

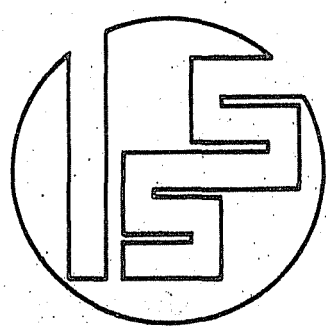
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OCCASIONAL PAPERS

On the Concept and Process of Marginalization

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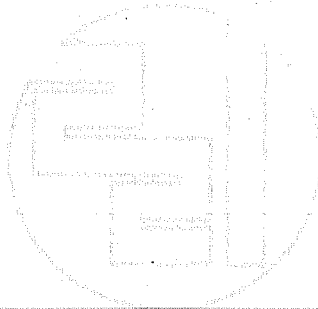
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ON THE CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF MARGINALIZATION *

1. The concept of marginalization has its genesis in the processes of transformation which have characterized the societies of Latin America (CEPAL). It is increasingly being used to denote similar processes in other parts of the world through which groups of the population are relegated to conditions which do not allow them to participate actively, equitably and productively in the societies of which they form part. The concept has a dynamic connotation as it suggests the processes by which people become marginal. For some years the attention of social scientists was geared less to the nature of the processes which bring about a state of marginality than to the state of marginality itself, understood as a set of conditions which should serve to explain the particular problems and nature of that part of the population which had become marginal.

The concept of marginality was initially used to indicate the state of migrants who had left the rural areas and settled down on city fringes in the slums (tugurios, barriadas and favelas). However, it was soon discovered that marginality was not an ecological or geographical fringe phenomenon but that the 'marginals' settled everywhere, on the fringe and in the core of the cities to which they had made their trek from the interior. While the concept was originally used to indicate the lack of housing provisions for the migrants, it soon became used in a wider sense to denote the general absence of services which characterized the life of the migrant population. Subsequently it was found that the absence of services and of access of services did not stand by itself but could only be explained as the outcome of a precariously low level of income of the migrants; in turn, this was seen as the consequence of limited employment opportunities and low levels of remuneration, either in employment or from work for themselves.

Thus, the concept of marginality gradually came to be used to denote the general state of relative deprivation of the migrants who were badly housed, fed, educated and in poor health because they lacked employment and income and had limited opportunities to improve their income and employment situation because of their limited access to the public services. It was then realized that the processes of migration to the cities were particularly induced by a similar but even more serious lack of opportunities and services for the population in the interior. While marginality expressed itself in lack of participation in benefits, facilities and services, it was felt that it could best be explained by the absence of active participation by the marginal population in the decisionmaking processes of society. The cause of this low level of participation was supposed to lie in their lack of internal integration and the relative absence of group consciousness and identity. If only the marginal population could be integrated, then the problems of marginality could be brought under control (DESAL). Thus, this view of marginality led to the conclusion that it could be eliminated by helping the marginals to organize, to adjust and to adapt to society, its values and culture, and by providing them with the necessary services and facilities.

* These notes were prepared as an introduction to a joint seminar on Marginalization of the Transformation and Participation Workshop, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, November 1972.

The policies which were introduced to overcome marginality were therefore basically directed at promoting the improvement of conditions of the marginal population, focusing strongly on the introduction of more services and facilities.

2. Radically opposed to this interpretation of marginality and the consecutive policies, which soon proved ineffective, another interpretation of the processes leading toward marginality emerged. The new interpretation emphasized that the population which was called marginal and not yet supposed to be integrated, was actually fully integrated in society; its marginal condition did not result from its own behaviour or characteristics but was the outcome of relationships with other classes and interest groups in society. Thus, their condition could only be changed by changing the terms of their relationships with other classes and interest groups in society. While in the first interpretation, society is conceived in a dualistic way and the conditions of marginals can, it is assumed, be explained by and on themselves, in the second approach society is conceived as an indivisible whole in which relationships between all classes and groups in society are interdependent and mutually determine each other. (Stavenhagen)

While in the first concept, society is conceived as an aggregate of individuals each with their own characteristics, attributable to the nature of the individuals themselves, in the second concept human nature is conceived as the expression of the totality of relationships; that is to say, a person can only be explained in his being and behaviour in terms of his relation to, and in the context of, the total relations in society as a structured whole. In the first interpretation, the process of development is equated with that of modernization and personal development is understood to imply the adjustment to and incorporation into the modernization process, seen as identical with process. In the second view, however, it is posited that the center (from where modernization processes are generated) can only develop and maintain itself insofar as it creates and maintains its periphery, that the emergence of marginalization is a necessary corollary, condition and consequence of the processes of accumulation and concentration of power and wealth, and that dominance and dependence (as expressions of marginality) are necessarily opposite but interdependent manifestations.

