SYMPOSIUM

''DEPENDENCY THEORY'' AND LATIN AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

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More than ten years have passed since the publication of *Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina*, thus providing a fitting opportunity to assess the impact of dependency theory after a decade of fiery debates and hopeful explorations. Cardoso and Faletto's book had an immediate and decisive influence, not only on the reading public but—perhaps more importantly—on the collective effort to define the issues and themes around which a new view of Latin America was to be built, based on the recognition of the central role of dependency in the shaping of Latin American realities.

Such a success had, from the start, an obvious element of paradox: for Cardoso and Faletto dependency is—rather than a ''theory'' or an explanatory principle—a fact, more accurately, a common feature of a set of facts that requires explanation (but not necessarily a single explanation valid for all of them under all circumstances).

Cardoso and Faletto's approach came close to the one historians would prefer instinctively, under the influence of the nominalist tradition so strong in their discipline. This explains, perhaps, why their influence was less strongly felt by historians than by social scientists; when historians look to other social sciences for new insights, they usually prefer those inspired by more clearly divergent—and hence more stimulating—perspectives. There was, however, a lesson that they

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could have learned from Cardoso and Faletto: a discreet but firm warning against the temptations that the cruder versions of *dependentismo* held for historian and social scientist alike. But they didn't heed this lesson, and had to free themselves from these temptations after a lengthy and not always painless process.

Cardoso and Faletto offered, among other things and perhaps unintentionally, a counterview to a work whose unlimited intellectual ambitions had won for it the rapt attention of an unexpectedly wide public, both in the United States and in Latin America. This was, of course, the work of André Gunder Frank, which flashed across the Latin American intellectual horizon like a dazzling, fleeting comet. His *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967)[1] purported to offer a radically new view of the region in its past, present, and future, based on a violent rejection of all Latin American intellectual and ideological traditions. Against this background, which they hadn't chosen, Cardoso and Faletto carried out—with admirable tact and deadly accuracy—a double task of recovery and destruction: they systematically gathered and described situations of dependency and proceeded to analyze them with tools that owed very little to Frank's revolution of ideas and much more to the very traditions he had contemptuously dismissed. These tools were, of course, marked by the eclecticism that dominates Latin American thought, and Cardoso and Faletto successfully avoided the danger of incoherency that less skilled practitioners very frequently are unable to escape.

Their terms of reference are provided, on the one hand, by an image of Latin America's economic evolution as outlined by ECLA and, on the other, by an image of Latin American society that is more their own and reflects the legacy of both Marx and Weber. The two perspectives are integrated through the concrete historical analysis that is the main concern of the book. Though explicitly oriented towards the past, this analysis also leans implicitly towards the future, seen as a long march in which society forges its own path, and not a short temporal horizon on which the final struggle is fought between two equally apocalyptic alternatives.

Because of this, the book—which, as Cardoso punctiliously reminds us, was written in Santiago, Chile "between 1965 and the first few months of 1967"[2]—addresses itself successfully to the concerns and needs of Latin America in the late 1970s, a region that has managed to survive, even if far from unscathed, the hopes and catastrophic disappointments of a long decade. It is then fitting for the problems first explored in Cardoso and Faletto's book to dominate Cardoso's later studies of his own Brazil during the current period of "associated development"; in a much more hostile historical climate, he strives again to combine the concerns of a researcher, ever curious about new socio-

economic configurations, with those of a Brazilian and Latin American who, in spite of everything, is not ready to renounce his citizen's right and duty to contribute to the shaping of the future.

Frank's work, on the other hand, more closely reflects the mood of the time when it first saw the light. His French publisher was not the only one to discover in it "the economic and political base which complemented the political conclusions reached by Regis Debray."[3]

The book's timeliness partially explains why its success was both resounding and comparatively short-lived. Frank's later allegation—that the replacement of the admiring chorus that first received it by ever more bitter censure is but a reflection of the world-wide advance of the right—is no doubt less absurd than the delightfully egocentric tone in which it is formulated would lead one to suppose.[4] Of course, his critics are far from being the cleverly disguised agents of bourgeois science or Muscovite orthodoxy that Frank would like them to be; however, they remember only too well the disastrous outcome of the political ventures inspired by the "political conclusions reached by Regis Debray," and the influence of their failure in strengthening the conservative reaction that finally swept through most of Latin America. The failure of the project with which Frank's work was linked—the failure, that is, of the alternative it proposed in defiance of the social order in Latin America and the theories and political practices dominant in the socialist world—undoubtedly contributed added bitterness to criticisms justified by the intellectual and scholarly shortcomings evident in Frank's work.

