

# More on Modes of Production: A Synthesis of Some Debates Contextualized for the Philippines

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A look into modes of production is one of many possible entry points for the study of society and economy. It was not well developed by Marx who only alluded to it here and there in his works. He introduced the idea in *Capital* (1977, Vols. I, 1974 II, and III), *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1970), and in *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (1964). While one can read this concept in his other texts, for example in *German Ideology* (1970), it is from the previously mentioned ones that others, most notably Althusser and Balibar in their *Reading Capital* (1970), have drawn the term to explicate it as a tool for social analysis. As a consequence, it is in secondary sources that the concept of a mode of production has been elaborated upon and refined. Marx remains a source of inspiration to proponents of the mode

of production approach who refer to him in constructing their concept.<sup>1</sup> I used these secondary sources in explicating the concept of a 'mode of production.' Note, however, that the term has been subjected to varied, if not contrary, definitions. All of them cannot be reviewed here, and so, I do not dwell long on what are considered to be outdated usages of the term that have been formerly criticized. This paper is limited to a review of interpretations and applications of the concept which have been deemed most congenial to anthropology and sociology in the Philippines.

## The Concept of Mode of Production

The concept of mode of production has not been definitively defined in Marxist theory from which it is derived. In fact, there have been debates over this very issue.<sup>2</sup> Marx, himself, did not consistently use the term in his own writings.<sup>3</sup> Yet, mode of production is a key concept in Marxist thought and has been used (and confused) in order to distinguish between social formations in history (primitive communist, ancient, asiatic, feudal, capitalist, socialist, and advanced communist), even though social formation and mode of production are two different concepts. A social formation is an entity (a particular type of society) constituted by "a specific overlapping of several 'pure' modes of production."<sup>4</sup> A mode of production, on the other hand, can be defined only in a tentative manner because it is subject to change. It is a complex of social relations, which link human beings together in any production process, and the means of production (e.g., tools, technology, knowledge, skills, abstract forms of organization) around which work is organized to ensure the material survival and reproduction of a particular human group.

Rarely are social formations found to be composed of a single type of mode of production, as may be the case in 'primitive communism.' Even then, one would have to prove that a society of this type existed in isolation. Wessman provides definitions for each of these 'pure' modes of production. The reader is referred to him for the specifics on each

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Godelier, Terray, Meillassoux, Asad, Banaji, Foster-Carter, Kahn, J. Nash, Roseberry, C. Smith, Wessman, Wolf, Wolpe.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to Althusser and Balibar 1970; Banaji 1976; Godelier 1978; Hindess and Hirst 1975; Meillassoux 1972; Poulantzas 1973; Terray 1972; Wolpe 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Bottomore, "Mode of Production," in *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Bottomore et. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 335-337.

<sup>4</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*. (London: New Left Books, 1972), p. 15.

general type.<sup>5</sup> These 'ideal types' are not to be read as models under which all economic modes may be subsumed. Rather, they are intended to provide a general idea of different known productive systems. In real life, modes of production have to be constructed from the point of view of the social formation in which they are found. Hence, models are always open to possibilities of change.<sup>6</sup>

This confusion between the two concepts formed the basis of a linear evolutionary scheme whereby world history was depicted by Marxists as a series of stages evolving one from another. Each historical epoch was portrayed as being dominated by a particular mode of production which evolved into a new type through revolution. For example, Worsley has pointed out that the former Soviet Marxists, much like the proponents of modernization theory in the West, have 'chauvinistically' tried to impose such an evolutionary scheme of world history into other nations. In the process, they spread division among themselves and blocked the passage from capitalism to true socialism. As Worsley put it,

[S]ocialism involves not only material equality but cultural equality and tolerance between groups that may be different in regards to their cultures, social organizations, ideological and religious bases, ethnic identities, and gender orientation.<sup>7</sup>

The emphasis of Soviet Marxists on national as opposed to class and social movements is an instance of false consciousness because nationalism in positing the priority of the interests of the whole mystifies the reality of exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

Marx, however, defended himself against those who would misapply his theory as a kind of 'suprahistorical theory' to be imposed on all peoples. As he put it,

[E]vents that are strikingly analogous, but taking place in different historical milieu, lead to totally disparate results. By studying each of these developments separately, and then comparing them, one can easily discover the key to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there with the master key of a historical-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being suprahistorical.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>James Wessman, *Anthropology and Marxism*. (Cambridge, Ma.: Schenkman, 1981). Ch. 6.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Peter Worsley, *The Three Worlds, Culture and World Development*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). p. 283.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 276, 291.

