

Alpheus Manghezi : *Class, Elite and Community in African Development*. Uppsala, 1976.

Reviewed by

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This book makes a penetrating, if not original, contribution to the present debate and real struggles towards the development of Africa, and to anyone sincerely interested in the building of an independent Africa its principal merit lies in the lucid way in which it raises the theoretical issues of development.

Most of the references in the book are taken from Anglophone literature, but the author's theoretical approach to real problems and the profound similitude of these very problems in both the English-speaking and French-speaking parts of Africa are such that his work may be said to be truly continental in scope, in spite of his own expressed qualms.

Menghezi puts the question : « What is development in the minds of those who trade this ideology as well as in social practice ? ». For an answer, the author begins by critically scrutinizing the various fashionable theories of modernization, imported from the advanced capitalist countries, which defy all geographical frontiers and penetrate every corner of the so-called Third World. Gleaning his inspiration from André Gunder Frank's criticism of these theories but placing them more precisely within the mainstream of classical sociology, Manghezi, after reading the Africanist authors, rediscovers the inadequacy of such theories as « pattern variables », « growth by stages » and, especially, « dualism » as well as the inappropriateness of liberal critiques of the theories, quite satisfied to preach relativism but refusing to accept that underdevelopment is a process, i.e. the consequence of imperialist history. Or if they do accept the fact (partially or by allusion as in the case of Rostow), they refuse to accept the need to attack the contradictory relations existing between imperialist and dominated countries in order to extirpate underdevelopment.

The author has been able to show, in a much more pertinent way and with much greater depth than the usual formal critiques, that the view of underdevelopment put forward by the acknowledged founder of the modernization theories, Talcott Parsons, is nothing but a political and ideological strategy aimed at consolidating Western hegemony. Similarly revealing is his critical examination of the works of Eisenstadt, characterized by an overwhelming emphasis on integration, adaptation and the establishment of institutional frameworks for the expressed purpose of containing discontent.

* Translated from the French.

This theoretical analysis leads to the conclusion that the proponents of the modernization theories are ignorant of the aspirations of Africa and brings the author to enter into a discussion on what constitutes the « principal enemy ». Is it, as the « modernists » claim, the old system, i.e. the system that could be defined by the term « feudalism », or is it the capitalist system about which these self-same « modernists » maintain an eloquent silence? Quoting from A.G. Frank, whom the author criticizes for not playing sufficient attention to production relations in his analysis, and Madeje, Manghezi considers that the dualism which exists in modern African societies is the creation of imperialism and directly accuses the capitalist system. He does deny, however, that in any analysis due weight must be given to the existence of ruling classes in the pre-colonial period and their alliances with the colonial class, which have left their imprint on the present social configuration.

The second, and most original, part of the book is devoted to an analysis of community development as a concrete and operational expression of the modernization theories. Manghezi traces the history of community development back to 1920 and this is the most debunking part of his analysis. We learn that the colonial authorities, in their attempt to make up for the inadequacies of the traditional school system in the territories under British rule, created community development. In reality, this consisted of a number of « Development Area Schools » teaching such skill as house-building, carpentry, masonry, shoe-repairing and various kinds of handicrafts. The recruits, once their training completed were to go back and settle in their respective home district and Communities, there to impart their acquired skills to others. The intention clearly was to halt migration and this is even more true today with the mushrooming of « peri-school », « post-school » or even « practical » education programmes. What lies behind this concept of community development? Rather than the usual vague definitions offered, it is the author's interpretation of them that will help us to understand certain common denominators. The first, and most important, is self-reliance; secondly, the initiative must spring from the people directly concerned and not be imposed from above; thirdly, institutions responsible for community development must be able to stimulate and shake the « apathy » of the masses. Community development thus defined is understood as a technique capable of improving the level of living of the people.

Manghezi comments that, as defined by the United Nations, community development is a technique for dealing with the economic and social problems of people living in underdeveloped countries, but notes that the objectives are described in vague and abstract terms. Another major defect in the concept of community development is the fact that communities are viewed as being composed of small groups of people living in isolated villages and mainly involved in so-called

face-to-face relationships. But, says the author, community or social problems « cannot be understood outside the central question of the existence of unequal access to the foci of political power and the decision-making institutions of the nation by the different groups of which society is composed ». Any differences existing between the U.N. definition and that of such writers as De Schlippe and Ponsioen, quoted by Manghezi, are a matter of degree rather than of substance. Community development has no scientific basic, « it is only of use to its protagonists as an ideological and political weapon, through its psychological manipulations of individual clients ». In many ways, it appears as a form of forced labour because the aim is to make people work without pay.

Hence, Manghezi postulates that the conclusion to be drawn is that there is a close affinity between community development and public administration, and makes the assumption that « the social control rôle of community development will become even more prominent, especially under the umbrella of the national bureaucratic administrations, known for their conservatism and commitment to the maintenance of the status quo rather than to innovation and change ». All these assumptions are supported by field studies by the author.

Part IV of the book is devoted quite logically to a study of social classes and class struggles, for in the final analysis any appreciation of development problems will depend on the understanding of production relations and the class options. Manghezi criticizes the elite theory which serves as the implicit or explicit basis for the proponents of community development (Lloyd, Nadel, etc...) in order to justify the fundamental existing order, since the élite, despite certain mistakes will be selected because of their qualifications.

To the concept of elitism, Manghezi opposes the social thought of other scholars such as Samir Amin, Stavenhagen, Kitching and the Marxist classics. Much of what the author writes falls into line with the views of the Tanzanian author Issa Shivji and the problems which he has pinpointed with regard to research on the dynamics of social classes (problems of definition, class consciousness, tribalism, mobilization) lie at the very heart of the difficulties that it is crucial to overcome.

After having provided unassailable evidence to support his conclusion, with which we absolutely agree, Manghezi invites all social scientists to commit the theory of elites to the dustbins of history and in its stead to adopt the only scientific theory in existence today, i.e. the theory of social class and class struggles. This « is diametrically opposed to theory of elites, rejects the assertion that domination, exploitation, social inequality and poverty are natural and inevitable and offers guidance and guidelines to the oppressed as to how they can proceed collectively to organize in order effectively to challenge and liberate themselves from the system that oppresses them ».