In the first interpretation, the basic assumption prevails that relationships in society are harmonious and that there is identity of interests (reason for which the phenomenon of marginality cannot be imputed to asymmetrical social relationships and has therefore necessarily to be explained in terms of individual or group characteristics, such as the particular consciousness or culture of an individual or group: Oscar Lewis, Michael Harrington.) In the second interpretation, the view tends to prevail that relationships between classes and interest groups in society are not characterized by identity and harmony of interests but by divergency of interests and that they are in principle antagonistic to each other. While the first interpretation of the phenomenon of marginality inevitably leads to attempts to eliminate the manifestations of poverty, the second approach would logically have to lead to a policy that would try to attack the roots of poverty insofar as these are located in the structure of the social relationships, as characterized by inequality and asymmetric power re-

lations. While in the first approach, poverty is seen as the absence of resources, capital and skills, in the second approach the view prevails that a society is not poor and people in a society are not poor because of the prevalence of poverty, but that this poverty, far from being a natural phenomenon, is the result of the wrong and inadequate use of the actual social surplus product of society, which is both non-productively used in accumulation (investment) and non-productively (conspicuously) consumed. It is furthermore posited that the potential social surplus product of society, that is to say, the potential of people's productive and creative energies which lies dormant and underutilized, is not unused because the poor and marginalized do not wish to work and contribute to production, but because the structure of society does not provide them with opportunities; if they have opportunities, their share in the social product which they produce is so limited that their interest in supporting production and productivity is understandably low.

3. Clearly, these opposing interpretations of the problems of poverty and marginality are actually rooted in two profoundly opposite interpretations of the nature of society.

In the first interpretation, development is understood as a linear process by which people move from a state of underdevelopment toward development, adopting and adapting to the same values and life style which characterize the advanced free market societies and the modernized parts of the poor societies; in the second interpretation development and underdevelopment (as expressions of domination and dependence which in turn are expressions of a particular class and social structure) do not exist side by side but make and depend upon each other. Thus, in this view, the rural hinterland remains stagnant and traditional because it serves as a pumppriming mechanism for the cities and centers, providing them with resources, raw materials and cheap labour, and becoming impoverished because a major part of the social surplus product produced is appropriated by the landowning class, merchants and moneylenders and is, as a rule, unproductively invested or consumed in the cities and centers. The direct producers in the rural areas receive a disproportionate share of the value which they produce or help to produce; if they sell it on the market, they receive low prices and have as a rule to pay much more for consumer goods from the centers than do the population in urban areas. Thus, they are subjected to double exploitation.

This situation should not lead to a simplified view that the relationships development/underdevelopment, accumulation/poverty, domination/dependence, express themselves only in the relationship between the centers and the rural areas. They express themselves between the centers and rural areas not as ecological, geographical or spatial units; the increasing inequality and disparity reflect divergencies in the productive structure which in turn are reflective of the prevailing class structure (Manuel Castells).

While such inequalities and disparities may be observed between the centers and rural areas in which social relations are the expression of the total structure of relations of and in society as a whole, they are also observable within urban and rural areas. It has been too easily assumed that the process of modernization converts city

centers in advanced areas as a whole, albeit gradually, in contrast with the rural areas which remain behind. However, it must be clear to any observer of dependent societies that the phenomena of inequality and disparity, enrichment and impoverishment, concentration of control over resources, and power versus marginalization, in opportunities and access to the control over and use of resources, become daily more pronounced both within the rural and the urban areas, while the social structure of the centers and cities reproduces the same features which are characteristic of the rural areas, so that in both rural and urban areas only a minor part of the population exercises control over the mechanisms of production, distribution and consumption, and regulates these mechanisms to its own advantage.

4. Mass poverty continues to be a dominating feature in most societies. In many, the situation has even deteriorated in recent years. While large segments of the population have inadequate work opportunities, are grindingly poor, suffer from malnutrition and live in miserable conditions, a very small segment enjoys great affluence. Available information suggests that in a number of societies, inequality and disparity in the distribution of income and wealth have increased.

