

# The Empirical Samir Amin: A Notice and Appreciation by Aidan Foster-Carter

## Preface

The title of this introduction is deliberately chosen. It has two principal aims, both relatively modest. Positively, it provides a basic account of the many and varied works of Samir Amin; normatively, it hopes that this essentially descriptive account will encourage an awareness of the richness of Amin's thought, and promote in the reader a desire to study it at first hand.

A 'notice' is less ambitious than a 'review'. Its literal aim is to draw attention, rather than (or at any rate prior to) passing judgement. This implies no presumption that the name and work of Samir Amin are unknown in the English-speaking world. Although this was true a *décade* ago, the 1970s have seen most of his major recent books translated into English. Yet there are two reasons why a 'notice' may, in the present context, still be appropriate. First, the sheer scope of Amin's work precludes any full review of the depth which it undoubtedly deserves, in the limited space available. Second, as will be argued further below, there is a certain imbalance in the 'consumption' of Amin in Anglophone quarters, due, especially, to his earlier detailed empirical work, as well as to the breadth of some of his more recent articles being overlooked. On one level, therefore, the purpose here is simply to put the record straight and provide a more accurate and well-rounded picture.

Equally, an 'appreciation' is not a 'critique'. However, it should not be understood as opposing or pre-empting critical scrutiny of Amin's work (nor, indeed, does it refrain from engaging in this). Once again, it is a question of balance. Much of the recent criticism of Amin's work seems to me unsatisfactory in various ways. Not only (to recall the previous point) is there little apparent awareness of important aspects of Amin's writings; but there is also, in some of the criticism Amin has attracted, an 'all-or-nothing' approach often couched in a polemical tone whose total effect seems to me to generate more heat than light.<sup>1</sup> Hence the intention of an 'appreciation' is at least to ensure that criticism is more securely grounded in a less hasty and partial reading of Amin than hitherto.

Beyond this, I would indeed claim that, taken as a whole, the work of Samir Amin constitutes — in its volume, range and depth — a unique contribution to the elucidation of problems of development and under-development on a world scale; both in themselves, and in their implications for our understanding of the broader issues of theory and strategy which the existence of the Third World poses for Marxism. Doubtless others will continue to disagree. But perhaps, in future, they will at least have a fuller knowledge of what they are disagreeing with.

In some ways it is not surprising that a less than accurate view of Amin prevails. The circumstantial obstacles to gaining a full picture are considerable. For one thing, the sheer volume of Amin's *oeuvre* makes it difficult enough to keep up with his prodigious output. To date, Amin has written some 20 books or book-length studies; has co-authored, edited, or contributed to at least a dozen more; and is the author of articles and papers whose number must run into three figures. Even allowing for some mutual repetition and 'auto-plagiarism', the bulk is forbiddingly large. Nor is there any particular reason to suppose that the flow will subside in future.

A secondary problem is that neither Amin nor some of his various publishers have always been as helpful in providing

the reader with maps and signposts as one would have hoped.<sup>2</sup> In some ways this is trivial, but not wholly so; and in any case it would not be honest if this appreciation were to omit an outburst of the frustration that everyone must have felt who has tried to find their way around Amin's work as a whole. The problem has several facets, most of which boil down to the fact that Amin repeats himself not a little. (Further details of the difficulties will be found in the Introduction to the Bibliography of Amin's writings included in this volume, which it is hoped will ensure that future readers no longer have to recapitulate the false trails and tailbacks which have confused earlier explorers.)

Thirdly, and most importantly, the translation of Amin's work into English has been uneven in at least one major respect. Although he is now primarily (and properly) thought of as a theorist, what actually made Amin's name in the first place was a whole series of half a dozen or more solid empirical monographs on the economic and social development of particular countries and regions in North, West and Central Africa. Written in French during the 1960s, only two of these (on the Maghreb, and West Africa as a whole) have been translated into English.<sup>3</sup> Among the works untranslated, the important study of capitalist 'growth without development' in the Ivory Coast is not entirely unknown.<sup>4</sup> But there seems little awareness of Amin's earlier critique of 'African socialism' in Ghana, Guinea, and Mali<sup>5</sup> (in the last of which he also worked as an economist for three years). And his book on the indigenous business community in Senegal — still, over a decade later, one of only a handful of empirical studies of a putative 'national bourgeoisie' — seems to be entirely ignored.<sup>6</sup>

Further description of these and other similar works by Amin will be offered below. For now, the point is not only the obvious one, that any consideration of Amin should look at all of his work; but also to stress that these specific case studies constitute in various ways the indispensable foundation of his subsequent and better known works of general theory. While the relationship between these two

stages and levels of work is not wholly straightforward, it is nonetheless inadequate to judge either in isolation from the other.

