam had become available? No wonder, then, that no one closely related with developmentalism has demonstrated an ability to do more than thumb his nose ineffectively at the *dependencistas*.

One possibility is that, like developmentalism, the dependency perspective will over time breed its own undoing. As this approach becomes increasingly sophisticated in its insights and broad in its applications, there is the chance of divergent or rival lines of analysis, or of an adulteration of the basic unity of view that characterized its literature throughout the 1970s. Consider the possible fate of the three recent refinements in the dependency approach discussed in the preceding section: the importance of local factors in determining the course of change in the South; the critical role of the state in development there; and the genuine gains in economic strength that have become apparent there over the last two decades. Could these factors be persuasively combined to suggest that a situation of dependency no longer exists (if indeed it ever did)? Looked at more closely, are these refinements not simply restatements of a version of the diffusion/political modernization models reviewed earlier as the hallmarks of developmentalism? If genuine growth *is* taking place, if the shape and pace of this change *do* reflect in good measure local economic and social circumstances, and if the state *is* especially responsible for how these events transpire, then one quite plausible inference would be that the ability of imperialism to make these areas "dependent" is declining, and that therefore the cardinal reference point of the dependency approach is fast losing its utility as a lodestar. Ironically, then, *dependencia* as a perspective may be spreading just as the situation that gave rise to it is coming to an end, and the very sophistication of its method can be used as its own cannons turned against itself. Surely to a Marxist there should be nothing paradoxical to such a situation, as the doctrine teaches that ideas reflect the material world around them, usually with a time lag. The judgment of other historians may be more severe; they may hold that dependency theorizing reflected on a transitory moment in the process of Third World change, and that its major contribution was not to give insight to events there, but to be the ideological representation of a triumphing nationalist consciousness in these areas. It might even appear in retrospect that dependency writing represented only the narrow and short-term perspective, while the developmentalist approach proved better able to explain the course of change in the Third World over the long haul. What greater irony than for the dependency school to reaffirm, as the result of its own labors, the established verities of developmentalism!

Intriguing as such speculation may be, there is little reason to think

that the dependency approach will founder for these reasons. As we have seen, dependency writing is not a simple-minded affair. It is no surprise, therefore, to learn that it has already generated concepts that enable it to pull back into line any potentially fissiparous tendencies leading toward apostasy.

A key argument in this respect is that the dramatic changes occurring on the periphery essentially leave untouched both the central characteristics of political life in the South and the predominance of northern power in shaping development there. For instance, industrialization to build up import substitution, through which southern countries attempted to become more self-reliant, led to the costly purchase of plants and equipment from abroad, the increased penetration by multinational corporations of local tariff barriers, and the development of ventures that catered largely to the ruling class. On the other hand, export-led industrialization also relied (as its very name suggests) on foreign know-how, markets, and financial institutions. In either case, the rich continued to monopolize the benefits of growth on the periphery and to depend on authoritarian governments to keep the masses in their place.

At the same time, foreign actors retained their paramount positions. *Dependencistas* point out that, while the periphery may be developing economically, the leading sectors of industry there—the “commanding heights” or the “pace-setters”—are owned overwhelmingly by Americans, Europeans, and Japanese. Moreover, because the local economy is now far more integrated than it was previously, it has also become far more sensitive to economic fluctuations abroad, as the current Third World debt crisis with its extreme vulnerability to interest rates in the United States so dramatically illustrates. As a result, the international system has maintained its grip on the periphery despite the real economic changes that have taken place there. And with this grip, its various agents—from multinational corporations to the International Monetary Fund—are able to create an environment suitable for the unimpeded accumulation of capital: a docile, cheap work force to exploit; favorable taxing regulations for private enterprise; and a fiscally “responsible” state (i.e., one that does not engage in “excessive” social service expenditures). Once again, the consequences have entailed the impoverishment of a substantial portion of the population and the need for an authoritarian regime to keep the discontented in line: the dependency relation itself may even have been strengthened.²⁵

According to the *dependencistas*, the economic modernization of the

²⁵ See, for example, discussions along this line in Evans (fn. 20), and Murdoch (fn. 18).

