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Coherence through critique: How Cueva's attack on Marini's *Dialectics of Dependency* contributed to strengthening Marxist Dependency Theory

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Coherence through critique: How Cueva's attack on Marini's Dialectics of Dependency contributed to strengthening Marxist Dependency Theory

Abstract: The paper presents the sequential interaction between the works of three thinkers, Ruy Mauro Marini, Agustín Cueva and Vânia Bambirra, published in the 1970s. It argues that Cueva's critique of the methodological approach of dependency theory in general, including its most radical strand based on Marxism, played an important role in strengthening and giving cohesion to the group which would later be known as the creators of Marxist Dependency Theory. The importance of critique is highlighted, in order to show that debate and disagreement are inherently constructive when the participants of the controversy recognize their interlocutors as equals in terms of having the capacity to use Marx's works in a creative and original way.

Keywords: Dependency Theory, Marini, Cueva, Critique, Marxism

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta a interação sequencial entre as obras de três pensadores, Ruy Mauro Marini, Agustín Cueva e Vânia Bambirra, publicadas na década de 1970. Argumenta-se que a crítica de Cueva à abordagem metodológica da teoria da dependência em geral, incluindo sua vertente mais radical baseada no marxismo, desempenhou um papel importante no fortalecimento e na coesão do grupo que mais tarde seria conhecido como os criadores da Teoria da Dependência Marxista. Destaca-se a importância da crítica, a fim de demonstrar que o debate e a discordância são inerentemente construtivos quando os participantes da controvérsia

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reconhecem seus interlocutores como iguais em termos de capacidade de utilizar as obras de Marx de maneira criativa e original.

Palabras-chave: Teoria da Dependência, Marini, Cueva, Crítica, Marxismo

Resumen: El artículo presenta la interacción secuencial entre las obras de tres pensadores, Ruy Mauro Marini, Agustín Cueva y Vânia Bambirra, publicadas en la década de 1970. Argumenta que la crítica de Cueva al enfoque metodológico de la teoría de la dependencia en general, incluyendo su vertiente más radical basada en el marxismo, jugó un papel importante en el fortalecimiento y la cohesión del grupo que posteriormente sería conocido como los creadores de la teoría marxista de la dependencia. Se destaca la importancia de la crítica para mostrar que el debate y el desacuerdo son inherentemente constructivos cuando los participantes de la controversia reconocen a sus interlocutores como iguales en términos de tener la capacidad de utilizar las obras de Marx de manera creativa y original.

Palabras claves: Teoría de la dependencia, Marini, Cueva, Crítica, Marxismo

Introduction

In the context of the post-Second World War period, the aggravation of class struggle in Latin America and the Caribbean created the conditions for the emergence and development of what is known as Dependency Theory. Among the authors and militants of this framework for analyzing world geopolitics from the perspective of the dependent countries from Mexico to Argentina, there were some who heavily based their studies on the works of Karl Marx. By focusing on the political aspects of the exploitative relationship between the center and the periphery, and placing great emphasis on the necessity to deal explicitly with the idea of revolution and socialism, this strand came to be known as Marxist Dependency Theory.

Although it can be said that Marxist Dependency Theory was already in action in the 1960s (Carcanholo, 2023), it is reasonable to affirm that the publication of Ruy Mauro Marini's *Dialectics of Dependency* ([1973] 2022) constitutes the synthetic-foundational work of this particular current of Dependency Theory. According to Marini, the subordinate character of Latin America, when absorbed by the capitalistic expansion from industrialized countries in the late 19th century, engendered a *sui generis* capitalism. This kind of capitalism and its corresponding dependency can be explained by the superexploitation of the local workforce as a redress of the dependent bourgeoisie for the surplus value lost in international markets. Ruy Mauro Marini, being one of the most notable pioneers defending this thesis, faced criticism not only

from political and intellectual adversaries but also from prominent Marxist theorists committed to the emancipation of the working class.

The most prominent and rigorous critic among allies was Agustín Cueva, an Ecuadorian sociologist who claimed that there was no need to create a new theoretical vein from Marxism to explain the Latin American political-economic determinants. To Cueva, classical Marxist theory already had the instruments to approach and determine the particular essence of Latin American social formations, which can only be perceived in their real movement when historically and concretely analyzed, without losing sight of the general laws of tendency, that is, of the abstract pattern of accumulation behind what Marx referred to as the “the natural laws of capitalist production” and “the economic law of motion of modern society” in the preface of the first edition of *Capital*. Thus, Cueva ([1974] 2019) recognized the contribution of dependency studies from a Marxist perspective, to which Marini adhered, especially regarding the studies on the subordinate integration of dependent countries into the world market. However, Cueva did not think that dependency was governed by a distinct body of tendential laws that required reformulating categories already solidified in classical Marxism, such as exploitation and imperialism. In short, for him, the dependent capitalist mode of production did not constitute a new theoretical object (Cueva, [1974] 2019).

Today, it is clear that Marxist Dependency Theory is not merely Marini’s theory, but a body collectively constructed by various contributors who were all independent and critical thinkers, such as Vânia Bambilra, Theotônio dos Santos, Orlando Caputto, Luis Vitale Cometa, Álvaro Briones among others (Machado Gouvêa, Nascimento e Castelo 2022). Accordingly, while Marxist Dependency Theory possesses a visible coherence, it also engenders a relevant degree of heterogeneity.

The aim of this paper is to show that a significant part of the coherence of Marxist Dependency Theory and its strengthening as a group of independent critical minds was one of the results of the critique of Agustín Cueva towards the method shared by the *dependentistas* of all sorts, specially by the group of Marxist Dependency theoreticians. We sustain that this positive effect for creating coherence through critique counterbalances the negative aspect of Cueva’s contribution being unintended appropriated by the enemy, as Cueva later recognized it occurred by writing that “(...) we never thought that our critiques of dependency theory in the mid 1970s, which were intended to be left-wing, could involuntarily join the rightist flood that later descended upon that theory” (Cueva [1988] 2015, p. 208, ft. 8, our

translation).³ So, the main argument we make in this paper is that criticizing innovative and exploratory theoretical works, as seriously as Cueva did, is a powerful way to generate possible paths for gathering minds around these constructions that aim at advancing Marx's oeuvre. Accordingly, even if there is a danger of that critique being used by political adversaries, revolutionary praxis must rely on the sense of autonomous thought to question and interrogate everything. Critique is not a form of insult, quite the opposite: it is the most appropriate way to interact scientifically with other minds. Without critique there is no political orientation and no emancipation from dogma.

