

Swein Eurydice Baticle: Modernization theory and the case of France's Overseas Territories

Thesis assessment

First and foremost, the thesis under review is devoted to topics that correspond to what the discipline aspires to, which could be described as core topics of historical sociology. Its content concerns issues of modernization, social change, developmental trends, dependency theory and multiple modernities. From this perspective, its topic and content can be described as distinctly discipline-relevant.

The thesis has a traditional content structure, in the sense that it consists of two parts, a theoretical and a research part; the research part, however, is essentially study and analysis of secondary literature on France's Overseas Territories. The two parts of the work under review are themselves of a fairly solid standard. In both, the student demonstrates the acquisition of a satisfactory level of knowledge and skills in the field of study, with an appropriate professional level for the whole thesis to be assessed as acceptable for defence.

Its problem, however, is that its two main parts represent in principle two disparate texts that are not - in my opinion - satisfactorily connected. The central problem is that the second - historically oriented- part of the text talks about the development of France and its Overseas Territories, but in the previous part, whose topic is modernization theory, there is not a single mention of a sociological conception by a French author, because it exclusively discusses modernization conceptions of Anglo-American provenance. From this point of view, then, the basic research question of the whole thesis – the influence of modernization theory on the formation of French development policies - appears to be highly problematic, since the response to this question completely ignores - as far as modernization theory is concerned - the French sociological perspective, in particular the contributions of such authors as Raymond Aron,

Alain Touraine, Michele Crozier, Pierre Bourdieu, etc. Moreover, it is usually considered that French social scientific thought is largely self-centred, so that to assume a significant influence of American sociology on French sociology is rather problematic, let alone how concepts of American origin have been reflected in French politics.

While not an expert on French thought, I would venture to suggest that the development of French policy regarding the Overseas Territories is not so much a matter of sociology as it is of the socialist-oriented ideology that dominated much of the French political scene for a considerable time after the Second World War, associated, among other things, with the notion of progress and the scientifically guided planned development that led to it.

To these comments of theoretical nature, however, it should be added that the student apparently faced the absence of their supervisor, Dr. Kumsa, at certain times during the development of the thesis, which may also have impacted its final form.

Overall, I rate the work of Swein Eurydice Baticle as very good (2).

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