The contrast between rich and poor is becoming sharper between developed and developing societies and, in many cases, within the developing societies themselves. In a world pulsating with improved communications, these growing disparities "generate wages and pressures that cannot be contained for any length of time". (United Nations Committee for Development Planning, April 1972).

5. The relative ineffectiveness of policies pursued implies that "attention has concentrated on symptoms more than on the underlying contradictions in patterns of growth and change and the ways in which existing national and international systems restrict capacities for effective planning and action". Many of the traits that characterize the developing societies, such as the lack of productive and remunerative employment, the inability to distribute the fruits of growth so as to relieve mass poverty or to narrow the gap between minorities enjoying modern consumption patterns and the rest of the population, the inability to accord the masses either the reality or the feeling of participation in decisionmaking, societal disruption and rising levels of violence, violation of basic human rights by groups holding power, squandering of irreplaceable natural resources and environmental degradation, unmanageable population growth and concentration in cities, have in different combinations become prominent in advanced countries and have "weakened their credibility as models for the development of the rest of humanity." (United Nations, Report on Unified Approach to Development Analysis and Planning, October 1972).

6. Ripping aside the confusing figures on growth rates, for about two-thirds of humanity, the increase in per capita income has been less than 1 dollar per year for the last twenty years. Even this increase, miserable as it may seem, has been unevenly distributed, with the poorest 40 percent of the population hopelessly squeezed

in its struggle for existence and sometimes getting even less than it received 20 years ago. There is "development wariness" in many developing countries today, with strident voices asking for social and economic revolution. Decisions by the developing countries during the last two decades to go after high growth rates in gross national products, to generally adopt a mixed economy as a style of development, and to turn to the developed countries for assistance, have all proved disastrous.

The choice of Western living standards was illusory at best, as has become painfully clear after two decades. To underline how hopeless it is to expect the gap between rich and poor nations to narrow, consider one comparison: the increase in per capita gross national product of the United States in one year equals the increase that India may be able to manage in about 200 years!

7. The old strategy, based on the quiet assumption that poverty can be taken care of through growth which eventually will filter down to the masses, has proved ineffective. Development is not merely a question of how much is produced, but what is produced and how it is distributed. Institutions which create growth are not neutral as to its distribution. Thus, if growth institutions are characterized by disparities in land holdings and concentrations of industrial wealth, the process of growth will strengthen them further and they will resist and frustrate all future attempts to take away their powers and privileges through orderly reforms.

The developing countries have no choice but to turn inward. This requires a redefinition of economic and social objectives of truly staggering proportions; liquidation of the privileged groups and vested interests which may well be impossible in many societies; redistribution of political and economic power, which may only be achieved through revolution rather than through evolutionary change.

8. A new development strategy must reject the thesis that poverty can be attacked indirectly through growth rates filtering down to the masses. It must be based on the premise that poverty should be attacked directly, by focusing on the poorest 40-50 percent in society, by planning to meet the basic minimum needs of these poor, and by bringing together the concerns for more production and better distribution, which invariably means that employment should be treated as a primary objective of development since it is the most powerful means of redistributing income in a poor society.

The developing countries will have to make a choice and become either more frankly capitalistic or more genuinely socialist. The days of the mixed economy are numbered. The capitalist alternative is workable only in situations where the society is willing to accept income inequalities over a long period of time without exploding, or where extremely high growth rates (10 to 15 percent) can be financed with a generous inflow of

resources. Otherwise, a genuine socialist system, based on a different ideology and a different pattern of society, is the only alternative. But this means a major change in the political balance of power within these societies and drastic economic and social reforms. Whether the developing countries can manage such a change without violent revolutions is a critical question of our time (Mahbub Ul Haq, Senior Adviser, World Bank).