It may be argued that this is wholly justified, especially because Frank, unlike Debray, has not felt the need to revise his viewpoints after these tragic and instructive experiences. Even so, this approach doesn't help to explain why a work whose defects were not exaggerated by its critics gained vast and enthusiastic favor, and not only among the misinformed.

The reason, as it has been suggested, was that it was perfectly attuned to the mood of the times. Both Frank and his acclaiming public were influenced by the deep Latin American and world-wide crisis of the decade. Frank himself tells us that the fall of the Populist government in Brazil in 1964 "conditions the way in which Brazilian history is treated" in his book.[5] In more general terms, the book explores the past in search of reasons why failures such as that of the Goulart regime were inevitable; why any attempt to change the socioeconomic order in peripheral countries was doomed if it did not start by breaking away from the capitalist framework.

This was the conclusion that was being reached independently by a good portion of the Left in Latin America from the constrasting experiences of mainland Populism—tried in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile in its hybrid developmentalist version—and Cuban socialism. But the Cuban

example was doing more than lending immediate relevance to a socialist alternative that, until then, even the more extreme socialists had relegated to an uncertain future. It lent even more immediate relevance to revolutionary change: until then, and for a long time, the only alternatives available to the Latin American Left had been the reformism of Populist models—moderate in tactics and even more so in goals—and the gradualism of the Communists—whose tactics had quite often been even more cautious precisely because they hadn't renounced their radical, long-term objectives.

It is understandable that a public, eager to get from the past a confirmation of the lessons the present was apparently offering, would be tolerant of the ways in which Frank reached the conclusions it so badly wanted to hear. However, this doesn't entirely explain Frank's success; his writings were not only attractive to this left-leaning public, even then smaller than memory suggests. He also had something to offer those who looked at Latin America's predicament from a perspective less concerned with immediate revolutionary prospects, but still with an open mind. These observers found difficult to accept the explanations that described Latin America as a latecomer into the industrial world that would, in due time, repeat the process already completed by the more successful countries of Europe and the United States. But it was becoming no less difficult for them to lend credence to the most prestigious of the alternative interpretations then available: the one proposed by Raúl Prebisch from ECLA. Two things were becoming increasingly clear in regard to the Prebisch model: the first was that some of the mechanisms described by Prebisch were losing the crucial influence he had recognized in them; the second was that this didn't change substantially the peripheral position of Latin America in the world economic system.

One of the contradictions that Frank had stressed—the one that opposed continuity and change—addressed itself directly to the concerns created by the growing distance between the performance of Latin American economies in the late 1960s and the forecasts implicit in the Prebisch models. To economists and social scientists alike, it was evident that, even if he had offered no alternative explanation, he had shrewdly pinpointed a crucial problem. To historians, from professional experience more used to recognizing the survival of continuities through change, this insight was less suggestive than the conclusions he proposed about the Latin American past. Here again, Frank's work couldn't have been more timely. The dominant linear interpretations of the past—both the theory that stressed the advance from feudalism to capitalism and the one that preferred to describe the same process as a transition from a traditional to a modern society—were proving extremely unsatisfactory.

Even if Frank's view was as radically unhistorical as the ones it

rejected, its impact was soon to reach the field of historiography. Inspired by a peculiar interpretation of Paul Baran's analysis of underdevelopment, Frank placed the history of Latin America—from the Conquest on—under the sign of capitalism, and recognized capitalism at work in every instance of surplus appropriation, whatever the mechanisms that made it possible. In Frank's reading of the Latin American past, continuity was more significant than change; this lent it a decidedly static, unhistorical character that made it both challenging and intriguing to historians.

Their reaction to this challenge was vastly different in the United States than in Latin America, and it is not difficult to understand why. While stimulated by Frank's eye-opening contact with Latin American realities, his book was very much a North American intellectual product and, more specifically—as the author rightly pointed out[6]—a product of the North American intellectual climate against which it reacted so vigorously: that of the ideological conformity characteristic of the Cold War years. During that period the Marxist tradition had been successfully and almost completely eliminated from the intellectual and ideological landscape of the country with a thoroughness and ease that contrasts with the situation in Western Europe, where it was still accepted, even by its most hostile critics, as having a legitimate place in the legacy of the nineteenth century.

