

The Theoretical Heritage from Marx and Weber in Development Studies: Introduction

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Development studies and development theory have drawn heavily from the writings of Karl Marx and Max Weber both directly and indirectly. This theoretical heritage has not always been acknowledged by development researchers. Actually, there has been a widespread tendency within development studies to disregard the original contexts from which basic concepts, epistemological assumptions and basic methodological principles have been extracted.

Development researchers have often in a mainly eclectic manner extracted the theoretical elements which appeared most appropriate within their own often quite narrow and empirically oriented perspective. As a consequence, development theories and the methods used are in many cases presented without explicit reference to the epistemological and other basic assumptions upon which they are based.

Another consequence of this state of affairs is a widespread lack of understanding of the close inter-linkages which actually exist between methods applied by - and findings arrived at in development studies.

In an article published in Danish in 1989, I criticised development studies and development research in general for being weak in several respects (Martinussen, 1989). Let me just briefly repeat that criticism in a few summary points.

Development studies are:

- * Mainly *empiricist* - with far too inadequate reflections regarding methods applied - their strengths and weaknesses and their grounding in philosophies of science.
- * *Action oriented* - with strong forward linkages to elaboration of strategies and often only implicit theories and very weak backward linkages to ontological and epistemological assumptions and to basic methodological

guidelines.

- * Generally inattentive to *value premises*. Values and valuations heavily influence development studies - as other social and cultural sciences - but this is disregarded by most development researchers.
- * Inattentive to applicability limitations - as regards approaches and methods - and similarly inattentive to validity limitations - as regards theories and propositions/hypotheses.

I will elaborate a little on some of these points below. Other related points are taken up in other papers in this volume.

At this stage, what I want to emphasise is the basic idea behind organising a researcher course on Marx and Weber and bringing out most of the papers from that course in the present Occasional Paper. The idea and thus the justification for wanting to discuss these two long-dead social scientists is to share with the readers some more explicit assessments of the heritage from Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920), because we think that by doing so we may contribute to compensating for some of the weaknesses in development studies just referred to.

Obviously, comprehensive assessments covering every field and every level of analysis cannot be given in just one volume. However, it is believed that by selecting crucial influences with respect to selected aspects it will be possible to significantly increase the critical awareness of the multi-faceted legacy inherited from the two giants in European social sciences. This will undoubtedly increase methodological awareness in the broader sense of the term. The aspects selected for closer scrutiny in the various papers may be grouped in the following four categories:

- * Epistemological assumptions;
- * Methodological principles;
- * Basic concepts; and
- * Propositions and hypotheses about societal realities and change.

The main objectives of the researcher course were originally summarised as below.

- * To acquaint the participants with some of the basic concepts, modes of analyses and theoretical propositions inherited from Karl Marx and Max Weber and applied in contemporary international development studies;
- * To enhance the participants' methodological consciousness and their understanding of the epistemological positions and methodological guidelines explicitly or - as is often the case - implicitly applied in development research; and
- * To discuss the extent to which the participants in their own research have relied upon the theoretical heritage from Marx and Weber and whether that research could further benefit from a less eclectic and more comprehensive application of the approaches developed by Marx and/or Weber.

These objectives can be brought forward to the present publication and directed at a broader audience.

The assumption behind bringing Marx and Weber together - rather than dealing with each of them separately - is that they supplement each other. They are different in their philosophies of science and theories of knowledge as well as in their basic approaches. Yet, both of them have 'resources' and ideas about how knowledge can be obtained which the 'other side' can use and benefit from.

Impact at different levels of analysis

As already hinted at, we have to look for the influence of Marx and Weber at different levels of analysis. Similarly, we have to discuss what more we as development researchers could learn from them in relation to different levels.

Most important is a distinction between:

- * Methodology - the basic assumptions and the methods of formulating questions and propositions; and
- * Substantive hypotheses, i.e. statements about reality.

Each of these levels can then be further sub-divided, as we shall see. But let me first mention a few illustrative examples of

substantive hypotheses put forward by Marx or Weber which continue to influence the debates among development researchers.

Marx (and Engels) on the Role of Colonialism

In his early writings, Marx emphasised the positive role of colonialism in relation to British India - the combined role of a destructive force eliminating development constraints in British India and the constructive role of laying the foundations for capitalist development.

It is interesting to note that in relation to Ireland, Marx emphasised only the destructive role of British colonialism.