Although the foregoing constitutes the major imbalance in Amin's 'consumption' in English, two other similar aspects should be briefly mentioned before proceeding to a more systematic and detailed study. First, it is unfortunate that of Amin's two volumes of collected articles, while that on general issues has been translated, the no less valuable compilation of materials on Africa which includes 'middle range' papers on general aspects of African development, and must rank among Amin's finest work, has not.<sup>7</sup> (Although several have been published individually in English here and there, the cumulative effect is not the same.) Second, it is remarkable how little response there has been to Amin's recent excursions into broader questions of social and political interest — socialism, technology, the environment, feminism, and 'cultural' matters generally.<sup>8</sup> While sometimes avowedly speculative, these articles are of considerable interest; they also illuminate aspects of Amin's economic theories.

### The Writings of Samir Amin

Amin's output already spans a quarter of a century. As mentioned previously, there is a certain relation between chronological order and subject-matter, and a rough division between the 1960s (empirical) and 1970s (theoretical) suggests itself. Even prior to this, however, brief mention must be made of Amin's earliest and almost wholly unknown writings. These in turn are of two main kinds, each in a sense reflecting an aspect of the contingencies of Amin's biography: his Egyptian nationality, and his French education.

Although the present discussion is concerned with texts rather than with presenting a biography, it should be noted that Amin was born in Cairo in 1931, and underwent his

university education in Paris where he took three degrees (Institute of Political Studies, 1954; Institute of Statistics, 1955; and his Ph.D. in Economics in 1957). This triptych already anticipates the three main facets of Amin's later work, even if subsequently now one and now another aspect has guided particular texts.

Amin's actual writings from this 'first period' (roughly, the late 1950s, i.e. in his mid to late 20s) are of two kinds. First, there are his two theses. The earlier of these (1956) is a statistical study of savings and their utilization in Egypt between 1938 and 1952.<sup>9</sup> The latter, Amin's prize-winning Ph.D. thesis in Economics, bears having its full title quoted: 'The structural effects of the international integration of pre-capitalist economies: a theoretical study of the mechanism which has engendered the so-called "under-developed" economies'.<sup>10</sup>

While this might not bat eyelids today, in 1957 — 25 years ago — such formulations were virtually unheard of. Evidently, and indeed by his own admission,<sup>11</sup> Amin, as early as this, had already formulated a critique of existing orthodoxies, and the elements of an alternative type of theory. Although the present writer unfortunately lacks first-hand acquaintance with this or indeed any other of Amin's work from this period, Amin's own account can be noted. Only more than a decade later, in *Accumulation on a World Scale*, would Amin return to this level of work. In the interim, and deliberately, he set out to pit the theory against 'a number of concrete analyses, with as much precision and data as possible'.<sup>12</sup> These studies are the subject of the next section, but evidently, for Amin, they confirmed rather than undermined his original formulations: for despite what he would now regard as 'theoretical mistakes and shortcomings' in his thesis, 'my fundamental position remains the same'.<sup>13</sup> *Accumulation on a World Scale*, in fact, incorporates passages from the thesis, especially in detailed critique of conventional economic theory.<sup>14</sup>

Thus far we at least have Amin the economist: empirical, theoretical, and critical. But meanwhile the *political*

dimension, already implicit in the thesis, was being explicitly vented in articles on various aspects of the current situation in Egypt and the Arab world. Samir Amin's very first publication of any kind is apparently an article in *Democratie Nouvelle* (1955) entitled: 'Where is Egypt going?'.<sup>15</sup> At the time, this was credited to one 'Saïd El Masry': the first of a string of aliases of variously Franco-Arab ethnicity — 'Pierre Dupont', 'Yves Durelle', 'Hassan Riad', 'Pierre Amon', 'Ahmad El Kodsy'<sup>16</sup> — whose intention at the time was no doubt to avoid the attentions of the Egyptian security services, and which have remained to confuse the bibliographer.

This was the first of a dozen and more articles surveying general or particular aspects of the Egyptian political economy.<sup>17</sup> Again, space and ignorance preclude detailed discussion. But, in the present context, Samir Amin's detailed concern with the actual and potential functioning of specific economic sectors and industries cannot be overlooked.<sup>18</sup> This concern, after lying dormant for a quarter of a century, has burst forth again in the renewed study of the Egyptian and other Arab economies which constitutes the present volume. In this, as in other aspects, and for all its diversity and development, there are important threads of continuity running through Amin's *oeuvre*.