The contrast can in part be explained by other specifically political differences between the role of the Cold War in the United States (where it was very much a national cause) and in Western Europe. But it undoubtedly owes much to the fact that the Marxist tradition had appropriated a style of thought radically incompatible with the intellectual bent that, for minds formed in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, is almost a second nature: this incompatibility is due less to the revolutionary vocation of Marxism than to its roots in the philosophical traditions of continental Europe.

Even after the climate of the Cold War partially dissipated, and even for those who developed their ideas reacting against it, the manifold influence of this radical difference in intellectual styles persisted. This being the case, the incorporation of the Marxist contribution to the arsenal of tools of historical-social analysis required a systematic effort to understand—if not necessarily to adopt—an approach that was at least as much alternative as it was complementary to the one developed and mastered by United States scholars. Frank, however, understood the task in much simpler terms. Rather than approaching Marxism as a living, articulated, and occasionally—or not so occasionally—contradictory intellectual current, he explored Marxist authors in search of authoritative statements that could be indifferently gleaned from the writings of Marx, Lenin, Otto Kuusinen, or Paul Baran.

Since most of Frank's North American readers (and especially the professionally trained social scientists and historians among them) shared his aloofness from Marxism as a specific tradition, his superficial incorporation of Marxist motives into his own work didn't evoke as widespread criticism in the United States as it did in Latin America.

But precisely because so much in Frank's work reflected the peculiar climate of ideas in the United States during the 1960s, it is difficult to gauge its specific influence on the historiographical explorations that followed along at least partially similar lines. The most important of these doesn't appear to owe too much to Frank: Stanley and Barbara Stein relied rather on their own long intimacy with the Latin American past and their experience of the cruel realities of the region; they were perhaps more indebted to "those Iberian and Ibero-Americans who dared to speak out against irrationality and injustice," to whom the book is dedicated.[7] True historians, the Steins don't share the static view adopted by Frank: they prefer to underscore the presence "on the margin of the traditional structures and frequently within them" of forces "nonreconciled, and indeed unreconcilable, with the past."[8]

This is, then, a book of militant history, very much a child of the North American political awakening of the 1960s. It is also something more: a pitilessly honest exploration in the historical roots of the unhappy and unequal relationship between Latin America and the United States, again typical of a moment in which not a few North American scholars had begun to ask themselves troubling questions about the role American scholarship had played in the affirmation of a United States hegemony in Latin America (a process completed only recently under the favorable conditions created by the Cold War).

But, paradoxically, what these historians discover in an act of thankless intellectual courage is sometimes not very different from what had already been said by other North American historians who had not been shaken in their beliefs by the winds of recent history. For the Steins, the term that best describes the negative forces at work in Latin America is "the past." In a few masterly pages they take us back to the moment of the Conquest, when the past was still the present and still open to alternative developments, to show us how at that time the interplay of social forces in the peninsula consolidated a style of colonization and domination that was to leave its indelible mark on Iberian America. From then on, even if they are attentive to changes in the external context and internal circumstances, they see the survival of that legacy of doom as primarily sustained by the constant influence of a specific cultural and ideological tradition incompatible with any successful integration into the modern world. The hasty reader, wishing to deduce a quick conclusion from the Steins' passionate and subtle analysis, would perhaps be tempted to find it in the notion that the current

misfortunes of Ibero-America owe less to her colonial roots than to the shortcomings of the powers that colonized it, so much more inept at the task than the one a generous Providence granted to the United States. The conclusion wouldn't do justice to the richness and depth of the Steins' thought; and, moreover, it is not necessarily wrong (and, of course, in suggesting it the Steins don't share in the smugness with which it was usually proposed by North American historians, very much to the irritation of their Latin American readers). The trouble is that it doesn't look particularly relevant to the tragic problems Ibero-America faces today; if there is something that the region cannot do—even if it wanted to—it is to cancel from its past the very legacy that makes it Ibero-America.

These "essays on economic dependence in perspective" constitute, then, one of the high points in the dialogue of ideas between Iberic and Anglo-Saxon America, where what the exponent of each discovers in his neighbor usually says more about who he is than it does about the object of his scrutiny. What follows is, regrettably, much less interesting. It is the use of "dependency theory" as just another set of ready labels for subjects that the researcher doesn't care to explore painstakingly enough. This rather inglorious result is due to a feature that "dependency theory" shares with the ones it sought to replace, such as those built around the notion of modernization: its promise to offer all-inclusive explanations. The influence of dependency theory is now especially clear in the ever more frequent use of categories of analysis taken from Marxism with total indifference towards the historical framework for which they were developed (which allows capitalism and imperialism to flower in the most unexpected places and times), as well as in the tendency to use these historical categories, not as notions abstracted from concrete historical analysis, but as supra-historic totalities that will only be cancelled—if at all—in a revolutionary future anticipated from an apocalyptic rather than an historical perspective.