He later changed his views on British India when he toned down the constructive aspects and put more emphasis upon the destructive aspects.

We need not go into further details here. For those interested in the development of Marx' and Engels' thinking about colonialism I refer to Marx & Engels (1972) in the list of references.

What I want to point out is that Marx's ideas and views on colonialism have set the agenda for and continued to influence debates among development researchers up to this day. In the 1970s and 1980s, most Neo-Marxists took the stand that colonialism in general had a negative impact upon development of the Third World. Dependency theorists like Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin maintained that colonialism actively underdeveloped the Third World. Althusserians and others have approached colonialism with a more open-ended conceptual framework concluding that it both destroyed and regenerated, depending upon the structures one was looking at.

During the same period, the early position of Marx was also revived by Bill Warren and others who maintained that essentially colonialism was a necessary evil and a good thing in the long-term perspective (Warren, 1980).

Contemporary debates among development researchers no longer focus upon the overall impact of imperialism and colonialism but rather upon the specific conditions in individual societies which have determined the long-term effects of colonialism in the past, but the original propositions formulated by Marx still serve as points of reference in much of the Neo-Marxist debates.

Weber on the Role of Religion

Weber's substantive propositions have never played a role nearly as prominent as those of Marx. Perhaps because "None of Weber's writings has the immediate force of the *Communist Manifesto* or the purple passages of *Capital*" - as W. G. Runciman has put it (Runciman 1969, p 52). Rather, "Weber's tone is almost always impartial, his erudition suffocating and his striking phrases few and far between." (*ibid.*). Weber's writings on the role of religion in societal development, however, may be mentioned as an area where his substantive hypotheses have influenced contemporary debates among development researchers considerably, particularly in India.

Stated in simple terms, according to Weber (Weber, 1958) Hinduism and its other-worldly ascetic ethic has impeded the growth of rational institutions and economic development.

Since this proposition was first formulated in the early 1920s, it has been contested by several scholars. Yogendra Singh in a review of the Indian debate in the 1960s (Singh, 1989) refers to some important points made by the well-known sociologist S. C. Dube. According to Dube, Hinduism comprises several sets of belief systems; many of these are not antithetical to economic development or rational principles of organisation; and empirical observations on India's processes of development do not support Weber's basic proposition.

Gunnar Myrdal - in *Asian Drama* (Myrdal, 1968) - on the other hand accepted that the basic doctrines of Hinduism "are not necessarily inimical to modernisation" (p 78), yet he concluded his discussion by saying that the way Hinduism had developed and the way the religion had been received "rendered it rigid and resistant to change"(p 112).

More recently, Dor Bahadur Bista, writing about Nepal, accepted Dube's proposition about the many forms of Hinduism but then concluded that the dominant form among the Nepali elite, called Brahminism, has led to fatalism which, in turn, has impeded economic development in the country (Bista, 1991).

Continued Influence

The main point I want to make here is that both Marx and Weber formulated substantive propositions which have influenced debates in development studies throughout this century. In many ways, they set the agenda for discussions decades after their deaths and set several of the parameters for these discussions.

This is even more evident if we broaden the perspective from selected and isolated propositions and take into account how Marx' and Weber's basic concepts and different ways of trying to understand modern societies continue to impact upon our thinking.

Preben Kaarsholm in his paper on Marx' research methodology provides an assessment of its relevance for contemporary development studies. Eleanor and John Toye in their paper in this volume discuss the relation between the thought of Keynes - who provided much of the conceptual foundation for Post-War development economics - and the thought of Marx. They identify both congruence and non-congruence of the two schools of thought founded by Marx and Keynes, respectively. Birger Linde deals with the theoretical heritage from Marx in a broader perspective, his impact upon Emmanuel Wallerstein, in particular, and tries to relate that also to recent debates about the educational programmes at Roskilde University. Signe Arnfred looks critically at Marx from a feminist point of view. Olle Törnquist in a retrospective analysis shows why Marxism as a powerful analytical tool and a strategy for political shortcuts to progress attracted so many followers in countries like India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Subsequently, he looks forward and raises the question whether Third World Marxism can be renewed to serve more effectively as an instrument of societal transformation in these countries.