After this *Introduction* in section 1, the paper presents in section 2 *The historical context of Marxist Dependency Theory*. Section 3, *Marini's sui generis capitalism* develops the main idea behind Marini's approach to the problem of dependency in Latin America. After that, section 4, *Augustín Cueva's critique of all theoreticians of dependency*, brings the essential parts of Cueva's attack against the methodology common to the authors that adhere to any sort of dependency theory. In section 5, *The collective reaction embodied in Vânia Bambirra's answer*, we explain how Vânia Bambirra's reaction to Cueva's critique was important for a defense that promoted union while still embracing individual freedom with respect to creative thinking within what would be worldwide known as Marxist Dependency Theory. A conclusion in section 6 closes the paper emphasizing *critique as a methodological approach for collective construction*.

The historical context of Marxist Dependency Theory

The grouping of intellectuals around a common idea, Marxist Dependency Theory, is the result of a concrete historical context. By the mid 1940s, the end of World War II brought with it a new organization of global power.

The Soviet Union, on one hand, emerged victorious from the war, with its sphere of influence extending to Berlin, but with part of its territory devastated and about 14% of its population decimated (Bandeira, 2016). The Indian historian Vijay Prashad (2020) recalls the economic impacts on the Soviet population, such as the decline in household consumption, which fell from 74% in 1940 to 66% in 1945,

³ In the original: "(...) nunca pensamos que nuestras críticas de mediados de los años setenta a la teoría de la dependencia, que pretendían ser de izquierda, podrían sumarse involuntariamente al aluvión derechista que después se precipitó sobre aquella teoría" (Cueva [1988] 2015, p. 208, ft. 8). (Cueva [1988] 2015, p. 208, ft. 8).

from a national income already affected by the war, representing a tremendous setback for the population.

The United States, on the other hand, leading the so-called Free World, emerged from this brutal conflict with its territory intact and its military power projected through the direct occupation of countries like Germany, Japan, and Italy, as well as military bases and troops positioned in approximately 150 countries (Dos Santos, 1998). Additionally, with a strengthened currency, an industry in full operation, 75% of the world's gold reserves within its borders, and by ensuring the reconstruction efforts of Europe through the Marshall Plan, which, beyond social justice outcomes, also had a political-ideological aspect, as it conditioned financial aid on the requirement that there be no communist parties in governing coalitions in the nations receiving support (Furno, 2022).

The magnitude of U.S. dominance in the emerging new world order was asserted through the greatest massacre in a short time frame by military means never seen before. The use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima, instantly killing 80,000 people, and later in Nagasaki, was crucial in shaping foreign policy and sending a brutal message to the rest of the world (Prashad, 2020). This demonstration of power was combined with efforts to create and maintain institutional mechanisms for international coordination, driven by the United States. According to Bandeira's critical assessment of Lenin's approach to the phenomenon of imperialism, (2005, p. 164 and p. 304), this could be interpreted as the closest example of what Kautsky termed Ultraimperialism.

Thus, in 1945, the United Nations (UN) was established, continuing the legacy of the League of Nations, and laying the foundation for a collective security strategy primarily based on its Security Council, which would be managed by five countries with veto power over collective decisions: the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. This structure reflected the asymmetry of global power, in which only these five countries "have the power to decide when and how to intervene against sovereign states" (Prashad, 2020, p. 39, our translation).

The late 1940s marked a period of shaping global geopolitics, with movements that continue to have repercussions today. In 1946, Churchill delivered a speech in which he first mentioned the 'iron curtain,' a foundational concept representing the reorganization of power among hegemonic powers. This idea positioned the political-ideological and economic divergences of the West against the Soviet Union as a new adversary (Fiori, 2004). In 1949, the strategy of confining Europe within the U.S. sphere of influence gained a new dimension with the creation of NATO, which

ensured the goals of containing the Soviet Union and subordinating Germany (Bandeira, 2016).

In the years following the end of the war, the bipolar division of global power into two zones was solidified through military and politico-economic agreements. The pattern of the international division of labour, however, continued to separate the core from the periphery, and now it underlied US power in Latin America and the reordering of industrial apparatuses in the region around it. From the 1950s onward, explanatory theories of the social, political, and economic human system continued to emerge and gain strength. These theories, such as the one proposed by Kuznets (1955), sought to understand the barriers that prevent or delay societies from reaching an ideal of modernity represented by Europe and the United States. Additionally, they aimed to advance countries from traditional or pre-capitalist societies through certain economic measures by the State, enabling them to achieve their development or *decolagem*, i.e., “take-off” (Dos Santos, 1998). Theotônio, also a dependency theorist, argues that this stage-based model became deeply entrenched in intellectual practice, taking shape as a true ideology (Dos Santos, 1998).

Developmentalism took on a distinctly Latin American character, marking an important break in the region's critical thought, particularly with ECLAC thought, established in 1948 with the creation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). This movement laid the intellectual and political foundations for thinking about and intervening in the economic development of Latin America. Its main intellectual pioneers, though not the only ones, were Raúl Prebisch and Celso Furtado. They based their work on a structuralist theoretical framework, analyzing Latin American societies from economic, political, and social perspectives. Their collective work was grounded in the recognition of the center-periphery dichotomy and questioned the premise of the international division of labor, which assigned the industrialized center a fixed position and relegated the periphery solely to the role of raw material exporter (Prebisch, 1949).

According to Lujano (2008), ECLAC intellectual production was responsible for partially breaking away from Eurocentric conceptual frameworks that analyzed Latin America with analytical biases, treating its history as linear and viewing the subcontinent as possessing incomplete and immature societies, as in the paradigmatic case in Rostow's (1960) book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A non-communist manifesto*. Lujano, also supported by Marini (1994), argues that Prebisch succeeded in overcoming the previous stage-based approach by conceptualizing economic reality through a center-periphery framework. He positioned the State as a crucial instrument of development, capable of undertaking tasks such as industrialization, monetary policies, and protectionism for the national industry.