But what of the political aspect? Evidently, it was a formative experience for Amin to cut his teeth on the inadequacies at many levels of what was then the model of an 'alternative', purportedly anti-imperialist and socialist, development path: Nasser's Egypt — Amin's first employment after completing his studies was as a senior economist with the Economic Development Organization in Cairo, from 1957 to 1960. Undoubtedly, this experience and that which immediately succeeded it — namely, three years as technical adviser for planning in Mali, then newly independent and the only avowedly 'Marxist' regime on the African Continent — prompted Amin to develop a critique of such 'socialisms' which was both penetrating and prescient. This, it will be recalled, was the era of Nkrumah's dictum 'Seek ye first

the political kingdom' and numerous other false dawns. Not many commentators kept a cool head in this period, but Amin was one who did. The charge levelled against him by come-lately critics, of being in some unspecified sense an ideologist and apologist for 'national bourgeoisies' and 'state capitalism', is, then, all the more ludicrous.<sup>19</sup>

We turn now to Amin's writings of the 1960s which, in the main, are the aforementioned empirical works. Strictly, his first published book was probably a study of monetary and financial flows in Egypt in 1957, published (in Arabic) by the Arab League in Cairo in 1959.<sup>20</sup> In similar vein, his first full-length publication in French was on Mali's national accounts for 1959, published in 1961.<sup>21</sup>

After his first two posts as a government economist, Amin returned to University life in 1963, as professor of economics variously at the universities of Poitiers, Paris, and Dakar. It was during this period (1963-70) that he gradually came to the notice of a wider professional public (albeit still almost exclusively Francophone) with a series of solid case studies of particular countries and areas. To enumerate these, first of all 'Hassan Riad's' *L'Egypte nasserienne* (1964),<sup>22</sup> pseudonymous at the time, can now be seen as a link with both Amin's earlier and later concerns. In 1965, in his own name, came Amin's survey of 'three African development experiences: Mali, Guinea, and Ghana'.<sup>23</sup> These, of course, were at the time West Africa's three avowed beacons of socialism.

Another year, and another book. The most substantial of all Amin's empirical works is his 1966 2-volume study of the Maghreb economy:<sup>24</sup> a detailed analysis of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, both in regard to their colonial past and recent decolonization (Volume 1), and their future development potential (Volume 2). An abbreviated and updated summary volume on the same area, *The Modern Maghreb*, appeared in 1970; this was Samir Amin's first book to be translated into English (as *The Maghreb in the Modern World*).<sup>25</sup>

In French, meanwhile, Amin continued to maintain his prodigious rate of production of a book a year on average.

1967 brought forth his classic study of the development of capitalism in the Ivory Coast<sup>26</sup> (which also provided the material for his final thesis *d'agregation*).<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, it was thus only in his fourth book that he first turned to study an instance of full-blown 'peripheral capitalism'. In 1969 came a slight variation: a book focussing not on a country but on a class (another thing critics have accused him of not doing), namely the Senegalese business community.<sup>28</sup>

The focus on a country returns in his next book (1970), although geographically Amin's gaze has shifted east and south to the limits of former French Africa: the countries of Equatorial Africa (Congo-Brazzaville, Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon and Cameroon).<sup>29</sup> Finally, and as if to summarize this phase of his research and its findings, in 1971 Amin produced a general survey of developments in 11 countries of West Africa: the nine which are Francophone, plus Ghana and the Gambia. This book did appear in English, in 1973; albeit under a title *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa* much inferior to the original French (which translates as *West Africa Blocked: the Political Economy of Colonization 1880-1970*).<sup>30</sup>

It is an impressive record, by any count: eight books published in as many years, studying in depth the structures of up to 20 countries. No brief account can do justice or even convey the flavour and force of this essential part of Amin's work. Nonetheless, there may be room for a few general observations as well as some specific comments.

Several things can be said about these books in general. Their coverage has already been indicated. By region, they span ex-French Africa in its totality, from Senegal to Chad and from Morocco to the Congo; plus Egypt, and two of the four Anglophone states of West Africa. By *regime*, they consider a variety of self-styled 'socialisms' as well as different modalities of colonial and post-colonial capitalism.

There are also common aspects to Amin's approach in these books. At one level, to reiterate, they are profoundly empirical. Not the least of their merits is that they are all

highly informative accounts of the countries concerned. At times, in fact, the sheer volume of data, figures and detail make it hard to see the wood for the trees (at the opposite end of the spectrum from what might be called the 'stratospheric' Amin of, for example, *Class and Nation*).<sup>31</sup>

This dense volume of facts is mostly within an economic framework: these are primarily *economic* analyses in both their object and method, that is, Amin analyses economic trends and phenomena, using economic tools. Secondly and secondarily, adding depth to the former, *historical* analysis is more or less present in most of these works; the book on former French Equatorial Africa is subtitled as an 'economic history'.

*Politics*, on the other hand, is for the most part relatively underplayed in these works, again in a dual sense. The polity is not their principal object of analysis; and the analysis itself is not explicitly couched in political categories. One should stress 'relatively', here. Not only does the amount of political analysis (in either sense) vary from book to book; but one can see in all of them — more so with hindsight, perhaps — an implicit concern with, and relevance to the kinds of theoretical issues which would be overtly posed in Amin's writings of the 1970s. It might be helpful to try to tease out at least some of these themes, by moving now from general remarks to the particular concerns of the specific works.