Dependency theory had a more ambiguous and varied reception among Latin American historians than it did among their colleagues in the United States (or even among Latin American social scientists). Those scholars more attracted by erudite than by interpretative history, and also those who either separated their scholarly work from their political positions or linked their interest in the past with conservative or reactionary-nostalgic political convictions, simply ignored Frank's challenge. The times when the pioneering Marxist vision of the Peruvian past and present, articulated by José Carlos Mariátegui, had met the thoughtful, respectful, and unexpectedly nuanced conservative reply offered by Victor Andrés Belaúnde were definitely left behind.[9] Moreover, Frank's work suffered from too many scholarly weaknesses to force conservative historians to confront its positions explicitly.

Historians who were less hostile to the politically revolutionary implications of "dependency theory," while aware of the poverty and imprecision of the factual base on which Frank had built it, objected primarily to his too approximate assimilation of the Marxist perspective, then more dominant than ever before among this group. From their viewpoint, the core of Frank's interpretation of Latin America was the notion that its colonial order had been capitalistic from its very inception; dependency theory was to them little more than a passionate restatement of one of the positions in the debate on the feudal or capitalistic nature of colonial Latin America and of the Europe that colonized it.

They didn't lack justification for this view of Frank's contribution. In fact, in his explanation of the colonial order he emphasized the political and mercantile spheres: for him, Latin America was capitalistic from its inception because dependency links had been established through both spheres with a metropolis dominated by mercantile capitalism. By putting his notion of mercantile capitalism at the center of his presentation, Frank was—no doubt without being aware of it—reinventing an interpretation of the early modern age in Europe and the areas already linked to it; an interpretation that had enjoyed wide support in the Soviet Union until it was abandoned in the more nationalistic climate of Stalinism. Even before Frank rediscovered it, interpretations very close to the one rejected for the Russian past had reemerged in discussions among Western Marxist historians dealing with some of the historical issues that Stalin's authoritarian imposition of a linear-evolutionary model, advancing through fixed changes, had forced aside. The debate on these issues reopened in 1950,[10] in rather muted tones (the mood of the times, during these last years of Stalin's life, was less hospitable than ever for open-minded discussions among Marxist scholars, some of whom were guided by Party discipline) and had much less immediate impact than the participation in it of Sweezy, Dobb, Lefebvre, Hill, and Takahashi would no doubt have justified in less unfavorable circumstances.

The debate had to do with the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and it was relevant to the interests of Latin American historians not only because it dealt with the Europe that built colonial societies in Latin America, but also because it could shed some light on the more general problem of the transition from one mode of production to another. Here they might be particularly intrigued by the notion that perhaps the transitional stage was long enough and endowed with features specific enough to be considered as something more than an undefined territory disputed between a dying mode of production and the one struggling to be born: this possibility was particularly tempting to researchers who found it extremely difficult to place what they knew

about socioeconomic relations in colonial Ibero-America within the framework of either the feudal or the capitalist mode of production.

The discussion, it will be remembered, originated in Maurice Dobb's reply to Paul Sweezy's partially critical review of his *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*. Sweezy had stressed the role of the urban bourgeoisie and trade in the disintegration of feudalism, something he felt Dobb had not valued sufficiently since he had not appreciated fully the importance of production for use as one of the basic features of feudalism.

Dobb rejected this objection; without denying that the crisis of feudalism from the thirteenth century on had been accelerated by external erosion due to expanding trade, he reiterated his conviction—as impossible to disprove as it was to prove—that even in its absence "the internal contradictions [of feudalism] . . . would, I believe, operate in any case (if on a quite different time scale) to consummate "the disintegration of the old mode of production."[11] This conviction was, in his opinion, a necessary aspect of his being a Marxist scholar, and he was of course right in stressing that putting production rather than circulation at the center of its economic theory had always been considered one of the essential features of Marxism.

