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DECONSTRUCTING MAZRUIANA: SOME STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF ALI A. MAZRUI'S THOUGHT

by

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These 25 structural elements of Ali Mazrui's thought were chosen by the author himself as a basis of discussion. The thoughts are compiled from his different works and drawn from different stages of his career. Element No. 1 on "Social Darwinism and Theories of Modernization" is summarized from his article in World Politics (Princeton) Vol.21 No. 1, 1968. The final Element (No. 25) on "Judging Civilizations" is summarized from his article in Foreign Affairs (New York) Volume 76 No. 5, September - October 1997. This deconstruction has a long appendix - Mazrui's Essay "THE MUSE OF MODERNITY AND THE QUEST FOR DEVELOPMENT".

1. **From Darwinism to Modernization Theories:**

Western theories of modernization have often been based on Eurocentric models whose ancestry goes back to social Darwinism and beyond. Non-Western societies are seen as simpler organisms slowly evolving towards the complex sophistication of Western civilization. At best modernization becomes Westernization.

2. **Yes to Modernization; No to its Theories:**

We need not throw out the baby of modernization with the bath water of its Western theories. Let us look anew at the baby. Modernization as a process needs a fresh examination.

3. **What is Development?:**

Development equals modernization minus dependency.

4. **What is Modernization?:**

Modernization is change which is compatible with the present stage of human knowledge, and helps to release the creative energies of the people in socially responsible ways.

5. **What is dependency?:**

Dependency is surplus need or deficit control. Country B is dependent on country A if country B needs A more than A needs B; or if B has less control over their relationship than A has.

6. **Towards Transcending Dependency:**

Dependency in a less developed country can be transcended through five strategies - indigenization, domestication, diversification, horizontal integration and vertical counter-penetration. (See Mazrui's paper "The Muse of Modernity")

7. **The International Class System:**

International stratification is based not on who owns what but on who knows what. The power of Western skills controls the diamond mines of South Africa and the oil wells of Saudi Arabia. Israelis own less than the Arabs, but Israelis are more skilled.

8. **Power and the Means of Destruction:**

In a technologically underdeveloped country power resides among those who control the means of destruction rather than those who control the means of production. Soldiers in Africa

have often been much more powerful than business tycoons.

9. **Ethnicity vs. Class:**

In a technologically less developed society, the forces of biological reproduction are more politicized than the forces of economic production. That is why kinship ties and ethnic forces are more powerful in Africa than class affiliations.

10. **The Primacy of Culture:**

Marx was right that “man had to eat in order to live” (the origins of economics). But man had to know what to eat and what to avoid (the origins of culture). So culture is prior to economics. In the beginning was the Word, and the word was culture.

11. **Paradigm Lost?:**

In development studies culture has often been a paradigm lost. Are we now witnessing paradigm regained?

12. **Seven Functions of Culture:**

There are seven functions of culture in society. Culture as lenses of perception, as a source of motivation, as a standard of judgment, as a criterion of stratification, as a basis of identity, as a means of communication, and as a framework of consumption and production.

13. **Women: Between Centering, Liberating and Empowering:**

Women in Africa are more centered in the means of production than women in the West, but women in Africa are less liberated than Western women. Women in both cultures have yet to be adequately empowered.

14. **Women: Between Rights and Roles:**

Traditionally, African women have been custodians of fire, water and earth - while God has taken charge of the omnipresent air. The Westernization of an African woman has often meant more rights but a less central role in society.

15. **Women in Islam and the West:**

Islam grants greater dignity but less liberty to women than Western culture does. Sons in the Muslim world respect their mothers more than sons do in the West; but husbands in the West are more respectful (though not necessarily more faithful) to their wives than are husbands in the Muslim world.

16. **Between Genius and Gender:**

Two developmental revolutions are needed in the Third world - a revolution in skills and a revolution in gender. The talents of the people need to be unleashed; and the powers of women need to be unbound.

17. **Development: Political, Economic and Social:**

The central aim of political development should be the evolution of humane governance and democratic participation. The central concern of economic development should be the improvement and consolidation of productive capacity and distributive economic justice. The central aim of social development should be the release of the creative energies of each citizen, male and female, through education, socialization and opportunities for self-fulfillment. Social development should also foster the three C's: Community, Compassion and Cooperation in a global context.

18. **Towards De-Leninizing Marxism:**

What has failed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe is not Marxism but Leninism. What has failed is the vanguard party, democratic centralism and unmitigated statism. If Marxism is to survive in the twenty-first century, it must learn to de-Leninize itself.

19. **What is globalization?:**

The term "globalization" is new but the process itself is centuries old. Globalization is much more than the Information Superhighway and the new expansion of international markets. Globalization consists of all the forces which are pushing the world towards becoming a global village. Globalization is the villagization of the globe.

20. **What is an intellectual?:**

An intellectual is a person who has the capacity to be fascinated by ideas and who has acquired the skill to handle some of those ideas effectively.

21. **Who are the revolutionaries?:**

The masses sometimes have the power to pull down the temple of the old order, as the mobs of Paris in 1789 and the mobs of Teheran in 1979 did. But it is the intellectuals (secular or religious) who attempt to create an alternative order and design a new temple. Robespierre, Lenin and Khoumeini were all intellectuals.

22. **Monotheism vs. Democracy?:**

Why has pluralist democracy survived better in India than in either Pakistan or

Bangladesh? Could one of the reasons be that the concept of God in Hinduism is pluralistic while the concept of God in Muslim Pakistan and Bangladesh is not? Did a pluralistic God in Christianity (Three in One, One in Three) make it easier for Western culture to evolve a liberal democratic system? Does strict monotheism lean towards political absolutism?

23. **Between Nostalgia and Hate-Retention:**

Societies differ in capacities for nostalgia, as well as in retention of bad memories. Jewish nostalgia gave birth to Zionism. The Armenian long memory of the 1915 massacres has generated assassinations of Turkish diplomats decades later. African culture is distinctive in having a short memory of hate. Political amnesia is often a valuable developmental resource.

24. **Between the Dual and the Plural Society:**

Most social scientists have tended to lump dual societies with plural societies. A dual society (where two groups account for more than eighty percent of the population) is vulnerable to polarization and stalemate. Dual Cyprus is in a stalemate, dual Czechoslovakia broke up, dual Northern Ireland is trying to find its way out of violence, and dual Rwanda is trying to recover from the ravages of genocide.

25. **How are civilizations to be judged?:**

Civilizations are to be judged not merely by the heights of achievement to which they have ascended but also by the depths of depravity to which they have sometimes descended. Muslims are often criticized for not producing the best, but they are seldom congratulated for having standards of behaviour which have averted the worst. There are no Muslim equivalents of systematic Nazi extermination camps, nor Muslim conquests by genocide in the bloody tradition of whites in the Americas, nor Muslim versions of South Africa's apartheid sanctioned by the Dutch Reformed Church, nor Muslim versions of the Stalinist terror in the name of Five Year plans. Nor can Islam be blamed for the only World Wars in human history - those started in Europe.