
A. Latimer, J. Osorio (eds.), *The Dialectics of Dependency: Ruy Mauro Marini*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2022, pp. 228.

Strange as it may seem, the winner of the latest (2022) edition of the prestigious “Paul A. Baran-Paul M. Sweezy Memorial Award” granted by Monthly Review Press is a text published a good 50 years ago. We are talking about one of the “sacred texts” of the so-called Marxist

“theory of dependence”¹, namely the *Dialéctica de la Dependencia* by Brazilian Ruy Mauro Marini (1932-1997). But the apparent extravagance is actually easily resolved. The text, published in Spanish in 1973, had in fact never been translated into English. The resolution of the first paradox, however, seems to have opened up another one: how is it possible that one of the most important texts about dependence theory has never been translated into the international language par excellence? Unlike the first, this second question does not have an unequivocal answer.

On the one hand, Marini himself never imagined *Dialéctica de la Dependencia* as the classical work it would later become. The result of notes from 1966, it was only in 1971 that the essay began to take shape, during a seminar called “Marxist Theory and Latin American Reality” at CESO (Center of Socio-Economic Studies) at the University of Chile. Marini’s idea was rather to introduce a discussion on how to apply the categories and principles contained in Marx’s work (first and foremost, of course, in *Capital*) to the reality of Latin America. On the other hand, Marini’s own troubled life² made it difficult to disseminate it more widely. The essay’s notes were lost on 11 September 1973, during a military raid against Marini in Santiago de Chile, on the very day of the coup that brought Pinochet to power and Allende to his death. A first draft of the text had however come out, as a working paper, in March 1972 in the journal *Sociedad y Desarrollo*. It was precisely against this edition that criticism was hurled by Fernando Henrique Cardoso, whose power, first intellectual and then political, and strong notoriety he enjoyed in Brazil led to a veritable *damnatio memoriae* against Marini’s essay in his own country. Not least, *Dialéctica* was literally overshadowed by another, much better-known work by Marini. That *Subdesarrollo y Revolución* that gave rise to the important concept of “subimperialism”, which highlighted the great responsibility of the Brazilian *burguesia compradora*³ in crystallising the relationship of dependence that bound Brazil to the United States, in a sort of ante litteram “peripheral realism”⁴.

¹ On this, see J. Osorio (2016), *Teoría marxista de la dependencia: Historia, fundamentos, debates y contribuciones*, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Los Polvorines; S. Amin (2010), *The law of worldwide value*, Monthly Review Press, New York.

² Masterfully summarised in this new edition by Amanda Latimer, who also took care of the English translation of the text.

³ On the concept of *burguesia compradora*, see P.A. Baran (1957), *The political economy of growth*, Monthly Review Press, New York.

⁴ On the concept of peripheral realism, see C. Escudé (1992), *Realismo periférico: fundamentos para la nueva política exterior argentina*, Planeta, Buenos Aires.

Marini's actual essay is perfectly contextualised by Jaime Osorio and Amanda Latimer, whose fundamental contributions greatly enrich the text, serving as an indispensable "handbook" for reading and understanding Marini's work. In fact, the text opens with a prologue by Jaime Osorio, which is fundamental for understanding the view of Latin American history as seen from the perspective of dependency theorists. In fact, the history of the subcontinent is quickly retraced through the filter of the unbalanced North-South relations, within that world-market historically characterised by an unequal exchange⁵ that has marked, and still seems to define, these relations. The prologue is followed by an excellent biography of Marini edited by Amanda Latimer, which summarises his human, political and intellectual background. From his relations with the Brazilian Communist Party, to those with other fathers of the dependency theory such as Theotonio dos Santos, Andre Gunder Frank and Vania Bambirra. From his forced exiles⁶ to his return to Brazil in 1984, via the aforementioned intellectual and ideological clash with Cardoso. This biography is actually a true contextualisation of Marini, the absence of which would render the author's essay mutilated for the 21st century reader.

After Latimer's contextualisation then Marini's proper essay begins, which does little to hide the critical nature of the writing. In fact, the text begins with a frontal accusation of the two deviations committed by Marxist scholars of dependency in Latin America: the first consisting of "substituting concrete fact for the abstract concept"; the second, involving an adulteration of "the concept in the name of a reality unwilling to accept its pure formulation" (p. 114). While economic history has been responsible for the first deviation (the "so-called orthodox Marxist studies", p. 114), sociology has committed the second. Both deviations originated from the intrinsic difficulty of analysing the Latin American context, and its "*sui generis* capitalism that only makes sense if we examine it from the perspective of the system as a whole, both at the national and, mainly, at the international level" (p. 114). Neither economic history nor sociology had therefore succeeded in understanding that the true orthodoxy to be respected resided rather in conceptual and methodological rigor, while "any limitation to the process of investigation derived therefrom no longer has anything to do with orthodoxy, but only with dogmatism" (p. 115). What Marini proposes to do, then, is to build a bridge to overcome both, combining

⁵ On the concept of unequal exchange, see A. Emmanuel (1972), *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*, Monthly Review Press, New York.

⁶ The first in Mexico (1964-1969), the second in Chile (1969-1973), the third again in Mexico (1974-1984).

logical coherence, methodological rigor, and historical reality, without forcing any of the three elements.