While for the feudal period the clash of opposing positions was based on convictions about the nature of socioeconomic change that reject a priori the need for empirical justification, the transition that followed offered a better opportunity to link each of the opposing views with the reconstruction of historical developments from the available evidence. Here Dobb felt on firmer ground when he remarked that Sweezy's objections left only two alternatives open: one was to fall back into the "Pokrovsky bog"*—that is, into the definition of a stage of "mercantile capitalism," a wholly paradoxical stage in which the dominant class reached that position not because of its role in the sphere of production but in that of circulation. The only alternative left to this, if one accepted Sweezy's position, was equally objectionable to Dobb; it was in fact the one Sweezy had already explicitly chosen. It assumes the existence of a truly transitional period in which for two centuries England knew no dominant mode of production, and several dominant classes existed side by side. But, even though a phrase of Engels (as usual, open to different interpretations) apparently offered Sweezy some support on this point, in Dobb's opinion a correct interpretation of Marxism—and, for those who care for it, just plain common sense—

*The expression, which offers a pale reflection of the colorful vituperative language so characteristic of the Stalinist era, alludes to the Soviet historian who, after being the almost official historian of Russia during the first revolutionary decade, fell into the deepest political disgrace.

showed Sweezy's assumption to be untenable. For him, feudalism, although corroded by internal contradictions and undermined by the increasing vigor of that "petty mode of production" from which capitalism was later to develop, remained the dominant mode of production in England until the seventeenth century.

The debate was to acquire a larger scope only in the climate of greater intellectual curiosity and growing perplexity prevalent after the mid-1950s. The perplexity was in part, but only in part, linked with the enormous problem that the legacy of Stalinism was posing to Marxist scholars: coming to terms with this recent historical experience was both difficult and unavoidable. Moreover, the gradual relaxation of the Stalinist climate brought back a Marxism richer in motives and inspirations than the Stalinist *Vulgate*, a Marxism whose internal coherence was threatened by its very wealth of heterogeneous motives and insights. This threat was as old as Marxism itself; the continuation of the extraordinary feat of the integration of deeply heterogeneous ideological traditions into a unified system, which Marx had partially achieved, was attempted by less powerful minds that only too frequently preferred to avoid the potentially divisive effects of such a diversity of inspiration through the prudent rejection of any too adventurous exploration capable of threatening the ever fragile equilibrium of this vast architecture of ideas.

However, this intellectual timidity, which predated Stalinism, was intensified under its deadly influence. After its demise, the mood didn't favor caution. In philosophy, the attempts to narrow the gap between Marxism and some of the earlier philosophical traditions to which it was indebted—frequent in the past—were once again publicly practiced. Next to a neo-Hegelian current (that had survived under the rigorous Stalinist climate and now dared again to identify itself explicitly) a neo-Kantian Marxism was reborn—or rather born, because it was vastly different from the one that had flourished in Germany in the early years of the century. An attempt was even made to recover the heritage of the classic materialism of antiquity in the thought of Marx and, especially, of Engels. In economics the relation between Marx and the classical economists, especially Ricardo, was now seen by some as more complex than it had been admitted. Ricardo was now used as a guide to understand Marx: the result was that Marx the economist appeared as a follower of Ricardo, as much as one who had gone beyond him. In a decidedly unhistorical approach, attempts were even made to bridge the gap between the Marxist tradition and later lines of thought that had, until then, been considered incompatible with it: thus with Husserl's in philosophy and Keynes' in economics.

This sudden shake-up of basic concepts exerted its influence on historians close to Marxism, but its effect was primarily negative: it took

away from them recourse to a limited set of general notions that had, until then, provided them with a quick, if not always satisfactory, orientation in their craft. These historians were now forced to rely more heavily on their own intellectual resources; at the same time they were rediscovering the legacy of a specifically Marxist tradition much larger and more varied than the narrow canon of Stalinist times. Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg, and even the Kautsky of the agrarian question, were restored to a position among the classics; but to historians an even more important development was the enrichment of the Marxian view of history through the incorporation of the *Grundrisse* into the canon of Marx's fundamental writings.[12] This brought back to honor, among others, the notion of the "Asiatic mode of production." By doing this, it did much more than add a fourth element to the triad of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism that had strongly influenced the Marxian view of the past even before it completely dominated it by Stalin's decision: it restored to the past a complexity that made the linear-evolutionary concept of historical progress clearly untenable.

It was in this context of new freedom and new perplexity that the dilemmas facing Sweezy and Dobb were rediscovered by those who took as their task exploring the Latin American past from a Marxist perspective; to discover them they hadn't needed the contribution of Frank; it cannot, however, be denied that it was to offer a powerful—even if perhaps accidental—incentive for them to face squarely and systematically the issues linked with the old and always new dilemmas.