<sup>9</sup>Karl Marx, "Pathways of Social Development: A Brief against Suprahistorical Theory," in *Introduction to the Sociology of 'Developing Societies'*, Alavi and Shanin, eds. (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 110.



Hobsbawm likewise pointed out that "the general theory of historical materialism requires only that there should be a succession of modes of production, though not necessarily any particular mode, and not in any particular predetermined order."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, 'mechanistic' evolutionary models of mode of production have been widely criticized because they are dogmatic and non-scientific.<sup>11</sup> They have been rejected by most Marxist anthropologists for omitting issues of culture, indigenous histories, gender, ethnicity, and ecology.<sup>12</sup> Even Engels, as it is now well known, warned that Marx's model should not be subjected to a reductionist interpretation.

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining element is in the last instance the production and reproduction in real life. More than this, neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure -- political forms of class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle etc., forms of law, and then even the reflexes of these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal, and philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma -- also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles, and in many cases, preponderate in determining their form.<sup>13</sup>

Althusser, who pioneered the process of rethinking the concept of mode of production in the 1960s, made it clear that a mode of production "has to be constructed out of the particular structures of production."<sup>14</sup> He stipulated that to think of the concept of production is to think of the concept of the unity of its material and social conditions at the same time. Wealth production in any society depends upon the existence of means of production, labor power, politics, culture, and nature. On the other hand, culture, politics, labor power, and means of production are secured by distribution of the produced wealth. Also, in peasant and tribal societies, the economy is frequently embedded in kinship, religion, or politics. This

<sup>10</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, *Introduction in Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, Marx*. (New York: International Publishers, 1964), p. 19.

<sup>11</sup>See Lukacs 1968; Gouldner 1970, 1980; Bloch 1984; Godelier 1977; Wolf 1982; Meillassoux 1972.

<sup>12</sup>See Worsley 1984:230; Wolf 1982:Ch.3; C. Smith 1984:225; J. Nash 1981:398.

<sup>13</sup>Engels quoted in David Seddon, "Economic Anthropology or Political Economy (II): Approaches to the Analysis of Pre-Capitalist Formations in Maghreb," in *The New Economic Anthropology*, Clammer, ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), p. xiv.

<sup>14</sup>Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*. (London: Verso, 1970), p. 101.

means that a country's culture, history, and social relationships also need to be understood to comprehend the dynamics around which a dominant mode of production is oriented.

Dogmatic Marxists interpreted the mode of production approach economistically. They saw the economic base of society as giving rise to social relations, the superstructure of a society, in all its political and cultural aspects. They failed to recognize that the development of the world capitalist system was not a one-way process, but that it developed in the context of pre-existing indigenous social relationships of power and authority.<sup>15</sup>

### Contextualizations

For example, early Philippine society had its own indigenous structures of authority in relation to the structures of authority of the Spanish colonizers. The early Filipinos were engaged in non-capitalist forms of petty commodity production as defined by Kahn, Godelier, Meillassoux, Smith, and Terray at the time of the arrival of the early Spanish.<sup>16</sup> They were involved in a tributary mode of production in the maritime economy of South and Southeast Asia. They were also engaged in mutually beneficial trade relations with hunters and gatherers and horticulturalists of the uplands to obtain rare goods for home use or trade in a wider economy. Composed mostly of traders, sea merchants, fisherfolk, cultivators, and crafts-people, the prehispanic Filipinos lived together in integrated communities. Their production was based on 'use value' as opposed to 'exchange value,' the latter being a characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. Surplus was produced but only in the sense of an excess of goods normally used for consumption being set aside for appropriation and circulation. That is, surplus was circulated on the basis of its use value (e.g., tribute), rather than exchange value, and the primary producers were still owners of their products of labor.<sup>17</sup>

The economy of the early Filipinos existed in contradistinction to capitalism which is grounded on exchange for profit. Prehispanic Filipinos were engaged in tribute and trade relations with centers of power like

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<sup>15</sup>See Fegan, G. Hart, Ledesma, Kahn, J. Nash, Ong, Stoler, Turton, White, and Wolf.