9. The cumulative nature of the polarization process shows itself dramatically in the convergence of inequalities resulting from disparities in the archaic rural social structures and from the processes of modernization taking place in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Hopes that the industrialization process could effectively serve as the decisive dynamic force in national development appear to have been based on the mechanistic assumption that the Western experience of industrialization would, although perhaps with some difficulties, essentially repeat itself, an a-historical interpretation whose invalidity has been amply demonstrated (Cardoso y Faletto, 1967). Where and while high rates of industrial growth may be obtained, the overall effects thereof tend to remain limited or are even regressive; as a result of the structure of investment, often induced or directed from outside, the emphasis is on the introduction of capital-intensive industries, a product of the exclusive interest in profitmaking. As a consequence, labour-intensive industries stagnate or are being replaced; employment opportunities either do not grow in proportion to the increase of need and offer, or even diminish. The share of the wage fund in total national income may, under such circumstances, grow very slowly or even diminish, with regressive implications for the income and the social structure.

The pressure to respond in the short run to the urgent need for increased food supplies to the urban areas, which have expanded in increasing disproportion to their absorptive capacity, strongly stimulates the modernization of agriculture. However, there is growing evidence that the Green Revolution, while leading to increased production and productivity, tends or may tend to increase unemployment, with again the implicit deterioration in the social structure.

Growth is then looked upon as the proof of "innate entrepreneurial capacities" of a minority of rich and middle-sized farmers. It is, however, necessary to point out that such entrepreneurial initiative does not result from "natural disposition or talent", but is rather

the outcome of the special opportunities offered to this group as the fruit of economic and political power.

10. The relative non-productivity of the peasantry with which the stagnation of rural society tends to become associated, should then not be explained as the product of resistance to change among the rural population and the peasantry, but rather as a consequence of the limitations imposed upon this population and peasantry by the processes of monopolization. A policy of "betting on the strong" (Wertheim 1964) has its necessary counterproduct in "weakening of the weak". The insistence on the assumption that somehow, by a process of spontaneous filtering, the acquired expertise and entrepreneurial initiative of the privileged majority will benefit the poorer classes, does not appear to be borne out by empirical evidence; on the contrary, there are many signs that such an assumption only facilitates and aggravates the process of polarization. The impossibility of the underprivileged majority to respond positively to innovations should not only be sought in the structural constraints which characterize their situation but also in the regressive effects of the dependency situation on their motivations; these become impaired by the effects of their dependency, the natural counterpart of a situation of structural and cultural domination. These effects express themselves in apathy, submissiveness, conformity, apparent laziness, inaction; seeming lack of understanding and irrational behaviour may therefore be understood as expressions of self-defence, and their seemingly pathological appearance as human reaction to the implicit or explicit forms of repression and oppression which accompany prevailing systems of domination.
11. The processes of modernization in the industrial and agricultural sectors, which entail regressive tendencies as a result of increased concentration of ownership or control over productive resources, also lead to a new situation of the marginalized population. While previously the hope for employment might have prevailed and its possibility was also theoretically assumed, the newly emerging situation is no longer characterized by potential employability but fundamentally by unemployability. This new situation is qualitatively different from that in the past. The unemployable can no longer be seen as potential participants in society; if they are not yet excluded they will become so (José Nun, 1969). This process of exclusion may be especially induced by a relative identity of interest and mutual support between the modernizing industrial elite on the one hand and the power groups which control the rural areas (agricultural exporters, merchants, landlords and middle-sized farmers) on the other hand. It is this coalition that provides the political base for the process of modernization and the Government's support.
12. If the marginal(ized) population cannot participate in society and its development, would it be realistic to expect a possibility for them to participate "without a prior qualitative transformation of the prevailing social and economic system?" A positive answer would be a denial of the internal dynamics of the very system of laissez-faire economic growth as it is imposed in the majority of poor

countries, and inevitably leads to increased lopsidedness and imbalance between the centers and the interior industry and agriculture regions, between classes and interest groups.

