

Culture of poverty ideology



It has been said that "Poverty is functional to society today", the extent to which this is true has been explored by theorists of the cultural, Marxist, and functional perspectives and can be examined in English-speaking countries of the Caribbean such as Trinidad and Tobago. To begin, in the late 1950s, Oscar Lewis, an American anthropologist created the culture of poverty ideology. It is in this ideology that he states that there are three levels in the culture of poverty. The first being the individual level.

Here the poor feels helpless, inferior to those around him and marginalised from society. The individual develops a sense of acquiescence and fatalism. He goes to say that the individual desires immediate gratification even through expedient means as they are unable to delay gratifying action. Secondly, the family level. On this level, there exist consensual marriages or free relationships, a high rate of divorce and a significant number of matriarchal families. Lastly, the community level in which most people are fatalistic therefore leading to minimum effective participation in the major institutions.

There is non-membership in trade unions and other homogeneous organizations. Not to mention, that little use is made of banks, hospitals, museums and other indistinguishable institutions. Lewis concluded his concept by suggesting that the culture of poverty emboldens poverty as the preceding characteristics of poverty act as vehicles to ensure the continuation of poverty. If this is applied to the country of Trinidad and Tobago, it can be said that those of the Beta residence formerly known as 'shanty town' may experience poverty at each level.

Individualistically, persons of the Beta residences and surrounding areas are often marginal's and are left to feel helpless and inferior to those belonging to other areas in Trinidad and Tobago. Most have given up on finding a way out of poverty and have turned to illegal means for immediate gratification. On the family level there are many common law marriages along with a high rate of divorce and separation between couples, therefore contributing to the existence of a notable number of matriarchal households.

Also there is little participation in institutions such as schools whether as a teacher or student as suggested by Lewis the persons belonging to this region may never find their way out of poverty as all the aforementioned characteristics encourage poverty to be continued. Thus, it can be said that Lewis does not believe that poverty is functional in his society. Though Lewis held great views, Critics have argued that in many countries, the poor has found ways of improving their life situation. These include, participating in community groups and politics and also by maintaining strong family units.

Also other researchers have insisted that the behavior of the poor is not culturally determined but instead is due to 'situational constraints'. For example underemployment, unemployment, low income and other related factors. Conflict theorists put forward the idea that poverty is a result of the state's failure to allocate resources equitably. They examine poverty from different angles including that of the labor market, stratification system and capitalism. They state that in the labor market, there is an increasing demand for skilled workers in industrialized societies. Those who are unemployed and underemployed are most likely unable to meet the require

meets and are unable to secure high wages on the labor market, thus, remaining in poverty. A great example of this can be seen in Trinidad and Tobago where a person is now expected to have at least three SEC passes in order to work as a cashier in a grocery or in KEF. Alternatively, there is a dual labor market, consisting of the primary labor market and the secondary labor market. The primary labor market is found in large and profitable companies with job security, high wages and training opportunities.

While the secondary labor market is found in small companies with little job security, low wages and few training opportunities. Conflict theorists suggest that women and those of ethnic minorities are concentrated in the secondary labor market and take low paying jobs. This too, can be seen in Trinidad and Tobago where the primary labor market is found in government offices or non-governmental organizations and the secondary labor market would be found in hairdressing salons, hardware, groceries, in the market, CHEEP, et c.

It is in most of these organizations that women and the ethnic minorities are heavily employed. In addition, Marxist theorists explore poverty from the angle of the stratification system. They indicate that this system relates poverty to class. They believe that at the 'underclass', namely the retired elderly, the physically disabled and single parents. These families lack prestige and wealth and that their low position is a result of their low status. They go on to say that it is because of their low wages that opportunities for better paid jobs are limited. Equally important is the angle of capitalism.

It is here that Marxist states that the existence of poverty is in favor of the owners of production, as it allows the m to maintain the capitalist system and maximize profits . It is important to realism that me embers of the working class only owns their labor which is sold at a wage and for those who SSE labor is not in demand, wages are low. Therefore competitions among workers arise which keeps the wage levels in check. The conflict theorist says that the state will act in FAA our of the ruling class and therefore, the government would do little to reduce poverty.

From this it can be said that Marxist view poverty as being functional in society but to non e other than the upper class or owners of production while exploiting the working class. There are researchers who disagree with the Marxist point Of view reason bee Eng, the Marxist view has failed to clearly states what causes certain groups in society to become poor, also the perspective does not distinctly distinguish the poor from other members of the working class, and therefore fails to offer an explanation for their poverty. Not to mention that the theory does not explore the income variations existing with n the working class.

Another Perspective taken on poverty is the Functionalist or conservative app roach led by Herbert . J Gangs. He argues that poverty persists because it IS beneficial to certain non poor and affluent groups in society.

Functionalist theorists including Gangs argues that there are certain functions of poverty.