Lars Rudebeck in his paper shows how the dichotomy of traditional versus modern as developed by Weber had a strong impact upon the modernisation school of the 1960s and how it continues to influence the conceptual structure of much of current development theory. Thomas Hansen shows how by selecting research topics like the emergence and strengthening of Hindu nationalism and other topics within the field of political sociology one has to relate to Weber because it is in Weber that one finds a solid foundation for discussing agency, authority, legitimacy, etc. Similar arguments are put forward in the paper by Christian Lund who discusses the Weberian approaches and basic concepts in relation to a particular case: the land tenure reform in Niger.

In my own paper below I trace the influence from both Marx and Weber upon the understanding of politics within development studies. I also try to indicate how, in a particular area, we might move towards a synthesis of what so far have appeared as competing modes of analysis in the Marxian/Marxist and Weberian traditions.

In what follows in this introduction I will leave out the level of propositions about reality and the concrete forces shaping reality and, instead, concentrate more upon methodology and basic assumptions at the level of philosophy of science and epistemology. But before doing so, it needs to be emphasised that the methodological heritage from Marx and Weber has been filtered and channelled through a number of competing 'pipelines'.

Another important feature is that Marx, in particular, has been received both positively and negatively in contemporary development research.

Let us therefore continue by looking a bit closer at the complex pattern of influence channels and modes - at what could be called the 'path dependence' characterising the ways in which Marx and Weber have been received and influenced contemporary development theory.

Path-dependent impact

The overwhelming majority of development researchers have not read Marx and Weber extensively. They have received their ideas, particularly their ideas about methods, through other social scientists who have interpreted Marx and Weber in their own ways. Many competing interpretations have developed over the last 70 years.

To briefly illustrate this, let me just mention how different some of the more prominent adherents of either Marx or Weber have perceived the relationship between - and the compatibility of - the two:

According to Karl Löwith (Löwith, 1982/1932), Marx and Weber are opposed to each other so fundamentally that one has to choose only one of them. Their logic and epistemological assumptions are incommensurable; their problematics completely different. A similar position was later taken by Talcott Parsons (Parsons, 1937), who basically maintained that Weber opposed and replaced Marx.

This view was taken over by mainstream modernisation theorists in the 1960s and 1970s and continued to dominate the thinking among development researchers in general even during the 1980s. This applied to non-Marxists as well as to Marxists and neo-Marxists.

Contrary to these views, Schumpeter (Schumpeter, 1947) held

the view that Weber merely expanded on Marx and that several areas of compatibility could be identified.

This line of reasoning has recently prevailed among several Neo-Weberian scholars and among what has been termed post-Marxist scholars. The rapprochement between the two streams of thought has been reviewed in Wandergeest & Buttel (1988) and Corbridge (1990).

Without going into further details on these points what I want to emphasise is that Marx and Weber have been received and interpreted quite differently by at least the following schools of thought, each of which still influences some part of contemporary development studies:

- * Anglo-American neo-Marxists;
- * Dependency theorists;
- * Althusserian neo-Marxists;
- * The capital logic school;
- * Post-Marxists - but Marxian! (the regulation school and post-imperialism school)
- * Orthodox Anglo-Weberian (Parsons)
- * Neo-Weberian

I would like to argue that the so-called post-Marxists and the neo-Weberians come much closer than the others to the original and more basic thinking of Marx and Weber. As pointed out earlier, this also implies that they come closer to each other than neo-Marxists to orthodox Anglo-Weberians.

Space does not allow me to argue extensively in support of that point. But let me try to give some scattered evidence. And let me begin with a few remarks on epistemology where I think Weber differed in very essential ways from Marx - but not necessarily in ways which prevent us from combining their two approaches in other respects.

Epistemological assumptions and associated conceptions of society and methodological guidelines

There is little doubt that Marx conceived of society as a pre-structured totality. This is the interpretation of both the capital logic school (Karel Kosik, 1971) and Louis Althusser (Althusser, 1965; 1971). However, they disagree on the more specific characteristics of that totality:

- * The capital logic school make a distinction between forms of appearance - the empirical phenomena - and the non-empirical essence. And they maintain that all the empirical phenomena may be explained with reference to the essence, to the laws of motion of capitalism, to which their whole interpretation of Marx is confined.
- * The Althusserian interpretation rejects this dichotomy between essence and appearance - but introduces another dichotomy instead, that of structures (or rather: process structures), on the one hand, and effects of the structures, on the other.

But both interpretations of Marx take it for granted that his ontological assumptions about reality imply conceptions of a pre-structured society, i.e. a totality structured by itself and not only provided by structures through scientific investigations. They further agree that this totality is characterised by contradiction, conflict and dominance - and that the material processes occupy a position of primacy over non-material processes.