Their reaction to Frank's work was one of stern rejection; this can, in part, be explained by the simplicity of Frank's reasoning. They were furthermore repelled by Frank's systematic use of the argument of authority, sustained by sometimes inaccurate quotations from Marx (that supported Frank's positions because they were inaccurate). But all this is not enough to justify the intensity of reactions that ranged from the tempestuous anger of Ruggiero Romano[13] to the icy disdain of Ernest Laclau, to the final compassionate echo that such derangements awaken in Carlos Sempat Assadourian, but only after he has carried out a mercilessly meticulous inventory of its symptoms.

Had this reaction something to do with the fact that Frank's work was a forerunner—involuntarily parodic in its brutal simplicity—of the positions (much richer in content and interpretative depth) towards which they themselves were cautiously advancing? If this was the case, it is more understandable that they felt the need to mark their differences from the caricature that Frank presented to them as bluntly as they did.

This seems, indeed, to be the case with some of the writings included in *Modos de producción en América Latina*, where the two introductory essays attempt this necessary distancing.[14] Laclau engages in

quasi-philological criticism to challenge Frank's credentials as a Marxist (and Frank's response that he never pretended to be one, while somewhat unexpected, is quite effective in cutting short the argument).[15] More interestingly, Assadourian confronts Frank's theses with what his experience as a historian has taught him about the past rather than the present of Latin America. He certainly acknowledges the political relevance of the issues raised by Frank and partially sympathizes with his political implications. Thus, he welcomes Frank's rejection of reformism and Communist gradualism, which he rightly links with his affirmation of the capitalistic nature of the Latin American order in the twentieth century. However, even here the agreement is more limited than is immediately apparent: Assadourian has much to object to in Frank's conception of capitalism, both on political and scientific grounds.

More importantly, these considerations are kept isolated from the ones Assadourian offers on Frank's views of the Latin American past. Even if he is ready to offer Frank as "an example for those of us who practice history . . . as a science of the past and not of the present," Frank cannot help belonging to the latter; Assadourian indeed, is mainly interested in Frank's image of the Latin American past.[16]

But even here he is more clear about what he objects to in Frank's views than about the alternatives he would prefer: "for the past we avoid an answer that wouldn't go beyond yet another formula." Why cannot it offer something different and better? Is it because—as he sternly admonishes Frank—to go beyond such formulas it is necessary "along with refining the *abstract generality* . . . to work on the *empirical totality* in order not to leap to another *imaginary abstraction*?[17] This doesn't seem to be the case; his trouble is not that he knows too little about colonial Latin America to place it within a precise framework, it is rather that he knows too much, that his image of colonial Latin America is too rich and precise for it to fit into one of the two alternatives—feudalism and capitalism—between which he is apparently expected to choose.

Assadourian then, chooses not to choose. In his *Introducción*, Juan Carlos Garavaglia argues that the choice is not really necessary: the notion of socioeconomic formation will offer a way out of the dilemma. With this notion we reach a level closer to immediate historical experience; while a mode of production offers an explicative model "tied to hypotheses in which common elements have been abstracted from societies considered to be similar," a socioeconomic formation always refers to "a concrete reality which can be located in time." But by having recourse to this alternative notion, the dilemma would be momentarily sidestepped rather than eliminated. Marx reminds us that "in every society there is a form of production which assigns others their rank and influence," and the determination of this dominant form of production

poses, in slightly different terms, the alternative choices Assadourian had tried to elude.

That is, unless historical experience reveals to us that in some nonconsolidated socioeconomic formations there is no clearly dominant form of production. Emilio Sereni suggested as much, and in Garavaglia's opinion, colonial Latin America confirms his insight: the most dynamic productive sector—mining—was clearly not dominant, and the task of assigning rank and influence to different productions fell to merchants, whose "domination of the system . . . [extended] far beyond the mere economic orbit." We are here not far from Sweezy's views, even closer perhaps to the Pokrovsky bog, but at least equally close to Frank, or rather to those historians to whom he owes his succinct information on colonial Latin America.[18]

More recently, Enrique Tandeter has again advised historians to place themselves on the level of socioeconomic formations, mainly to avoid the current proliferation of "modes of production" about which too little is usually known to define them with any precision.[19] The advice is perhaps well-founded, but it has larger implications than are immediately apparent. The notion of mode of production offers an explicative model, or—to return to the more openly ambitious language preferred until recently—offers the laws of operation and development of a set of societies. True, the promise implicit in the notion has only been fulfilled for the capitalist mode of production; as Stalin quite accurately remarked, the basic laws of the feudal mode have never been discovered. Thus, in renouncing the use of the notion, the students of the Latin American past don't deny themselves the guidance that such laws might offer; such guidance is just not available to them. But by abandoning the notion of mode of production they may renounce also the completion of a task that, within the Marxian framework they have adopted, is worth fulfilling.