<sup>16</sup>Note that the term 'petty commodity production' is not analogous to Chevalier's and Friedman's definition of 'simple commodity production' as an incipient form of capitalist production.

<sup>17</sup>See Ernest Mandel, *Introduction in Capital, A Critique of Political Economy. Marx*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 56.



India, China, and Arabia. Its communities made their own histories because their inner and outer relationships were organized in different ways.<sup>18</sup> Spanish colonization changed the indigenous social structure and lowered the status of Filipinos here and abroad in relation to the maritime trade economy.<sup>19</sup> In the archipelago, local leaders were answerable to their constituents alone, who, if dissatisfied, could refuse to follow them by literally moving to join another lord.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to remember that the follower system in Southeast Asia was different from a follower system as defined in a Western context. As Reid put it,

[A] follower system [in Southeast Asia] is the awareness that a relation of authority of high over low exists, as accepted by the latter, and likewise the realization that high and low need each other in their striving for high standing. This relation is based on cooperation. The relation between [almost] equal groups, on the other hand, is best described as opposition.<sup>21</sup>

Spain's entry into the Philippines changed the indigenous follower system. Although local lords were initially accorded land and freed from tribute and corvee labor, their previous wealth and power had derived less from the land than from tribute and services they collected from slaves and serfs. The Spanish government undermined this indigenous economic relation by exacting a head tax on the common Filipinos. This is one reason why rebellion was endemic in the early colonial society.<sup>22</sup> The local 'servant-to-lord' mode of production process was diminished by the newer colonial modes of production of Spain.

In the Third World today, many chains of power are derived from earlier relationships forged between colonized, 'outwardly' subdued peasantry and their colonial overlords in the past incipient capitalist and mercantile trade economy.<sup>23</sup> Capitalism, far from absorbing pre-capitalist modes of production, usually co-opts them (for instance, even socialist countries, like China, have to collaborate to do business with capitalists).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup>See Anderson 1972; Rafael 1988:13-17; Reid 1983; W. H. Scott 1982; Wolters 1982.

<sup>19</sup>See de la Costa 1961:112; Mojares 1986; Iletto 1979; Rafael 1988; W. H. Scott 1982; and Wolters 1982.

<sup>20</sup>See also Adas 1980, 1981; Reid 1983:7; and Wolters 1982.

<sup>21</sup>See Anthony Reid, *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 7. For further details on the complexity of Filipino social organization, the reader is referred to W.H. Scott's article "Class Structure in the Unhispanicized Philippines," 1982.

<sup>22</sup>Horacio de la Costa, S.J., *The Jesuits in the Philippines, 1581-1768*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).

<sup>23</sup>See Kahn 1978, 1981; C. Warren 1984; Reid 1983; Van Leur 1955.

<sup>24</sup>See Mei-Hui Mayfair Yang, "The Gift Economy and State Power in China," in *Comparative Study of Society and History*, 1989, 31:25-54.

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The French Marxist anthropologists Godelier, Terray, and Meillassoux developed the mode of production approach in anthropology to study social transformation of pre-capitalist societies in relation to capitalism. In Western capitalism, for example, one can see how the economic instance becomes the basis upon which all other spheres of social life are made possible. In other societies though, especially pre-capitalist societies, relations and forces of production, which govern distribution and exchange, tend to be carried out through inter-personal relations embodied in social organizations other than the economic one. Hence, the French Marxist Anthropologists suggested

that it was the job of the student of anthropology to uncover the mode of production in non-capitalist societies (even as they articulate with capitalism) which gives them their momentum.

For example, Resil Mojares provides some insight into how social relationships changed in Negros Occidental, in relation to changing modes of production in the neighboring island of Iloilo.<sup>25</sup> Prior to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, the local islanders were involved in the trade networks of Southeast Asia. Iloilo city was renowned for its production of merchant crafts. It was an important port of trade in Asia and beyond because it was centered in relation to the southern islands of Indonesia and Borneo, and the northern islands of Taiwan, Japan, and mainland China.<sup>26</sup>

In prehispanic times, crafts were produced by craftspeople who controlled the production and exchange processes. Exchange took place in the form of prestations that bonded communities together horizontally in terms of friendships, and vertically in terms of patron-client relations, as in the case of tribute. Foreign trade "served as an impetus for an active internal trade in pottery and textiles."<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup>See Mojares (1986) and McCoy (1982).