For Marini, Latin America has historically defined itself from its inclusion in the international division of labour shaped by the central countries of the West, and thus developed "in close consonance with the dynamics of international capital" (p. 116). This North-South relationship has from the outset been delineated on the basis of a dependent relationship, defined as "a relation of subordination between formally independent nations, in the framework of which the relations of production of the subordinate nations are modified or re-created to ensure the expanded reproduction of dependency" (p. 117). This relationship of dependency has its origin in an unequal exchange whereby the dependent countries supply the central countries with goods at a lower value than their real value, while conversely the latter sell theirs at an overvalued value.⁷ After all, for Marini "the mere fact that some produce goods that the rest do not, or cannot produce easily, allows the former to evade the law of value; that is, to sell their product at prices higher than their value, thus giving rise to an unequal exchange" (p. 128). So Latin America's role in the world market was "shifting the axis of accumulation in the industrial economy from the production of absolute surplus value to that of relative surplus value; that is, that accumulation will come to depend more on increasing labour's productive capacity than simply from the exploitation of the worker" (p. 120). On the contrary "the development of Latin American production, which allows the region to contribute to this qualitative shift in the central countries, will be based fundamentally on the increased exploitation of the worker" (p. 121). This dynamic was forged around the concept of super-exploitation, which for Marini consists of reducing the worker's consumption beyond its normal limit so as to, and here Marini quotes directly from Book I of *Capital*, "transforms the worker's necessary fund for consumption, within certain limits, into a fund for the accumulation of capital" (p. 130). The real movement of dependent capitalism then emerges "from circulation to production; from the connection to the world market to the impact that this had on the internal organization of work; and then to return to reconsider the problem of circulation" (p. 136). Given therefore that Latin American development was born to "meet the demands of capitalist circulation-whose axis of articulation is constituted by the industrial countries-and focused on the world market" Latin American production "does not depend on internal

⁷ The labour-value theory is implicitly accepted by Marini, without going through the reworking that Piero Sraffa implemented in his well-known *Production of Commodities by means of Commodities* (1960).

consumption capacity for its realization" (p. 137). Marini insists a lot on the separation, in dependent countries, between circulation and production, which forces the former to take shape in the sphere of external market with the consequence that "the worker's individual consumption does not interfere with the realization of the product, although it does determine the rate of surplus value" (p. 139). Not even the industrialisation of the region, a direct result of the crisis of the international capitalist economy, would be able to break this dynamic. This because "Latin America industrialization does not therefore create its own demand, as in the classical economies, but rather is born to meet a pre-existing demand, and will be structured according to the market requirements emanating from the advanced countries" (p. 145). After all, "an interest in promoting the industrialization process in the periphery arises among the central economies, with the objective of creating markets for their heavy industry" (p. 148). What Marini seems to want to emphasise is that the spread of technology in Latin America was more the result of an exogenous concession of the "lower stages of industrial production" (p. 149), rather than an endogenous development, explicitly echoing the theses of Mandel.⁸ The introduction of technology thus depends not so much on the preferences of individual countries, but on the "objective dynamics of capital accumulation on a worldwide scale. It was the latter that drove the international division of labour to assume a configuration that opened new channels for the diffusion of technical progress, and which accelerated the pace of this diffusion" (p. 150). Restricting the domestic market becomes inevitable for Marini to acquire technology under conditions of super-exploitation of workers: "the dependent industrial economy-unable to extend the creation of demand for luxury goods to workers, and predisposed to the compression of wages that exclude them *de facto* from this kind of consumption-not only had to rely on an immense reserve army, but was also forced to restrict realization of luxury commodities to capitalists and the upper-middle classes" (p. 152). In conclusion "Production based on labour's super-exploitation thus gives rise once again to the mode of circulation that corresponds to it, at the same time as it divorces the productive apparatus from the consumption needs of the masses", involving a real "resurrection of the old export economic model" (p. 152).

It was a text that caused much discussion in Latin American Marxist circles, as Marini's own postscript to the essay shows, a direct response to the criticism levelled at him especially by his compatriot Cardoso. At the end of the postscript, Marini again emphasises the central

⁸ E. Mandel (1972), *Late Capitalism*, Verso, London.

concept of his work, namely that “dependent economy – and therefore the super-exploitation of labour – appears as a necessary condition of world capitalism” (p. 160) and that therefore “capitalist production, by developing labour’s productive powers, does not eliminate but rather accentuates the greater exploitation of the worker” (p. 162). Short but intense, Marini’s essay is therefore complemented both by his post-writing and by endnotes by Jaime Osorio, who succeeds perfectly in his effort to “translate” the text to make it perfectly usable for the 21st century reader. In fact, his analysis of Marini’s text makes the latter much clearer, especially in its crucial points, highlighting its profound topicality. The reader is in fact faced with a complex text to analyse without a knowledge of the basic tools used by Marx and without that of the main concepts expressed by the dependency theory. But Osorio and Latimer’s contextualization greatly helps to understand the text, almost eliminating the need for prior knowledge. The importance of Marini’s text is, finally, perfectly summed up in a few lines by Osorio: “it was necessary to re-create Marxism, but not to repeat Marx [...] That is what Marini’s book, *Dialéctica de la dependencia*, offers to theory and Marxism. No more, and no less” (p. 172). Needless to add the topicality of these lines. Today, more than ever, it is necessary to recreate and not repeat, and this is the greatest legacy that *The Dialectics of Dependency* gives the reader of the 2020s.

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