13. It is at this juncture that the concept of participation requires more precise analysis. It would seem that in the face of the suggested effects of the processes of modernization, the prevailing postulate and practice of participation in society and development obscure the real issue and help to consolidate or aggravate prevailing tendencies of polarization. Thus participation in development activities by marginalized groups in the name of national and local development with a view to improve conditions, may too frequently and easily intensify exploitative forms of surplus-appropriation by power-controlling minority groups, whereas participation "in the name of democracy" may provide a cover of legitimacy and safety to those promoting and benefiting from the processes of concentration (Zeitlin, 1970). It may be asked whether as a result of the nature of the process of growth, the validity of the contention of the prevalence of a situation of 'internal colonialism' is not diminishing insofar as the developed sector in the cities and in the rural areas "would no more be generated through the exploitation of the more backward sectors and that it needs them less and less for continued growth" (United Nations, 1969).
14. The stagnation of traditional rural society as a result of the maintenance of an archaic non-productive exploitative structure, necessitates profound and radical reforms. However, the need for such reforms has received diminished attention, as a result of the processes of modernization and dualization which make the marginalized rural and the unemployable urban population (in itself produced by the stagnation of life in the rural areas) a-functional and "useless" in the context of the prevailing system (Kuitenbrouwer, 1971). The growing insight that this emerging situation leads to closed circuits and islands of growth in a sea of increasing poverty, threatens the stability and diminishes the chances for authentic development, should bring to reason those who impede or delay the introduction of far-reaching reforms. The arguments for such reforms may then be based more on considerations of social justice and political necessity than on reasons of a purely economic order, unless development from within becomes a fundamental issue in the considerations of those politically responsible in the given context for their societies' development. The proposition that modernization should only be allowed to take place if a society has achieved "structural maturity" (Jacoby, 1971), runs counter to the pressures inherent in the process of modernization, as these actually impose themselves. Will such a proposition only be understood after the storm generated by the marginalizing effects of such modernization, has swept away the prevailing order? The prospects of unemployability in the face of continued high population growth, combined with the negative effects of dysfunctional, distorted educational systems and the impact of capital-intensive technology, should be a forceful warning for those holding power to look for new ways and alternatives in development, based on giving primacy not to profit and growth but to people and their legitimate desire for dignity and a meaningful

life. In this context, participation should need to be defined not primarily as taking part in any development activity, but rather from the point of view of the interests of the marginalized groups as "any action which might promote the transformation of the prevailing societal structure"(Stavenhagen, 1970).

15. The persistence of traditional rural structures and the development of a monopolistic process of industrialization induced from outside, promote the production of an increasingly diversified set of consumer goods for the affluent minority which exercises economic, social and political power, as well as for a privileged minority of workers with relatively high incomes (Ranjit Sau, 1972). The development of industrial monopolization not only excludes the poor population from access to basic consumer goods, but also obviates or diminishes the need for transformation of the traditional agrarian structure (Theotonio dos Santos, 1969). Also, discretionary consumption by a bureaucratic elite and a labour aristocracy may impede the development of the internal rural economy just as much as the priority given by foreign investment to maximization of surplus by investment in the industrial sector may contribute to the stagnation of rural areas (Arrighi and Saul, 1968).
16. While access to goods, opportunities and services, in short the participation in the distribution and redistribution of power and wealth, is basically determined by the differential control over and access to the means of production, the increasing inequality in access to opportunities and services is particularly enhanced by the political needs of governments to favour the urban population.

The process of urbanization as a particular form of social and spatial organization with its marginalizing effects on the rural areas is (theoretically) to be understood as the expression of a particular mode of production and social structure (Castells, 1972).

17. From the above, it may be inferred that the concept of marginalization refers to the processes and mechanisms by which:
 - the access of people to and the control over means of production is limited or impeded
 - people as a consequence of their position in the social structure have limited or diminished access to distributional and redistributional processes and policies, in terms of power resources, decision making, wealth, income, services and benefits, while at the same time a significant share of their contribution to the total social product is appropriated or they are excluded from participating in the productive process, a situation which in turn may have marginalizing effects for the employed (under non-monopolistic, competitive conditions)

- people's consciousness and scope and capacity for self-development and self-realization are impaired as well as their capacity for solidarity, organization and joint action in self-defense and the promotion of their own legitimate interests (Helen Icken Sata, 1971; Julio Cotler, 1970).

18. The above propositions rest on the premisses that

- the distribution of economic goods is not a sphere separate and independent of production but is determined by the mode of production (Giddens, 1971)
- the development of underdevelopment (Frank, 1973) and its effects in terms of inequality and impoverishment is not in the first instance determined by exchange relationships but by the specific ways in which in dependent societies capitalist and pre-capitalist formations combine, interpenetrate, and support each other (Samir Amin, 1970; Laclau, 1971).

The process of marginalization, it is suggested, is circular and cumulative in the sense that the various processes and elements leading toward economic, political and social marginality, as expressions of one indivisible total process, tend to reinforce each other (Myrdal, 1943, 1957).