However, the 1960s and 1970s would become the epicenter of significant events in the Latin American subcontinent. Just as the Cuban Revolution marked a period of mass agitation and ascent, the terror of civil-military dictatorships was its counterface. These events were intertwined with the failure of the import substitution industrialization model to address the needs of the majority of the population. The theoretical development that addressed the contradictions of this inadequacy ushered in a fruitful period of theoretical critiques of developmentalism, leading to a critical rejection and overcoming of ECLAC theory. Fact is that ECLAC, being unambiguously dominated by the Western bloc within the United Nations, was forcing the economic development of Latin America within the boundaries of capitalism. Its character was essentially reformist (Colmenares, 1971, p. 61-71).

It is within this context, influenced by the political and economic events of their time, that Marxist Theory of Dependence emerged. Its intellectuals were initially brought together at the University of Brasília, where André Gunder Frank, Ruy Mauro Marini, Vânia Bambirra, and Theotônio dos Santos met in the early 1960s. Deeply influenced by Marxism, these intellectuals sought to understand the social, economic, and political characteristics of Latin America with the aim of transforming the continent and overcoming its issues. With the 1964 coup, the four intellectuals were forced into exile, later establishing themselves at the Center for Socioeconomic Studies of the University of Chile (CESO), which brought together other exiled Brazilians and Latin Americans. In addition to advancing economic science, their work also influenced Salvador Allende's government to varying degrees. These four intellectuals were the most intensely engaged in the intellectual battle over the meanings of dependence and development, and were actively involved in the public sphere (Wasserman, 2017).

Building on the efforts to understand Latin America from its own perspective, beyond the influences of geopolitical, economic, and class struggle contexts, Bambirra (1978) identifies the theoretical foundations upon which the Marxist Theory of Dependence is built. These are: 1) Engels and Marx's writings on the colonial question; 2) Lenin's controversy with the Russian populists; 3) The entire framework of classical imperialist theory; 4) Lenin's theses on the national and colonial question, emerging from the debates of the Second Congress of the Comintern, and all of Lenin's contributions to Marxism; 5) Mao Zedong's elaborations on Marxism-Leninism; and 6) The Marxist theoretical development on the issue of underdevelopment in the 1950s, led by Paul Baran.

Vânia Bambirra (1978) goes further and highlights a tactical-strategic necessity for the emergence of the Marxist Theory of Dependence: the weakness of the

Communist Parties in the subcontinent, which, imbued with a mechanistic and schematic view of reality, believed it was imperative to form a class alliance between workers and the progressive national bourgeoisie to implement a democratic, anti-oligarchic, and anti-imperialist government in the region. They thought that neither the bourgeois revolution had been completed, leaving remnants of feudalism in society, nor could the working class alone lead the structural change of Latin American societies. However, this view clashed with an essential aspect of capitalist development in Latin America. After the war, investment in the industrialization process of the Southern Cone countries was entirely through foreign capital, whether through direct investment or machinery. The local bourgeoisie summarily allied with the imperialist bourgeoisie, eliminating any chance of autonomous development and, consequently, the class alliance advocated by the Communist Parties (Bambirra, 1978).

Since it was a country not swept up by heavy militarization and the physical elimination of dissenting voices against capitalism, Mexico hosted many dependency theorists and other Marxist thinkers who went into exile after the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile and the closure of CESO, or who simply needed an academic home. The Universidad Autónoma de México (UNAM) became a place where prominent Marxist intellectuals could continue their theoretical work.

Among these intellectuals was Agustín Cueva, an Ecuadorian sociologist who began his theoretical work by exploring the connection between Ecuadorian literature and the country's historical foundations with his first work, *Entre la ira y la esperanza* (1967). He then moved on to an in-depth analysis of the class struggle and the Ecuadorian populist phenomenon of Velasquismo with his book *El proceso de la dominación política en el Ecuador* (1972). Cueva consolidated his contributions in the 1970s with studies on the State, politics, and Latin American sociology, during which he engaged in a profound controversy with dependency theories. Tzeiman (2017) distinguishes Cueva's theoretical production into distinct periods, beginning in the 1960s with a significant influence from broader and less orthodox sociological studies, such as Lukács's literary theories, Sartre's philosophy, Levi-Strauss's anthropology, and Roland Barthes's philosophical and literary perspectives, while never losing sight of the Marxist foundation Cueva acquired during his studies in Paris in the early 1960s.

Cueva, as a skilled polemicist, did not shy away from engaging in intense debates with dependency theory. He initiated this movement with his text *Problemas y perspectivas de la teoría de la dependencia* (1974), a year after the publication of Ruy Mauro Marini's essay *Dialéctica de la dependencia* (1973), with whom he shared the trenches of Marxist critique. He continued his theoretical development with his most refined work on Latin American political economy, for which he is best known, *O*

Desenvolvimento do capitalismo na América Latina (1977). This work is not only a direct critique of some of the tenets of dependency theories but also a proposal for an alternative methodological path.

Marini's *sui generis* capitalism

In the opening paragraphs of *Dialectics of Dependency*, Marini ([1973] 2022), p. 113-114, argues that in their attempt to analyze Latin American dependency, Marxist investigators have committed mistakes because of the real challenge of the issue under study.

“These deviations stem from a real difficulty: faced with the parameters of the pure capitalist mode of production, the Latin American economy presents peculiarities that at times appear to be deficiencies, and at others - not easily distinguishable from the former - deformities. The recurrence of the notion of *precapitalism* in studies of Latin America is therefore not accidental. What should be said is that, even if it really is a matter of capitalist relations that are insufficiently developed, this notion refers to aspects of a reality that will never be able to develop in the same way as did the so-called advanced capitalist economies, due to the former's overall structure and functioning. Rather than precapitalism, therefore, what we have is a *sui generis* capitalism that only makes sense if we examine it from the perspective of the system as a whole, both at the national and, mainly, at the international level.” Marini ([1973] 2022), p. 114

This means that there has been a tendency to treat the formation of dependency as the result of some sort of a capitalism of lower level, as if more capitalism would lead the continent forward in the latter stages of development. Linearity and stageism (the view of development as a progressive process that proceeds step by step without contradictions) dominated the scene. Intending to correct this, Marini develops a dialectical approach to the phenomenon of dependency.