An exotic example that suggested that the task was still relevant and its fulfillment could at least be attempted came from Poland, and was offered by Witold Kula's *Economic Theory of the Feudal System*.[20] And indeed the Polish historian offered an apparent way out of the dilemmas implicit in the Dobb-Sweezy debate by integrating interest in production relationships with attention to the impact of the market. Even so, Kula's lesson couldn't be applied literally to Latin America; the vast differences between a country such as Poland, where the dominance of agriculture and the class of magnates were both very clear socioeconomic features, and the much less integrated, socially less clearly defined Latin America made this impossible.

Thus, Kula's work offered encouragement rather than direct inspiration to the most systematic attempt to date to restate the feudal thesis: Marcello Carmagnagni's essay, from which the cautious, meticu-

lously erudite approach that had dominated his previous writings is totally absent.[21] To Carmagnani, the whole history of Latin America from the discovery to the 1920s is the history of the rise and dissolution of a feudal system. The restated feudal thesis has little in common with the earlier versions so violently attacked by Frank. Feudalism doesn't imply here a closed economy: from its very inception, Latin American feudalism develops in relation to mercantile networks. However, what makes a feudal enterprise feudal are two basic features. The first is that—while it produces at least in part for markets with which it is linked through these networks—it cannot afford to obtain its means of production from those markets: it survives by channeling into them resources it obtains through nonmarket and, in large part, extra-economic mechanisms.

This is so because the mercantile networks with which it is integrated are characterized by unequal exchange. Also because of this, the feudal enterprise cannot accumulate and thus open the transition to capitalism; capitalism will have to come from the outside. Both these features grant Spanish American feudalism a remarkable staying power and an even more remarkable lack of economic dynamism.

This daring historical overview of the Latin American past necessarily causes some perplexity. In selecting his data, the author has taken liberties that make his case more clear-cut, but also less convincing. There is, moreover, a basic problem in Carmagnani's line of reasoning, and it has to do with his assumption that colonial enterprises were unable to accumulate. This is proven by figures that show that fixed initial investment was low, when compared with the yearly expenditure of the enterprise once it achieved full production. But this is not very different from what we know about the enterprises that were active in the early stages of the English industrial revolution; and in England, the sums involved were sometimes much more modest than the ones available to the Mexican enterprises that, we are told, didn't become capitalistic because they didn't accumulate. As Paul Bairoch reminds us, the creation of the only boiler factory active in England during the first two decades of the steam revolution required an initial investment of a little over £3,000 (roughly equivalent to 15,000 Mexican silver pesos).[22] Apparently, Carmagnani's capitalism has from the start features that are more clearly present in monopoly capitalism; if this is so, then his conclusion that in Latin America feudalism could only be replaced by monopoly capitalism acquires the irrefutable, but also empty, certainty of a tautological statement.

But is this so? Or is it the case that Carmagnani's argument has more merit than his perhaps too simple—and even simplistic—presentation suggests? As it is, it offers a logical conclusion to a collective effort that shows striking parallels with that of Cardoso and Faletto. Faced

with Frank's challenge, these historians had also carried out a recovery of what they recognized as legitimately theirs in Frank's contribution, and a thorough demolition of the rest. After this was achieved, the matter was apparently closed. This explains, perhaps, the surprisingly faint response until now to Emmanuel Wallerstein's books, which restate Frank's arguments with a more sure control of the facts and a more refined historical sense.

But this parallel doesn't eliminate the consequences of the deep difference between history and other social disciplines younger by more than two millenia: the relation between theoretical concerns and the actual progress of historical work is always more complex, problematic, and even ambiguous than in any of these disciplines. Two works inspired in a Marxist perspective, which are destined to become classics of Latin American historiography, were published immediately before and during the controversy we have followed: *El ingenio*, by the Cuban Manuel Moreno Fraginals, and *La patria del criollo*, by the Guatemalan Severo Martínez Peláez.[23] Neither of these authors seems particularly concerned with the theoretical problems explored with growing subtlety in the course of the discussion. Moreno Fraginals owes to Marxism a solid, simple framework on which to display his prodigiously rich and articulate vision of the first sugar century in Cuba; Martínez Peláez' Marxism is crude rather than simple, and both Ciro Cardoso and Murdo MacLeod are right when they stress—from opposite perspectives—the weakness of his theoretical assumptions.[24] But it is enough to read *La patria del criollo* to discover that these criticisms are as irrelevant as they are well-founded: this subtle and sensitive reconstruction of a society and a world view is vastly different from what could be expected from the blunt reductionism of the author's theoretical views on history.