<sup>26</sup>See Mojares 1986:178 and Hutterer (1977).

<sup>27</sup>Resil Mojares, Artist, Craftsman, Factory Worker: Concerns in the Study of Traditional Art." in *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, Vol. 14 No. 3, p. 178.



The arrival of the Spanish and British 'country trade' changed the terms of production and trade in the Philippines. The Spanish transformed the Philippines into a source area for primary products in an emerging capitalist system. However, they were not able to gain a monopoly over Philippine trade. The British and local Chinese merchants controlled Iloilo's textile production mainly by indebting its weavers. They supplied the weavers with raw materials, and the weavers supplied them with finished goods in exchange for a meager wage. First, the weavers were employed part time and they had to rely on home gardens for their subsistence. Later, during the time of the local textile boom which did not last long, they were employed full time.<sup>28</sup>

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Mojares reflects upon the changing quality of life and values embedded in the textile production process in Iloilo during the colonial period. He laments the infiltration by the capitalist mode of production of the Philippine economy, whereby wages have been kept low, and the bargaining power of workers, kept weak. He notes,

Economic changes have desacralized labor and we have come a long way from the time when the exchange of goods among men [and women] was a moral transaction positively animated by economic, religious, political, and aesthetic notions.<sup>29</sup>

Al McCoy describes the destruction of the local weaving economy as related to the business dealings of an entrepreneur and embassy diplomat named Loney. In effect, Loney flooded the local market with cheap cloth which was then being mass produced in England as a result of the industrial revolution. Also, the rise of the sugar industry is related to the decline of the weaving industry in Iloilo. Iloilo's mestizo elite (i.e., Chinese who married Filipinos and worked with the colonial powers by

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 187.



mastering their ways), owners of the declining textile mills, built the sugarlands. They used three tactics to acquire their work force:

Forced expropriation of peasant farms later legitimized by legal documentation; cash purchase of small peasant farms to form a plantation; and high interest loans to peasant proprietors with default provisions requiring forfeiture of the land and years of debt bondage.<sup>30</sup>

Once the land was cleared, sugar landlords used similar strategies to maintain their work force: They imported migrant laborers from Panay (e.g., dispossessed textile workers) and bought off permanent migrants with cash advances and indebted them with high interest loans when they arrived. However, these tactics were not enough to keep their workers intact. Plantation owners had to use violence (corporal punishment and military guards) to prevent workers from escaping.<sup>31</sup>

Plantation owners began to ship sugar directly off the coast of Negros only after the stevedores of Iloilo protested 'en force' against them, and demonstrated that they could no longer be repressed. The stevedores demanded better wages and working conditions from their employers, and were defeated only after the steam engine, which permitted the shipment of sugar from Negros, was invented.

The plantation workers of Negros also organized themselves to demonstrate against their 'owners.' Their efforts were less successful than the stevedores of Iloilo because the workforces of Negros were stratified and *divided* among themselves as a class by the conditions under which they labored. The plantations of Negros were literally tightly run 'factories in the field.' They were administered by sugarlords who hired supervisors from their workers to coerce "debt slaves who owned nothing more than their clothes and their cooking utensils to work for them."<sup>32</sup> Plantation owners in Negros did not hesitate to crush emerging labor unions by using military force and infiltrating them with their "henchmen."<sup>33</sup>

In the Philippines, scholars interested in issues of modes of production specifically asked the question of whether or not capitalism was creating class polarization or stratification in the peasantry.<sup>34</sup> McCoy

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<sup>30</sup>Alfred McCoy, "A Queen Dies Slowly: The Rise and Fall of Iloilo City," in *Local Trade and Global Transformations*, McCoy, ed., University of Hawaii Press, 1982, pp. 320-321.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>See Eder 1982, 1981; Fegan 1972; Lewis 1971; Lopez 1989; Russel 1989; Takahashi 1969; 1972; Umehara 1983; and Wolfers 1983.

demonstrated that although the peasantry becomes stratified into classes through its relations with capitalism, it remains a single class in relation to other classes in the wider society — a society where members of the peasantry are promoted to supervise each other for a more dominant elite.<sup>35</sup>