Marini regarded his text *Dialectics of Dependency* (Marini, [1973] 2022) as undeniably original but incomplete. The work consolidated his research conducted in Chile on Latin America, which included historical surveys, economic statistical data on each country in the subcontinent, lecture outlines, and personal studies. Marini was hesitant to publish the text, as mentioned by the author in *Memórias* (Marini, 2005), because it was not yet mature enough to do justice to his research, and the time to develop the ideas presented was limited due to his extensive political

involvement before and after the coup in Chile. Despite this, the publication of the essay could not be stopped, and from its first presentation in the journal *Sociedad y Desarrollo*, published by CESO, it garnered the attention of critics, particularly Fernando Henrique Cardoso, whose criticisms Marini saw as the beginning of the distortion that the work would undergo in the following decades, as well as criticisms from Agustín Cueva, which are addressed in this article.

Divided into 6 parts plus a postscript, *Dialectics of Dependency* was first published in book form in 1973 by the Mexican publisher ERA. In this essay, Marini aimed, as much of his work sought to do, to make a theoretical effort to overcome developmentalism as the main approach to explaining the economic, political, and social reality of Latin America. As indicated, this reformist current had gained intellectual and material strength primarily after World War II with the creation of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Marini's studies ([1973] 2022) pointed to a clear path: the Latin American reality can only be understood in its essence by observing the concrete historical character of its integration into the international market, from the European mercantilist expansion of the 15th century to the formation of consolidated capitalism in the 19th century. He was not the only one to propose such a methodological approach, as seen in the work of Theotônio dos Santos and Vânia Bambirra, but this direction permeates Marini's entire work and is presented for the first time and with greater force in the essay *Dialectics of Dependency*. This work outlines three major axes of analysis of the condition of dependence, constituting interrelated elements of dependent capitalist accumulation: the transfer of value, superexploitation, and the division in the cycle of capital. These elements will be discussed in the following paragraphs, along with the logical sequence proposed by Marini.

In the first part of the essay, Marini ([1973] 2022) addresses a crucial issue in his analysis of capitalist accumulation: the shift in the axis of accumulation in major centers from the exploitation of labor through expansion of the working day to the exploitation of labor through increasing productivity, meaning that relative surplus value begins to dominate over absolute surplus value. A key point of this exposition is the role of Latin America in the international division of labor, supporting the center of capitalism with primary goods capable of sustaining the burgeoning industry and ensuring the reproduction of the labor force, in exchange for manufactured goods and accumulating debt with the metropolis. This positions Latin America with a dual role in the global economy: as both a granary and a gold mine for the old continent, creating a supply of food that ensures the subsistence of workers in emerging industrial countries, while remaining a destination for industrialized products from the capitalist center.

The concepts of absolute and relative surplus value are extremely important for understanding the process of exploitation and industrialization under capitalism. In book 1 of *Capital*, Marx ([1867] 1887) dedicated a massive part of it to explain the dynamics of two different ways to extract surplus labor from the working class. By separating the extension of the working day into two components, the necessary working-time and the length of the surplus labor, Marx ([1867] 1887) pp. 162 explains that there are two main ways to alter the relationship between them. The first one is through maintenance of the necessary working-time and increase of the working day. This leads to an absolute expansion of the length of the surplus time, hence the name absolute surplus value production. The second one is through maintenance of the working day. In this case, the only way to make the length of the surplus labor greater in relation to the necessary working day is by diminishing the necessary time to reproduce labor power. This is done by increasing productivity, which also leads to an increase of exploitation, though through an indirect process. This second type of surplus value production is called relative surplus value production.

Marini had a sharp understanding of the dialectics between absolute and surplus value production, and applied these theoretical concepts to analyze the economic reality of capitalist imperialism over Latin America (Camarinha Lopes and Araujo (2013)). According to Marini, the historical transition from absolute to relative surplus value production substantiated in industrialization in so-called advanced areas cannot be explained without reference to the intensification of absolute surplus value production in the expropriated areas around the globe that finance such technical transformations. Under capitalism, technical advancement and underdevelopment in the world economy are two sides of the same coin.

This means that Latin America (among other exploited regions in the globe) plays a decisive role in reducing the value of labor in industrial countries, converting this movement into increased rates of surplus value that can be appropriated as profit by the bourgeoisie of imperialist countries. Marini also highlights, within the scope of trade relations between raw material-producing countries and industrialized countries, an important mechanism: value transfer. The author argues that only the exchange, via the market, between nations trading distinct goods—raw materials and manufactured goods—leads to a transfer of value from the primary goods-producing countries to the industrial goods-producing countries. This occurs because the latter

manage to circumvent the law of value by trading their manufactures at prices exceeding their value.⁴

It is from this realization that Marini conceives one of his main categories of dependency analysis, which will establish his legacy for decades to come, even into the contemporary era: the superexploitation of labor. Marini ([1973] 2022), in recognizing the transfer of value from dependent countries to central countries, notes that there is something intertwined with this dynamic: a form of compensation for the loss of surplus value by the local bourgeoisie in dependent countries, as they are unable to counteract this movement, which compresses the capacity of this dependent bourgeoisie to appropriate surplus value as profit. Superexploitation, then, occurs within the scope of local production in dependent countries and relates to the submission of the working class to three strategies for extracting surplus labor: either by increasing the intensity of work, extending the working hours, or through a third method—by reducing the worker's capacity for consumption. This directly affects the reproduction of their own labor power, limiting their ability to rest, eat, and perform other essential life functions. Ultimately, superexploitation leads to the premature deterioration of individuals belonging to the working class in dependent countries.