periphery has also affected the international order; but here, too, the continuity of imperialist control lies beneath the apparent change. As countries in the South come to diversify and integrate their economies, they may leave the periphery—but not to join the core, since neither their financial nor their technical infrastructure is autonomous enough to play a part in controlling world economic affairs. Instead, because of their continued dependence, these countries come to play the part in the world system that their middle class plays domestically. That is, they have little real power, but the demonstrable privileges they enjoy relative to those beneath them on the periphery (in part because of their exploitation of those less well placed) obligates them to do their part to keep the system operating. So those on the “semi-periphery” (sometimes called the “newly industrializing countries” or NICs) become junior, collaborating members of the international trading, investment, and financial system—their very gains serving only to reinforce the system that binds them to its will. If in appearance the international economic system is undergoing change, in reality the power of capitalism and the dominance of the northern imperialists have never been more effective.²⁶

Thus, however much the dependency school may seem to possess within itself arguments that could lead to its own destruction, such a forecast takes no account of the ways in which the doctrine can maintain its stability despite the changes it is undergoing. Like other coherent ideologies, the dependency perspective has self-protecting concepts to deflect all manner of threat and preserve the doctrine's integrity. More than just an ideology is at stake here; there are other forces in operation assuring the doctrine's stability. The dependency perspective is an ideological “united front” in the Leninist sense: it binds together Marxists and Third World nationalists in their mutual hatred of imperialism. Just as *dependencistas* maintain that developmentalist ideas are “ideological” in the sense of serving political interests, so there is a political urgency to the dependency case as well. In short, for practical political, as well as doctrinal, reasons, we should expect the dependency approach to remain assertive. It will not be undone, as was speculated above, by its own hand.

An adequate criticism of the dependency school must simultaneously provide an account of British and American imperialism since the late 18th century and an account of change in the late-industrializing world.

²⁶ While the term “semi-periphery” appears to have been coined by Immanuel Wallerstein, the earliest use of the concept of which I am aware occurs in the idea of “go-between countries” as explained by Johan Galtung, “A Structural Theory of Imperialism,” *Journal of Peace Research* 8 (No. 2, 1971).

It must demonstrate that economic interests constitute but one motive to imperialism (and not necessarily its most important), and it must establish that the form development has taken in Africa, Asia, and Latin America is only partly (and usually not primarily) the result of imperialism's influence; instead, it represents the outcome of local forces at work. Any such undertaking will confront fully and directly the core propositions of the dependency school: that imperialism works fundamentally to accumulate profits for capitalists, and that the power of this enterprise over the last several centuries has been so great that it has literally molded the economic, social, and political profile of the Third World. One cautionary note: piddling criticism of the dependency school is a waste of time. A perspective as supple and complex as that of *dependencia* will have no trouble explaining away as irrelevant, or as understandable in its own terms, relatively minor points about change in the core, the periphery, or the international system, or demands that its claims be made quantifiable and so readily testable. One must instead go to the heart of the matter, exploding dependency's myth of imperialism at the same time as its myth of the logic of change on the periphery. This is not to say that imperialism does not continue to be of influence in the South, or that Marxism is without its insights into the human condition. It is indeed possible to accept dependency interpretations of history where they seem appropriate. But that is not good enough for the advocates of dependency; like proponents of any holistic ideology, they are intensely suspicious of eclecticism. For the unity of the movement to be irredeemably shattered intellectually, it is not necessary, in short, to maintain that dependency is always and everywhere mistaken, but only that it is no better than a partial truth.²⁷

The extremeness of the dependency model, its holism, and the way it comes to rest on a few simple premises constitute its source of unity and strength, and at the same time its point of greatest vulnerability. Consider, for example, its enormous emphasis on the character of the collaborating class in the Third World context. This group, born of imperialism and serving its interests locally through the power to manage affairs on the periphery, is predominant thanks to its international connections. But if it can be maintained that, for a specific time or place,