To understand this structured totality, methods have to be developed which allow the researcher to grasp the essential features, the process structures. These are pre-given and do not depend upon the researchers' own preferences, concepts and ideas about what is particularly interesting.

Now, if we compare these conceptions with Weber's, we find a completely different world. According to Weber, empirical reality is boundless - "ein unübersehbare Mannigfältigkeit". No structures are assumed. No distinction is made between the empirical and the non-empirical. Reality as a whole is empirical. Further, in Weber no primacy is accorded to the material - or for that matter to any other aspect of reality (for an excellent review of Weber's writings on ontological and epistemological subjects, cf. Bruun, 1972).

To study this kind of reality requires quite different analytical tools than those applied by Marx. What is important is not pre-given, but something the researcher decides to give particular importance. This is why Weber emphasises the so-called value relation and value interpretation.

The aim of social science is to interpret and explain. But explanations can never be total. With the conception of society and reality in general as boundless, as inexhaustible, it follows logically that there are an infinite number of potential causal explanations. Any object, however small, which we want to explain causally, represents an infinite number of qualities, and the individual manifestations of each of these qualities are again the results of the interplay between an infinite number of causal factors (Bruun, 1972, p 98).

Therefore, social science, according to Weber, begins with a selection of the aspects which we want to study. This is followed by a selection of criteria which we want to apply for interpreting phenomena studied. Establishing this kind of what Weber called a *value relation* to the objects under study (at the same time defining these objects which are never pre-given) provides the means of reducing the multiplicity to a structured universe. But it is the researcher - not reality itself - which establishes this structure.

In Parsons' interpretation of Weber, this all amounted to idealism at the level of philosophy of science and to indeterminism, voluntarism and positivism when it came to guidelines for theory construction and analysis. This interpretation, however, cannot be supported with reference to Weber's own writings. Weber often explicitly said that he was not opposed to historical materialism and Marx from the point of view of an idealist philosophy of science, but because he found that Marx had a 'closed' approach to reality.

In *The Protestant Ethic*, e.g. Weber wrote that it is "not my aim to substitute for a one-sided materialistic an equally one-sided spiritualistic causal interpretation of culture and history (Weber, 1965, p 92).

As hinted at earlier, Weber's approach was more open, leaving it to be decided as part of the scientific interpretation and explanation what aspect of reality is the more important - as seen from the particular point of view chosen. This is why Weber could emphasise the importance of the Calvinist ethic for the development of capitalism - without thereby rejecting the importance that Marx attached to the productive forces, the

division of labour, etc. The conclusions, according to Weber, would all depend upon the aspects chosen - the value relations established.

In passing, it is interesting to note that David Apter has applied a similar approach - but apparently without knowing the heritage from Weber. At least there are no references in Apter (1987) to Weber on this point. Apter criticises Marx and Marxism for being deterministic and materialistic and then goes on to elaborate what he calls a 'probabilistic approach', very similar to Weber's open and value mediated aspect analysis.

Post-Marxist Marxian Analysis and Neo-Weberian Approaches

Now, let me come back to the proposition that Marx and Weber have developed compatible approaches. Not the Marx that Apter refers to. And not the Weber known to Parsons. But the more authentic Marx and Weber.

My point is that we do not lose anything important from Marx by transforming his ontological and epistemological assumptions into propositions or hypotheses which are open to questioning and testing. By doing so, we may simultaneously avoid some of dogmatism otherwise characteristic of many researchers who have adopted Marxist approaches and still benefit from Marx' ideas and major contributions to the understanding of society and societal change.

On the other hand, we do not lose anything important from Weber if we take for granted that researchers can learn from their research that under certain circumstances the material processes take precedence over non-material processes or that empirical phenomena tend to appear in patterns with certain structures. But we do have to emphasise that all the propositions should then be treated exactly like that and not as unquestionable assumptions.

This is how I suggest that we try to approach Marx and Weber when revisiting their theoretical contributions. This is also, I believe, the approach adopted in most of the papers contained in the present volume. The aim, of course, should not be to conceal actual differences at any level of analysis and theory formation but rather to identify such differences and confront the propositions derived from the respective theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence - with the further aim of invalidating or validating these propositions as far as possible. While attempting to do so, epistemological and methodological considerations and

propositions in both Marx and Weber may prove very useful.

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