Another essential point in Marini's analysis of Latin America's dependency is the division of the capital cycle, meaning that the production and circulation of goods in dependent countries occur in distinct spaces. Marini ([1973] 2022) also bases this argument in historical terms, noting that capitalist production relations in Latin America begin in the regions exporting primary goods, whether in food production or mining, particularly from the period of the abolition of slavery in Brazil at the end of the 19th century—a development that coincides, not by chance, with the encouragement of European migration, mainly to work in agriculture under wage labor or semi-servile conditions. Since these regions are primarily oriented towards

⁴ The notion and study about value transfer among different State nations is not entirely new, but Marini's approach is distinctive because of its methodology of analysis, which follows closely Marx's theory. The same phenomenon has been studied by structuralists from ECLAC such as Celso Furtado and Raul Prebisch. The deterioration of terms of trade has become known in the literature in economics through the so-called Prebisch-Singer thesis (Toye and Toye, 2003). For a recent empirical study demonstrating the reality of value transfer from the "global South" to the "global North", see Hickel, Hanbury and Barbour (2024), whose analysis confirm the argument by Marini and others that "Unequal exchange is understood to be driven in part by large North-South wage gaps" (Hickel, Hanbury and Barbour (2024), p. 6).

the external market, the construction and consolidation of the capitalist accumulation axis are also externally focused, meaning that accumulation occurs without relying on the domestic market.

This arrangement specific to Latin American societies is contrasted in this essay with the reality of industrialized centers. While in Brazil, for example, workers' own consumption is separated from the productive structure, which is developed with a focus on the capitalist center, in these industrialized countries, this same individual consumption is responsible for part of the realization of industrial production. This implies the possibility of completing the capital cycle within their own borders for industrialized countries.

Marini ([1973] 2022) also discusses other implications of this dynamic for Latin American economies in his text. One of these is the division of the sphere of circulation into two: one for the consumption of domestic production, carried out by workers, and the other for the consumption of European manufactured goods, consumed by the bourgeoisie and high-wage segments of the working class. This division also creates the conditions under which the Brazilian industrialization process unfolds, with effects that were still present at the time of writing *Dialectics of Dependency* and continue to be relevant today.

Dependency, as a specific pattern of accumulation generated by Latin America's subordinate integration into the global market, also shaped the industrialization process of the subcontinent. Marini differentiates between the two processes of industrialization: the central one, which took place in Europe and later in the United States, and the dependent one, which occurred in Latin America, mainly in more industrialized countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina. In central countries, the creation of the consumer market happened concurrently with wage labor. Since food and other primary consumer goods could be acquired externally at low cost, a significant portion of workers' wages could be spent on manufactured goods. Marini also mentions that the separation between two distinct spheres of consumption, the essential and the luxurious, does not occur completely. To generate sufficient demand for the accumulation process in the production of superfluous or luxury goods, it is necessary that within central economies, these goods become relatively accessible and within the possibilities of internal consumption in these economies (Marini [1973] 2022).

The dependent industrialization process, according to Marini ([1973] 2022), is qualitatively distinct from the imperialist one. One of the main differences between these types is the role of the internal working class in dependent countries, whose needs do not serve as the guiding axis of industrial production. Instead, as we have

seen, the exportation to central countries is what constitutes this axis. This situation leads to specific conditions, such as the weakness of the nascent dependent industry, which is primarily expanded due to external factors. For example, declining consumption in central countries during economic crises leads to reduced imports.

Another factor in dependent industrialization, as outlined by Marini ([1973] 2022), is the intrinsic connection between industrialization and the superexploitation of labor. In the quest to increase profit margins in a situation of equilibrium between supply and demand, industrial capitalists do not seek to expand into new markets. Instead, they opt to raise prices on one hand, and on the other, to exploit crises and the abundant labor supply to push wages down. This, along with other mechanisms to increase the length and intensity of workdays, is possible, according to Marini, due to the relative independence between the dependent industrialization process and workers' wages. The rate of surplus value does not increase because of the devaluation of industrial goods; rather, the opposite occurs, where the expansion of production initially does not rely on the purchasing power of the majority of the population (Marini [1973] 2022).

Marini ([1973] 2022) concludes the first publication of his essay by discussing the evolution of the industrialization process in Latin America, highlighting a significant qualitative shift that becomes evident when examining the progress of this phenomenon, especially from the 1950s onward. He notes the increasing direct investment in dependent industries in the form of capital goods, such as machinery and technology, which were crucial for the industrial development of Latin America. This direct foreign investment in dependent economies was driven and made possible by a combination of factors. Marini points to the rapid technological advances in the capital goods sector, the immense concentration of financial and technological resources, particularly in the hands of U.S. capitalism, and the obsolescence of certain machinery that was being replaced by cutting-edge technologies but could still be used in other countries and regions as part of a new wave of industrialization in the periphery of the world.

The peripheral counterpart to this new stage of technological development is based on assumptions complementary to those of the center. It involves the need to increase the consumption of manufactured goods in dependent countries through middle-class segments, the difficulty of dependent industries in renewing their machinery and technological development solely through the market, and a significant profit opportunity for capitalist centers through direct investment. This is particularly facilitated by the suppression of labor value via superexploitation, which allows for greater appropriation of surplus value (Marini [1973] 2022).

These trends specific to dependent capitalist development in its process of industrialization, such as the division between production and circulation and the reduced purchasing power of the working classes—intrinsically related to the characteristics caused by what Marini terms superexploitation, which restricts the realization of surplus value in the internal market—lead to a quest for expanding internal market boundaries towards other countries. This tendency to seek regional and subregional markets, combined with a strong state militarism, drove Brazil towards subimperialism, a key category in Marini's legacy for the study of Latin American social formations.⁵

In the postscript, Marini ([1973] 2023, pp. 154) used it to briefly address some criticisms received by the essay, primarily related to misunderstandings of his analysis. Some of the criticisms directed at dependency theory, which will be discussed later in this article, arise from the notion that *Dialectics of Dependency* fails to capture the particularities of each specific Latin American social formation. Marini argues that this was not the intention of his work and explains this both in terms of the focus of his analysis and the brevity of the essay. Thus, the author places his essay at a high level of abstraction, aiming to capture general elements of the political-economic dynamics of Latin America, while acknowledging that these more general elements manifest in specific ways when examined in the context of each country or society. This corresponds to the author's caution that “only when the dependent economy becomes in fact a genuine center of capital production (...) is there a full manifestation of its laws of development, which always represent a particular expression of the general laws governing the system as a whole” (Marini, [1973] 2023 p. 156-157).