This kind of stratification in the peasantry is one reason why Ledesma suggested that peasants might benefit more if they were an integrated, rather than stratified, class because "stratification in effect leads to the marginalization of segments of the peasantry."<sup>36</sup> Marginalization gives rise to unemployment -- a rare phenomenon in pre-capitalist Philippines prior to its being dominated by the capitalist mode of production. It starts a process of 'incomplete reproduction' of peasant family household units through semi-proletarianization, indebtedness, or permanent migration. This brings into question whether or not peasant household reproduction can be measured in terms of its farm output when its income is derived from sources on and off the farm. These farm households cut across class lines in which individual family members are connected to enable the 'survival' of the farm as a family unit.<sup>37</sup>

### Summary of the Positions of Early Mode of Production Thinkers

Like Levi Strauss (although distinct from him), the French Marxist anthropologists (Meillassoux, Godelier, Terray) were interested in issues of structural causality in modes of production. Initially, they were concerned to distinguish themselves from other Marxist theorists who adhered to economic and mechanistic models of modes of production. As Godelier put it, they were developing a theory "as distinct from the Marxism normally practiced, a Marxism which can very quickly become vulgar materialism."<sup>38</sup>

There are a number of other anthropologists who utilize the concept of mode of production for the study of economic and social phenomena.<sup>39</sup> Firth (1984) and Roseberry (1988) have divided these mode of production

<sup>35</sup>McCoy, p. 320.

<sup>36</sup>Antonio Ledesma, *Landless Workers and Rice Farmers: Peasant Subclasses under Agrarian Reform in Two Philippine Villages*. (Manila: International Rice Institute, 1982), p. 207.

<sup>37</sup>See Deere 1987:43,45; Kearney 1986:347; Long 1977:6-7; Ong 1983; Roseberry 1983: 206-207; Sacks 1989:538; Weeks 1978:25.

<sup>38</sup>Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*. (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 62.

<sup>39</sup>For example, Asad, Banaji, Bradby, Chevalier, Foster-Carter, Hindess and Hirst, Kahn, Kearney, J. Nash, Roseberry, Seddon, C. Smith, Wessman, Wolf, Wolpe.



scholars into two schools of thought according to whether or not they are 'cerebral' (i.e., interested in problems of a theoretical order) or 'gut' (i.e., politically motivated and concerned with classic Marxist issues of revolutionary change) Marxists. However, I evade this type of classification. Instead, it is the common direction of mode of production approaches, rather than their points of divergence, that concern me because such points of congruence form the basis for a more complete conceptualization of mode of production.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, Roseberry's divisionary scheme creates an impression that the French Marxist anthropologists are aloof from concrete issues of social change. However, most of the French Marxist anthropologists are active in the French Communist Party. As Kahn and Llobera pointed out, the French Marxist anthropologists have gone so far as to plan their careers around their political interests.<sup>41</sup> Is not this involvement ground enough to say that they are as much concerned with concrete issues of social transformation as are the so-called 'gut' Marxist anthropologists?

### Mode of Production Theories

The mode of production scholars began their study of economy and society from the point of view of production. Prior to the mode of production approach, analysis of the process of modern economic development in tribal and peasant societies was made along lines of the substantivist or formalist schools of thought. These schools provided inadequate definitions of the economy. The formalists often exclude those characteristics of a society which may be more fundamental to the people themselves, or those which determine the deeper logic of the system, because they focus only on formal aspects of an economic system. As Godelier put it,

[T]he analysis of intentional economic behavior among individuals and social groups -- the analysis of their decisions and forms of action, for example -- provides a real basis for economic science; however, the formalist definition of economics, in reducing the field of economic science to a single aim, prevents the final analysis of the situation by excluding those characteristics of social and economic systems which are neither desired nor often even known by those individuals or groups who are their agents, that is, the objective, but unintentional, characteristics which determine, in the last analysis, a deeper logic and development.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>As supported by Kahn in Joel Kahn and Josep Llobera, "French Marxist Anthropology: Twenty Years After," 1980, in *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp.87-88.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>42</sup>Godelier, p. 19.

By omitting these essentials, such theorists may devise explanations that are removed from the societies they are intended to represent by projecting concepts from their own social economic system onto those which may not hold such views. On the other hand, substantivists, with the exception of Sahlins as I shall go on to explain, have limited themselves to the study of the circulation of goods. Such an approach results to an incomplete grasp of the economy in a given society.