This shouldn't surprise the historian who knows the history of his own discipline and its peculiar rhythm of advance: actual historiography is usually either better or worse than the theoretical assumptions that sustain it, and maintains a surprising degree of independence from these assumptions. It is no doubt a messy situation, and one that cannot easily be theoretically justified; but experience suggests that it is not likely to change. The consequence is, of course, that even those theoretical debates that attract the passionate interest of historians have a much more limited immediate impact on their actual work than is the case in more modern sciences that have more successfully strived to keep an intimate relationship between theoretical explorations and empirical research.

NOTES

1. André Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1967).
2. F. H. Cardoso and E. Faletto, "Postcriptum a 'Dependencia y desarrollo en América Latina,'" in *Desarrollo Económico* (Buenos Aires) 17, no. 66 (Jul.–Sept. 1977).
3. The opinion of François Maspero in André Gunder Frank, *Capitalismo y subdesarrollo en América Latina* (Havana, 1970), p. 397.
4. André Gunder Frank, "La dependencia ha muerto. Viva la dependencia y la lucha de clases (Una respuesta a críticos)," *Desarrollo Económico* 13, no. 49 (Apr.-June 1973), p. 206.
5. Frank, *Capitalismo*, p. 191.
6. Ibid., p. 21.
7. Stanley J. and Barbara H. Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (New York, 1970), "Dedication."
8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. Victor Andrés Belaunde, *La realidad nacional* (Paris, 1931).
10. Now easily accessible in P. M. Sweezy et al., *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism* (London, 1976).
11. M. Dobb, "A Reply," in Sweezy et al., *The Transition*, p. 60.
12. The pertinent sections won a vast audience in the West after the publication of Karl Marx, *Precapitalist Economic Formations*, edited and with an introduction by E. J. Hobsbawm (New York, 1964).
13. Ruggiero Romano, "A propósito de 'Capitalismo y dependencia en América Latina' de André Gunder Frank," *Desarrollo Económico* 10, no. 38 (Jul.-Sept. 1970).
14. Carlos Sempat Assadourian et al., *Modos de producción en América Latina* (Cordova, Argentina, 1973).
15. Frank, "La dependencia ha muerto," p. 214.
16. Carlos Sempat Assadourian, "Modos de producción, capitalismo y subdesarrollo en América Latina," in *Modos de producción*, p. 77.
17. Ibid., p. 76.
18. Juan Carlos Garavaglia, "Introducción," in Assadourian et al., *Modos de producción*, p. 8. Enrique Semo, on the other hand, is closer to Sweezy in his *Historia del capitalismo en México. I* (Mexico, 1973). If his contribution is not taken into account here it is because he has preferred to keep aloof from this discussion, only taking sides implicitly.
19. Enrique Tandeter, "Sobre el análisis de la dominación colonial, *Desarrollo Económico* 16, no. 61 (Apr.–June 1976).
20. Witold Kula, *Teoría económica del sistema feudal* (Buenos Aires, 1974). The date of publication in French is more significant, *Théorie économique du système feodal; pour un modèle de l'économie polonaise des XVI–XVIII siècles* (Paris, 1970). This is now available in English, *Economic Theory of the Feudal System* (London, 1979).
21. Marcello Carmagnani, *L'America Latina dal 500 ad oggi nascita, espansione e crisi di un sistema feodale* (Milan, 1975).
22. Paul Bairoch, *Revolution industrielle et sous-développement* (Paris, 1963), p. 56.
23. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El Ingenio; el complejo económico-social cubano del azucar* (Havana, 1964). Severo Martínez Peláez, *La patria del criollo. Ensayo de interpretación de la realidad guatemalteca* (Guatemala, 1970).
24. Ciro F. S. Cardoso, "Severo Martínez Peláez y el carácter del régimen colonial," in Assadourian et al., *Modos de producción*, pp. 83ff.; Murdo McLeod, review in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, no. 2(May 1974), pp. 317–19.