In other words, there seems to be no attempt by Marini ([1973] 2023) to rewrite the general laws of capitalist accumulation, but rather to characterize the specificity of general accumulation in the situation of dependence—that is, the exact form of the application of this law in the periphery of the capitalist system, which is ultimately inherent and closely related to the superexploitation of labor. Is Latin American capitalism a special case of capitalism, a peculiar type of capitalism, a *sui generis* capitalism as Marini puts it, requiring a whole new theoretical construction or is it just the normal reality of a system already completely dissected by Marx? Cueva's critique is the key to answer these questions.

⁵ The category of subimperialism is more thoroughly developed by Marini in other writings. For an extensive presentation of this category in Marini's work, see Luce (2011).

Augustín Cueva's critique of all theoreticians of dependency

In his essay *Problemas y perspectivas de la teoría de la dependencia* (1975), Agustín Cueva offers a direct and internal critique of Marini's *Dialectics of Dependency*, extending his criticism to the entire field of dependency theory, treating it somewhat as a cohesive whole, almost in a caricatured form. This initiated an open polemic in which Cueva engaged not only with Marini but also with other prominent figures in the field, in a somewhat hierarchical manner, with arguments that were more or less central, mainly concerning the extent to which his targets had surpassed developmentalism—that is, how far they had deviated from Marx. Here, Cueva primarily targets André Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Francisco Weffort, Theotônio dos Santos, and, of course, Ruy Mauro Marini.

Cueva (1975) acknowledged the contribution of dependency studies from a Marxist perspective, particularly in relation to the analysis of the subordinate integration of dependent countries into the global market. He also recognized the critical value of this theory, viewing it as a significant challenge to the bourgeois interpretation of Latin America's historical process, an interpretation without which it would be unimaginable to understand the vulnerable position of social sciences in the subcontinent. However, Cueva adopted a contradictory stance; while these studies provided a critical viewpoint against bourgeois science, they did so on the margins of Marxism and were still entangled with remnants of developmentalism.

However, Cueva did not conceive of dependency as governed by a distinct body of tendential laws, one that would require the reformulation of well-established categories in classical Marxism, such as exploitation or imperialism, nor did he see dependent capitalism as constituting a new theoretical object (Cueva, 1975). In summary, Cueva, in contrast to the unifying idea of Marxist dependency theorists, considered it a mistake to investigate dependent capitalism as if it were a new species to be scientifically discovered and described. He argued that all the characteristics of this supposedly unknown system were already identified and ready to be analyzed using Marx's own work, with no need for further theoretical extensions.

For Cueva (1975),

“Both imperialist domination and exploitation, as well as the particular articulation of modes of production that occur in each of our social formations, determine that even the laws inherent to capitalism manifest themselves in these formations with varying degrees of intensity or are "tainted" with "impurities" (...), but without this implying qualitative differences capable of constituting a new theoretical object governed by its own laws. Dependency does not constitute a *sui generis* mode of production, nor does it represent a specific phase of any

mode of production (...) but rather is the concrete form of existence of certain societies, whose particularity must, of course, be studied.” Cueva (1975), p. (our translation)⁶

Thus, Cueva (1975, p. 11) argues that dependency theory establishes itself as a “neomarxism on the margins of Marx,” attempting, in vain, to utilize Marxist methodological categories alongside bourgeois categories in a theoretical approach deeply imbued with the developmentalism it aims to critique. Part of this problem lies in the fact that, with the exception of works by authors such as Marini and Aníbal Quijano, the analysis of the economic and political situation of the Latin American subcontinent is carried out in a reductionist manner. In this approach, primary contradictions, such as class and class struggle, are supplanted by regional contradictions or those between imperialist and dependent countries, leading to economistic perspectives that require theoretical acrobatics outside of dialectics, such as André Gunder Frank's “development of underdevelopment,” a concept and method heavily criticized by Cueva.

Continuing with the examination of criticisms that, while general, begin to touch upon Marini's contributions to the study of dependency, Cueva (1975) argues that the category of dependency is used arbitrarily, as it is poorly defined and insufficient, especially when attempting to construct grand explanatory schemes about the history of Latin American development. Cueva explains this by stating that dependency cannot be taken as a singularity or an object in itself since capitalism itself occupies that position. He posits that the character of Latin American societies lies in a dual exploitation by both the imperialist bourgeoisie and the local bourgeoisie, as well as the articulation of different modes of production at various stages of development, which explains the specificity of these societies, thus negating the need to search for something original (Cueva, 1975).

⁶ From the original: “Tanto la dominación y explotación imperialistas como la articulación particular de modos de producción que se da en cada una de nuestras formaciones sociales, determinan que incluso las leyes propias del capitalismo se manifiesten en ellas de manera más o menos acentuada o cubiertas de “impurezas” (...), pero sin que ello implique diferencias cualitativas capaces de constituir un nuevo objeto teórico, regido por leyes propias, ya que la dependencia no constituye un modo de producción *sui generis* ni tampoco una fase específica de modo de producción alguno (...) sino que es la forma de existencia concreta de ciertas sociedades cuya particularidad tiene que ser desde luego estudiada.” Cueva (1975), p.

In his critiques specifically directed at Marini, Cueva (1975) explicitly mentions the propositions found in chapters 5 and 6 of the essay *Dialéctica de la dependencia*, where Marini discusses the arguments related to the division in the capital cycle and the problems of realization due to the superexploitation of workers. Cueva (1975) argues that Marini exaggerates in his propositions by working with models instead of laws, neglecting factors such as the possible superexploitation of French workers in the 1930s and 1940s, or the potential that the industrial sector producing electrical goods like televisions and radios might have been driven by consumption from lower sectors of the population. Thus, Cueva contends that Marini was creating a new category—superexploitation—to describe a process that simply reflects the compression of consumption, which, according to Cueva, could already be adequately captured by the concept of pauperization.