Sahlins, in my view, represents a cross-over between the earlier formalist/substantivist approaches and the mode of production approach.<sup>43</sup> Sahlins is most noted for postulating an original economy of plenty in primitive and tribal societies, where the domestic mode of production was foremost a production for use value as opposed to exchange value. It was 'limited' production (i.e., production ceased once the needs of the household were satisfied). His thesis (influenced by Chayanov's theory of household economy) directly countered prevailing formalist notions of the existence of scarcity in pre-capitalist societies giving rise to production.

The concept mode of production solved the old dilemma in economic anthropology, caused by the rift between the substantivists and the formalists, by looking at how goods are produced, utilized, and transferred. There are advantages to focusing on production. Production results can be measured in terms of time, capital, monetary equivalents, and so forth. A look at production enables one to see how access to resources and control of products is gained, which opens a window into social stratification and the hierarchy of power relations or classes. One can look at several aspects such as: what is being produced, who is doing the producing, where are the products going, who is working with whom, what kinds of social relations form the basis of the society, is there surplus, if so, who controls it? If one can make a case for the appropriation of surplus value, then one can also make a case for exploitation. The more types of basic inequalities we find in pre-capitalist, tribal, or peasant societies, the more relevant Marxist analysis becomes to that extent.

Mode of production analysis is analytically powerful in understanding the process of modern 'economic development' in tribal and peasant societies. It provides one of the possible ways of delineating the articulation between different modes of production as they come into contact with, and are often subsumed under, capitalism. Joel Kahn, in his

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<sup>43</sup>For details, see Cook 1968, 1978:30-31; Dalton 1968, 1969; Godelier 1972; Meillasoux 1972; Wessman 1981:177.



study of petty commodity production in West Sumatra, was able to show how blacksmiths organized their productive relations indigenously and how these were influenced by the world market, which determined price rates of locally produced goods since these goods could not compete with cheaper goods produced in capitalist factories.<sup>44</sup> Meillassoux discussed how peasant villages often act as a social security system for capitalist enterprises established in third world countries, where underpaid laborers go home to retire or to work on family farms during off-seasons, receiving no social security benefits from their employers.<sup>45</sup> The concept

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mode of production, in such cases, sheds light on the nature of development and brings into question who such 'economic development' is intended for? It can pinpoint problem-areas in the articulation between different modes of productions which could be targeted for change beneficial to the direct producers.

Theoretically, there are some problems with this approach. For example, by modifying Marx's theory to the study of tribal and peasant societies, the Marxist anthropologists, notably Godelier, have put emphasis on social relations rather than on the means of production.<sup>46</sup> In so doing, they have taken away the determinism in Marx's original theory. In a sense, they have made Marx's original distinction between the infrastructure and superstructure irrelevant because elements from each

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<sup>44</sup>Joel Kahn, "Economic Scale and the Cycle of Petty Commodity Production in West Sumatra," in *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology*, Bloch, ed. (London: Tavistock, 1984).

<sup>45</sup>Claude Meillassoux, "From Reproduction to Production: A Marxist Approach to Economic Anthropology," 1972, in *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1 Nos. 1-4, p. 102.

<sup>46</sup>Maurice Godelier, "The Object and Method of Economic Anthropology," in *Relations of Production*, Seddon, ed., 1978 (London: Frank Cass.).

can be reshuffled and used as needed. The French Marxist anthropologists seem to have taken a different approach from earlier Marxist anthropologists. Leslie White and Gordon Childe, for instance, placed much emphasis on technology.<sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to test their theories for this reason. But, to the extent that peasant and tribal societies do seem to be governed around principles different from fully developed capitalist societies, and to the degree that the economy does not seem to differentiate itself as a distinct entity prior to the emergence of the capitalist mode of production, one must agree that many of these societies appear to be based on kinship, politics, or religion. Thus, the infrastructure seem at root to be organized around the ways in which a society makes its living from nature.

The newer mode of production scholars simultaneously entered into another debate (other than the early substantivist-formalist debate) over the direction of social change in pre-capitalist societies. They were concerned with the issue of whether or not peasant traditions are inevitably transformed into capitalist class relations from their articulation with capitalism. The mode of production scholars aimed to find empirically testable cases to answer the question of whether the pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production are not the effects of capitalism.<sup>48</sup> This controversy is related to yet another controversy over the 'world systems theory' (and to Lenin's disagreements with Chayanov and Luxembourg).