In the above context negative characteristics of dependent people, such as lack of cooperation, unproductivity, apathy, laziness, conformism, lack of understanding and insight, have to be interpreted not as characteristics inherent in people but as rational responses to their marginalized state, insofar as this excludes or diminishes own control over life and work (Wertheim, 1971) and impairs people's opportunities for self-realisation and self-development (Mandel, 1971).

19. In the above perspective, marginality in terms of employment and income, marginality in ecological or spatial terms (slums, rural areas, periphery), cultural and socio-psychological marginality (resignation, apathy, social atomization, culture of poverty), or marginality in terms of conflict in culture, status and values (José Nun, 1969), are all understood as manifestations of contradictions within the concrete historical process of development of class relations in a given society, which in turn, express themselves in the specific role and function of the State as regulator of the societal process.

20. The theoretical and practical acceptance of processes of marginalisation as causing impoverishment is conditioned by acceptance of the proposition that poverty and impoverishment in the dependent societies do not arise so much from the inadequacy of the surplus product as from the wrong, non-productive and wasteful use that is made of it through inutile consumption and investment. The scope for development of the productive forces, however, is not only impaired by the use of the actual surplus

product but also by the limitations on the use of the potential surplus, that is, the productive and creative potential of people whose capacities and energies remain unused or underutilized due to the prevailing social structure (Baran, 1962 and Mandel, 1970).

21. Transformation of the social, economic and political structure, and new forms of social control which will permit people to have effective control over their own life and work, their product and environment, are a necessity not only in order to make the dependent, impoverished, societies more viable, but also to create conditions for the full development of people's potential and for the enhancement of their self-realisation and self-development. Effective equality is a necessity from all points of view (Myrdal, 1970).
22. It cannot be assumed that a socialist society automatically leads to elimination or diminution of the processes of marginalisation as indicated above.

The progressive de-marginalisation of people is dependent on the total movement of society, and on the degree to which the inequality that results from the dichotomy between centers and rural areas, industry and agriculture, and intellectual and manual labour, will disappear. Development policies which effectively start from and promote the self-development and self-realisation of human beings require a radical turn-over of prevailing processes and policies (Gurley, 1970).

23. The development of new orientations which naturally start from the premise that man and his creativity and productivity is the source of all wealth and that no-one should rise unless all rise together (Mao Tse Tung), may be normatively delineated but can only be realised in practice if and when the development of class structure in the concrete historical process enables and promotes it (Huberman and Sweezy, 1967; Bettelheim, 1970).

Development in this sense may then be defined as the processes through which a society achieves increased control over its environment and over its own political destiny, and enables its members to gain increased control over themselves (Inayatullah) and over their environment.

24. In approaching the problems of marginalization and in attempting to identify its roots, it is useful to refresh our conscience as to the basic fact that all of us, intentionally or not, have a particular position and belong to a particular interest group in our own societies, that we are all consciously or unconsciously ideologically and politically involved, and that in neither theory nor in practice can we hope to be or qualify ourselves as neutral (Stavenhage, 1971). Inasfar as social science is used as an instrument to promote not the maintenance but the transformation of the prevailing social order so as to secure effective opportunities for

self-development and self-realization to all instead of to a minority, it will naturally encounter the suspicion and opposition of those groups who are bent on maintenance of the status quo and their vested interests and who will attempt to influence the shaping of historical and sociological thought so as to save their interests (Goldman, 1966). It will be natural for such groups to promote an a-historical approach to the issues so that processes of marginalization become reduced to the problem of marginality (the efforts and outward manifestations of marginalization in poverty, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, poor housing, low income, etc.).

Such a theoretical position will necessarily lead to the practical position of proposals to solve the problems of marginalization by focusing primarily on its manifestations and symptoms.

The attempt to avoid a historical approach is understandable from the point of view of such groups insofar as it likely to remind them of the transitory nature of social institutions, an uncomfortable thought to established interest groups or an ancien régime (Barrington Moore, 1958).

25. The need for a de-mystifying, critical analysis applies to all societies, irrespective of their political ideology and social and economic structure and system. While the need for a worldwide movement of counter-alienation (Lucaks, 1971) becomes ever more pressing, the possibility to fight against the roots and manifestations of marginalization cannot be abstractly claimed as the exclusive preserve or legitimate theoretical monopoly of any intellectual, political or ideological group. Any such claim can only be validated in and by the practice of development.

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