Another direct critique of Marini, pointed out by Cueva (1975), is that the coffee economy in Brazil and the cereal economy in Argentina do not provide sufficient reasons to argue that Latin America's agricultural production was the primary factor in lowering the cost of European labor and allowing Europe to focus more on industrial work. Cueva (1975) argues that dependency theory, in general, suffers from an inherent flaw: it tends to explain dependent social formations solely through their articulation with other social formations, rather than treating this articulation as just one manifestation of a more fundamental issue. According to Cueva, the capitalist mode of production should be understood not in isolated terms but as a global system. He asserts that the internal characteristics of dependent social formations, in their most essential aspects, determine how these formations are linked to global capitalism. This perspective leads Cueva to prefer explaining dependency not as a new theoretical object, but through the specification of concrete characteristics proper to these dependent social formations.

Cueva's (1975) argument also highlights a weakness in the dialectical treatment of the internal-external relationship, either by overemphasizing external determinations or by nullifying the distinctions between the external and internal. This issue is addressed by the argument that imperialism itself is internalized within the dependent structure of a given country. These and other critical points unfold in the work considered by Theotônio dos Santos as marking a new type of criticism of Dependency Theory, particularly for giving primacy to external factors over internal ones (Dos Santos, 1998).

Thus, in what would become his most significant work and contribution to critical Latin American studies, Cueva published *El Desarrollo del Capitalismo en America Latina* (*The Development of Capitalism in Latin America*) in 1977. This book made its mark by providing an analysis of the historical and concrete processes in Latin America and the Caribbean, representing an effort to move beyond dependency

theory. Cueva's work aimed to delve into the concrete realities of historical processes. At the very beginning of the book, Cueva cites Marini, stating that one of his intentions is to "dialecticize and specify underdevelopment as the result of a process in which the bourgeoisies of the most powerful states exploit economically weak nations" (Cueva [1977] 2023, p. 27), and also to "determine what constituted this initial weakness" (Cueva [1977] 2023, p. 28, our translation).

For methodological reasons, Cueva prefers to pinpoint the crucial aspect for determining the specific situation of the Latin American continent by examining its internal dynamics, through the analysis of the historical evolution of these social formations, primarily by studying the

“historical-concrete modalities of existence of the slave and feudal modes of production on the American continent, their deepening and expansion in each area, as well as their concrete ways of articulation with capitalist embryos, mainly mining ones, and with secondary modes of production such as the peasant community, patriarchal economy, or simple merchant production” (Cueva [1977] 2023, p. 32, our translation)⁷

Considering these concrete manifestations of different modes of production, Cueva develops the notion of structural heterogeneity, a process that constitutes these social formations and determines its politics, culture and, finally, how the State in Latin America originates and consolidates itself. This miscellaneous kind of social formation constituted a scenario that limited or conditioned the class struggle and the action of the dominated ones. Cueva ([1977] 2023) mentioned a sort of outcomes caused by this structural characteristics, using as an example a number of popular rebellions that occurred in Brazil on the early nineteenth century that yet spread over

⁷ From the Brazilian edition: “modalidades histórico-concretas de existência dos modos de produção escravista e feudal no continente americano, de seu aprofundamento e extensão em cada área, assim como suas maneiras também concretas de articulação com os embriões capitalistas, principalmente mineiros, e com os modos de produção secundários tais como a comunidade camponesa, a economia patriarcal ou a pequena produção mercantil simples” (Cueva [1977] 2023 p. 32).

a high number of cities were not capable of integration nor political direction, also due to the segmentation and atomization of pre-capitalistics structures.

By the way he moves historically through his analysis, Cueva arose with the logical conclusion that the overdetermination caused by structural heterogeneity engendered the capitalistic development that followed in Latin America. This particular form of historical determination gave rise to tasks and challenges that faced a shared way of political and economical aspects in the subcontinent, which the capital accumulation surged from pre-capitalistics structures led to a ‘oligarchical-dependent’ course of action pronounced by political instability, authoritarianism, exploitation of direct productors, lack of conditions to conform a modern proletariat and its counterface, the difficulty of the modern bourgeoisie emergence, given that the peripheral one was born tangled with landed aristocracy (Cueva [1977] 2023).

Concluding the overview about the logical path designed by Cueva ([1977] 2023), the underdevelopment faced by Latin America was constructed by the dependent oligarchies-centered accumulation, which also conformed the way that the subcontinent was integrated in the world market under the domination of imperialistic countries. What Cueva ([1977] 2023) argues, in other words, is that the primary conditions of Latin American countries’ development caused the unequal development perceived in the totality of the capitalist system, and endogenous methodological point of view.

The collective reaction embodied in Vânia Bambirra’s answer

Cueva’s intervention in the debate provoked a powerful answer from one of the foremost figures in Dependency Theory and Latin American Marxism: Vânia Bambirra. That answer is an incisive defense of the ideas about dependency against all sorts of critics. In that sense, it is possible to think of it as a reaction that generates an ambience of collectiveness that will be fundamental for the future strengthening and establishment of Marxist Dependency Theory as a proper school of thought about the social and economic formation of Latin America.

In her book *Teoría de la Dependencia: Una Anticrítica*, first published in 1978, Vânia Bambirra (1978) makes precise political and theoretical choices as she directs her “anticritique” towards the critics of Marxist Dependency Theory. According to the author herself, the work does not aim to add new contributions to the theory but rather compiles the main critiques of Marxist Dependency Theory as a whole, successfully exposing the weaknesses of the critiques from representatives of ECLAC developmentalism, communist parties opposed to Marxist Dependency Theory, and Agustín Cueva. The latter is praised by Vânia as being the most rigorous in his critiques.

According to Bambirra (1978), Cueva's critique is nothing less than generalist and imprecise. She argues that Cueva treats Dependency Theory as a solid block and denies the different nuances and contributions that a large number of intellectuals have brought to a heterogeneous whole. In other words, Bambirra highlights that Dependency Theory is composed of numerous contributions, many of which are not in total accordance with each other. Authors being classified as belonging to a "Dependency Theory school" are usually original and creative intellectuals, and so each one of them has a unique approach and interpretations about what dependency really is. In that sense, her line of defense is to emphasize the heterogeneity within a group which shares only some ideas that are, nevertheless, fundamental. Bambirra also contends that Cueva's work becomes somewhat subjective by caricaturing certain aspects, particularly in his critique of Gunder Frank. This, according to Vânia, makes criticism difficult and even impossible, as there is no concrete object in the text that can be dismantled through argumentation (Bambirra, 1978).