The mode of production scholars disagreed with world systems theorists (e.g., Frank, Braudel, Wallerstein) who opined that all pre-capitalist modes of production are being subsumed into the capitalist mode of production. Hence, relations between them are capitalist. That is, for the world systems theorists,

[T]he appearance of capitalism -- whether as the result of internal development as in Europe or external imposition as in the case of the colonies -- signalled the more or less immediate and inevitable disintegration of the pre-capitalist modes of production and the subsumption of the agents of these modes under the capitalist relations of production.<sup>49</sup>

However, Meillassoux (Kahn, Wolf, and Wolpe) noted that Marx studied pre-capitalist societies only in so far as they related to the

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<sup>47</sup>Wessman, 1981.

<sup>48</sup>Amin, Bradby, Chevalier, Friedmann, Foster-Carter, Godelier, Kahn, Long, Nash, Roseberry, Russel, J. Scott, C. Smith, Wolf, Wolpe, among others.

<sup>49</sup>Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and Cheap Labor Power in South Africa: From Segregation and Apartheid," 1980, in *The Articulation of Modes of Production, Essays from Society and Economy*, Wolpe, ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan), p. 2.



development of capitalism.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere in his works, Marx alluded to a certain tendency in pre-capitalist modes of production (notably the Asiatic mode of production) to resist the capitalist mode of production (Marx, Vol.III, 1974, p.328).<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the world system view reduces the relationship between pre-capitalist modes of production and the capitalist mode of production to a one-way process that overlooks local interactions.

Mode of production scholars look at local interactions. Although they agree that the relationship between pre-capitalist modes of production and the capitalist mode of production can lead to capitalist relations of production, they stipulate that this is not always the case. This is because there is widespread resistance to the capitalist mode of production. Resistance sometimes occurs within the context of the capitalist mode of production in terms of improving its very conditions, at other times, it represents a direct challenge to capitalism, and calls for its replacement by another mode of production altogether.

Furthermore, a capitalist mode of production sometimes preserves a non-capitalist mode of production because it is more profitable to do so. This is one explanation of the relation between peasants and capitalists on the haciendas in Negros Occidental. In the Philippines, as in Southeast Asia in general, resistance movements have continued to appear in history, as witnessed in the crushing defeat of the dock worker's unions of Iloilo,<sup>52</sup> the persistence of the Huk (People's Liberation Army) rebellion,<sup>53</sup> and the People's Power Movement.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

'Mechanistic' evolutionary models of modes of production (e.g., feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism) have long been criticized by many Marxist scholars. These kinds of mechanistic models of modes of production have been widely criticized for being dogmatic and ethnocentric, and as such, they are considered non-scientific. They have

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<sup>50</sup>Meillassoux, p. 189.

<sup>51</sup>The reader is referred to Godclier (1978), Bailey and Llobera (1981), Wessman (1981), and Dunn (1982), among others, for a discussion of this controversial issue of the AMP.

<sup>52</sup>See McCoy 1982; Mojares 1986.

<sup>53</sup>See Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>54</sup>See Raymond Bonner, *Waltzing with the Dictator*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1987).

**"[M]ost current Marxist scholars agree that pre-conceived and mechanistic models of the economy have to be abandoned. They argue that culture, human agents, and ideology have a relative autonomy in social life, and for this reason, they need to be included in models of the economy, society, and social change."**

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been challenged for omitting considerations of gender, local history, and most significantly, culture.

Indeed, most current Marxist scholars agree that pre-conceived and mechanistic models of the economy have to be abandoned. They argue that culture, human agents, and ideology have a relative autonomy in social life, and for this reason, they need to be included in models of the economy, society, and social change. Local interactions also need to be taken into account in large scale models of the relationship between capitalists and non-capitalists, and most scholars would agree that the indigenous context and history matter.

Marx's concepts are best seen as entry points for social analysis. This paper reviewed the early history of the emergence of one concept, the mode of production concept in anthropology. It is best seen as a non-essentialist concept. A mode of production, as Althusser would argue, can only be understood in terms of the particular social formation and other modes of production which orient it. A mode of production, in turn, is open for analysis and change from any point on a wide spectrum of possibilities, be it from the viewpoint of gender, history, environment, or culture.

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