²⁷ See Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain, and the Late-Industrializing World since 1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chaps. 1 and 2. Strong attacks on world system analysis—which is the cornerstone of dependency theory—include Theda Skocpol, "Wallerstein's World Capitalist System: A Theoretical and Historical Critique," *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (March 1977); Aristide R. Zolberg, "Origins of the Modern World System: A Missing Link," *World Politics* 33 (January 1981); and Patrick O'Brien, "European Economic Development: The Contribution of the Periphery," *The Economic History Review*, 2d series, 35 (February 1982).

this class is only one among many, and that other factors, such as inherited political institutions or ethnic cleavages, are equal or even more significant in determining the course of events, the claim that the country is dependent loses its essential meaning. Through the insertion of a collaborating class in the South, imperialism must dominate life there; it is not enough that this be one force among the many, or only triumphant at certain intervals. If it were not dominant, then the country would no longer be shaped primarily by the force of economic imperialism. The tie with world system analysis would snap, the claim to a unified approach to the study of the Third World would be invalid, and the militant accusations that the class struggle and the national struggle in the South are one would be more difficult to sustain. One may find that some countries, at some times, correspond more closely to the dependency model than do others; so it clearly has its value as a paradigm for analysis. But the suggestion that the paradigm is useful only sometimes would be unacceptable to this school. Its ambition requires far more. And, though this ambition is an undeniable source of the dependency movement's strength, it is likewise the point at which the arms of criticism may be used most devastatingly against it.

There is no reason to believe that attacks on the dependency approach will weaken the convictions of its advocates. Like the proponents of any strong model, these writers have ways of deflecting attacks and maintaining their conceptual unity. And, as we have seen, the political interests served by such an ideology will insist on the veracity of this way of understanding the world whatever the objections.

IV. NEW AGENDA FOR THIRD WORLD STUDIES?

One ready answer to the serious problems caused by inadequate model-building for Third World studies is to avoid comparative studies in favor of the traditional historical method, where the intelligibility of events is assumed to flow from the unfolding of unique constellations of circumstance. I believe that this is what Hirschman was suggesting when he contrasted the occasional weakness of the comparative method with the richness of John Womack's *Zapata and the Mexican Revolution* (1970). Similarly, Clifford Geertz has emphasized the value of understanding social orders from within, citing Roy Mottahedeh's *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society* (1980).²⁸ Although these two works have no explicitly comparative ambitions, they produce such insights on

²⁸ Hirschman (fn. 5); Geertz, "Conjuring with Islam," *The New York Review of Books*, May 27, 1982.

the interested reader in much the manner a good novel may work, with a message far exceeding the historical limits actually set by the work of art.

In fact, however, there is no need to contemplate abandoning the comparative method as a serious remedy for the shortcomings in Third World studies bequeathed us by the descendants of Marx and Weber. Despite our inability to come up with a "general theory of action," or our reluctance to believe that virtuoso applications of class analysis will unravel all the complexities of development, work is going ahead on a variety of important questions whose analytical manageability is proof of the enduring worth of the comparative method.²⁹ *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* by Barrington Moore, Jr. (1966) and *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (1962) by Alexander Gerschenkron are examples of the kinds of comparative work that may serve as models in the field. As long as worthwhile problems are posed that have the possibility of empirical analysis on the basis of well-formulated theories not hostage to some hidden agenda and drawing from the domains of the social sciences combined, it would be premature indeed to announce the field of study closed. Certainly the interest is there. The proliferation of problems studied and the range of approaches used to deal with them, combined with a sense of the moral and political seriousness involved and their close relationship with questions of American foreign policy, make the field particularly dynamic even if there is no single center of gravity pulling everything together.

In future undertakings there is no need to repudiate the important insights provided by either the developmental or the dependency approaches. For whatever the shortcomings of their general categories of analysis as such, each has provided useful empirical and theoretical tools for Third World studies which should on no account be abandoned. Freed of the agendas set by their paradigms, we may nonetheless borrow from their labors.