Vânia Bambirra (1978) also dismantles a series of fallacious comments made by Cueva. In his eagerness to craft one of the major critiques of this school of thought, Cueva argued about aspects that did not align with reality. For example, he claimed that Dependency theorists did not mention class struggle, ignoring an entire body of theoretical work, especially from CESO. Another aspect was Cueva's (1975) assertion that Dependency theorists were distant from the Cuban Revolution, an argument elegantly refuted by Vânia Bambirra herself. She had previously engaged in this debate and addressed the Cuban Revolution in her work *La revolución cubana: una reinterpretación* (The Cuban Revolution: a reinterpretation) (1974), where she critically discussed the revolution's character within the Marxist framework.

Vânia Bambirra even agrees with many of Cueva's criticisms of Gunder Frank, but when it comes to Theotônio dos Santos, she defends him. Cueva's (1975) critiques of Dos Santos are limited to a passage where Theotônio dos Santos suggests the need to expand and reformulate Lenin's theory of imperialism. However, Bambirra (1978) rightly argues that Theotônio dos Santos does not suggest this because the theory is wrong or poorly formulated, but rather because it is incomplete. To fully encompass its dialectical counterpart within a unified theoretical analysis, the theory of imperialism must include the perspective of dependent countries and the study of these specific laws of motion within the capitalist system: those laws of motion which precisely constitute dependency.

Drawing on contributions from the great theorist of imperialism and Russian revolutionary, Lenin, Vânia Bambirra fiercely defends the regional analysis and, more importantly, the nationalist character that dependency theory must embrace to

accurately analyze concrete situations. According to Cueva (1975, p. 13), there is an "inadequate handling of dialectics" in how dependency theory addresses the national question. Bambirra (1978) challenges this argument by revisiting Lenin's contributions on the national question. She argues that once it is understood that imperialism is internalized at the national level through control of the primary accumulation process in dependent countries—namely, manufacturing—the class struggle necessarily includes imperialism as the immediate enemy of the working classes in dependent nations. Moreover, she contends, only through a correct understanding of the national issue did the Bolsheviks succeed, both in defeating czarism and in correctly positioning the nation within the broader international struggle.

As seen, Vânia Bambirra's reaction to Cueva's attack shows that there is a common methodological approach which could be termed Marxist Dependency Theory. However, this does not mean that such theory is a monolithic bloc. Nor that it is a finished construction. Instead, it is a coherent way to interpret the real phenomenon of dependency, even though their proponents have their unique theses and ideas about various aspects of it. Vânia Bambirra indicates clearly that disagreements among the proponents of Marxist Dependency Theory is normal, because each of them is an autonomous thinker. This means that critique and counter-critique is a strong feature within the group, as this is the case among communist militants who adhere to the basic practices of intercommunication and mutual education.

Conclusion: critique as a methodological approach for collective construction

Marxist Dependency Theory is considered today a solid body of theses about the reality of Latin America within global capitalism. However, for a long period it remained isolated. The 1970s, marked by intense development and critique of Marxist Dependency Theory, eventually gave way to a deeply unfavorable situation, particularly in light of the significant uncertainty that Marini, Theotônio dos Santos, and Vânia Bambirra faced upon their return to Brazil after the Amnesty Law. This was due to cultural shifts, the silencing of ideas and militants opposed to the dictatorship, and the state of knowledge production in Brazil, where the socialist transition was no longer on the agenda (Reyes, 2022; Wasserman, 2017). The ongoing crises, signaled by the oil crisis of the 1970s, paved the way for a new rationality in the global economic system: neoliberalism.

This period is marked by the rise of political figures such as Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, Ronald Reagan in the United States, and Helmut Kohl in Germany. These liberal-conservative leaders implemented economic policies that, to

varying degrees, focused on deregulation, market liberalization, privatization, and attacks on social policies. This shift was also reflected in the adoption of these ideas by multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which significantly influenced academic and institutional intellectual debates (Carcanholo & Baruco, 2009).

Thus, concepts and slogans like class struggle, revolution, and socialism became outdated in Brazilian academia. Marini, Theotônio, and Vânia faced significant challenges in reestablishing themselves in universities that had adapted to the authoritarian period. These institutions were also marked by an epistemological rejection of modernity as a paradigm for understanding reality, alongside the growing influence of post-structuralist and postmodern theories represented by figures such as Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida (Wasserman, 2017).

According to the research presented here, focused on the sequential interactive works of Marini, Cueva and Vânia Bambirra, it is possible to argue that the practice of critique is fundamental for the strengthening of a collective intellectual construction. Marxist Dependency Theory developed as a radical stream, apart from other, non-Marxist, currents of dependency theories because those authors who aimed at being faithful to Marx's research program and militant praxis recognized themselves as legitimate interlocutors whose purpose was not to destroy each other's work, but to contribute to their improvement. This is done through critique. Critique, therefore, must be always conceived as an essential procedure for gaining strength.

Marxist Dependency Theory strengthened its identity not because the scholars involved converged and suppressed their disagreements, but because their divergence was put to debate in an environment of collective effort to remain faithful to the tradition inaugurated by Marx. So, even though there are tensions between these thinkers, there is a powerful coherence that enlarges the complexity and diversity of this stream of analysis. This dynamic, of which the sequential interaction Marini - Cueva - Bambirra is an example and has been presented here, suggests that Latin American Marxists were evidently capable of generating synthesis through dialectical analysis. In that sense, we argue that Cueva's critique, instead of weakening the radical stream of analysis of the second half of the 20th century, was ultimately incorporated into the tradition, contributing to a broader and more profound synthesis. It is our opinion that part of the coherence of Marxist Dependency Theory is the result of Cueva's critique: a serious engagement that also prompted serious reactions, in which both sides seek to deepen their understanding and study of the

reality of class struggle. In that sense, criticizing Marxist Dependency Theory along the lines of Augustin Cueva, is a way to contribute to its improvement and further development, being an exemplary way to reverence it.

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