The problem with developmentalism was that it was too fragmented; with *dependencia*, that it is too holistic. Is it nonetheless possible to promote some kind of cross-fertilization that breeds the strengths of each into a new synthesis while leaving the deadwood behind? If we have catalogued the failings of each school, what of their positive le-

²⁹ For interesting reflections on the comparative method, see Neil J. Smelser, *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), esp. chaps. 6 and 7; Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," and Victoria E. Bonnell, "The Uses of Theory, Concepts and Comparisons in Historical Sociology," both in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (No. 2, 1980).

gacies? Is some kind of “postmodernist” borrowing possible that moves us forward?

Thanks in good measure to the dependency perspective, those in the “mainstream” must now think more broadly and complexly about the Third World than before, while moral advocacy is no longer taboo in the name of an “objective” social science. We must think more broadly because the dependency approach obliges us to analyze Third World development globally and historically on a far larger scale than before. We must think more complexly because *dependencia* obliges us to see the interconnectedness of things—especially in the realm of political economy. And we must think in a more normative manner because of the dependency school’s insistence that the terrible human problems of change can simply not be put to the side. Indeed, it should be possible to take the dependency lesson one step further, not only by extending its methods to new areas, such as the study of Soviet imperialism in Eastern Europe or examining the ways in which relations with the South actually debilitate and undermine the great powers involved (witness the multinationals exporting jobs and selling the technological patrimony of the West for a pittance), but by expanding our sensitivity to the range of influences apart from the economic that the United States in particular may use to shape the Third World in basic ways. In its greatly exaggerated emphasis on the economic motivations of the United States and the earlier imperialist powers, the dependency school has completely overlooked the political logic of imperialism, both as a reason for American policy and as an active agent of change in the South. Thus, for all its warnings of the threats that imperialism poses to the late-industrializing world, dependency thinking has neglected, ironically enough, one of the chief avenues by which northern influence is exercised.

By contrast, the major accomplishment of developmentalism lies in the variety of analytical tools it brought to the study of change, and in the care with which it used them. The focus of this school was essentially on working out the logic of different social processes in their own terms—political, economic, social, and psychological. If God is in the detail—that is, if excellence is apparent in the mastery of nuance and technique—if it is the specificity, the concreteness of social life that brings us closest to understanding it, then developmentalism still has a great deal to teach us by example. It is from developmentalism that we can come to appreciate, for instance, the “laws of motion” of discrete domains; in politics, there are the rich studies done on bureaucracies, parties, and matters of legitimacy, for instance. Eclecticism is sometimes thought of negatively, as if it had an *ad hoc*, superficial character that

is of little use analytically. But if eclecticism is thought of instead as the effort to bring a variety of insights to bear on a problem in a patient manner that respects the complexity of the problem studied, then the various analytic tools offered by the social sciences today can continue to have the utility that the developmentalists originally hoped they would have. Thus, current topics—such as ethnicity as a source of solidarity or conflict in development, the character of the state and its role in change, and the varieties of religious cultures and their impact on change—were all subjects of interest to developmentalists a good quarter of a century ago.

From dependency thinking, we may learn a breadth of vision (even if most of these writers used this vantage point to violate the integrity of individual cases). From developmentalism, we can learn how a variety of theoretical tools may be used in harmony to organize the complexity of social life (even if in the hands of most of these writers such an approach did not add up, so that an overly fragmented view was the result). At the same time, Third World studies may work more fruitfully in the case of issue-oriented problems of comparative analysis, without the feeling that such efforts must ultimately vindicate either of those will-o'-the-wisps, a "general theory of action" or the notion that "all of recorded history is the history of class struggle." Simultaneously, there may be a renewed appreciation of works of art or history that, despite their lack of comparative focus (or indeed, because of it), are able to communicate so well the character of the Third World. In this way, perhaps something of the unity of the field may be resurrected—by the frank admission that the range of issues to be investigated admits of a variety of approaches such that discourse is facilitated, not ended. Still another frank admission must be that these concerns are not limited to the field of comparative study, but involve international relations as well. No matter how critical a comparative analysis may be today of the study of comparative development, its conclusions may also serve to clarify our thinking as to what is useful and what is possible—so that the field may once more experience the self-confidence that shows its revitalization to be at hand.