As mentioned above, Amin's first three published books are all more or less concerned with the critique of avowed 'socialisms'. Admittedly, in these early writings the critique is muted in various ways: mostly implicit, couched in terms of economic appraisal, rarely strident. The exception on all counts is *Nasser's Egypt*, where Amin was protected by anonymity. In other ways too, this earliest of his works studied an 'untypical' case — that is, highly unlike the societies of Subsaharan West Africa which were to become Amin's major field of work. It will not be further considered here, save to note the decisive importance of this text to a full evaluation of Amin's overall political thought and its

formation.

The first impression of *Three African Development Experiences* is of drowning by statistics: from pages 21 to 58, for example, there is a figure or table on every page. More than half the book is devoted to Mali, doubtless reflecting Amin's years of employment there: Guinea and Ghana receive briefer treatment. But the general picture which emerges is fairly uniform; and seeds are planted of themes that will sprout in Amin's later work. He is profoundly critical of what he does not yet, at least here, call 'petty-bourgeois socialism'. Essentially, if implicitly, the charge is of failing to break with existing economic patterns and frameworks, political rhetoric aside. Amin shows how these regimes all attempted, in the absence or inadequacy of investment revenues, to 'advance' via deficit financing. The only tangible product of this was, not socialism, but inflation. There was little else to show by way of economic growth, let alone social welfare or redistribution. Agriculture remained largely untransformed; industry (if any) was of the traditional type.

Amin can scarcely have been surprised when two out of these three regimes subsequently fell; nor does he regard their successors as much changed.<sup>32</sup> Speculatively, one might suggest that his critique of these 'inflationist solutions' in Africa paralleled the simultaneously emerging critique of import-substitution economic strategies in Latin America.<sup>33</sup> In both cases, beginning from avowed rejection of a colonially oriented past and its results, reforming governments mooted an ambitious alternative. In both cases, the 'alternative' failed: failed, above all, to transcend the limitations imposed by its context, which ultimately it had not challenged — in theory or practice — sufficiently fundamentally. The result, in both cases, was that a more radical critique emerged out of the debris: the dependency school (epitomized, but not monopolized, by Andre Gunder Frank)<sup>34</sup> in Latin America, and in Africa the further theoretical development of Samir Amin.

If the three West 'African development experiences'

received rather uneven treatment, this cannot be said of the North African trio studied in *The Economy of the Maghreb*. Not only is the latter a much deeper study, but also Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia possess a profound regional unity of geographical and historical experience, quite non-comparable with the mere ties of 'orientation' that brought together Mali, Guinea and Ghana (the last-named not even being contiguous with the other two). Hence, the first of Amin's two volumes on the Maghreb is able to subsume the region as a whole in a total perspective, comprising natural resources, population, social structures, economic transformation, and political history. In fact 'unity' is the keynote of this work in several ways. Despite the avowedly different strategies followed by each regime — 'socialist' Algeria, monarchist Morocco, Tunisia somewhere in between — Amin stresses the similarities not only of pre-existing economic and social structures but also of results. Volume 2 compares development plans and potentials for each country, concluding that a much more far-reaching transformation is called for, of which a crucial aspect is the *integration* of the region as a whole. Here we have one of Amin's signal themes: hostility to colonial balkanization, and stress on the need for '*les grands espaces*' in order to overcome fragmentation and promote genuine development. (This recurring emphasis, it may be said, would appear to separate Amin from the otherwise similar perspectives of Clive Thomas;<sup>35</sup> the latter being an avowed proponent of the feasibility of 'socialism-even-in-one-small-Third-World-country'.)

Amin's next work, as stated above, finally confronts a model of *capitalism* in one country. With *The Development of Capitalism in the Ivory Coast*, he is dealing with one of the 'growth miracles' extolled in the West: an economy whose annual rate of growth averaged 9% and whose exports quadrupled in the period 1950-65. Amin does not deny these quantitative achievements, nor the corresponding changes in economic and social structures. It is rather the evaluation of the *direction* of development which concerns him. He

points to such factors as: the continuing dominance of foreign capital, the absence of significant local savings, the regional imbalances, the paradoxical combination of high unemployment and a large influx of foreign labour, the pronounced rural stratification and the general slowing down of the economy from around 1965 onwards. And his conclusion is as follows:

The Ivory Coast . . . provides an excellent case study of 'growth without development': that is to say, growth created and maintained from the outside, without the structures thus established permitting one to foresee any automatic evolution towards the further stage of self-centred national development, moved by its own internal dynamism.<sup>36</sup>

Here we see posed — perhaps for the first time, and certainly much more explicitly than heretofore — the assumption of Amin's fundamental problematic of 'autocentric' versus 'extraverted' development paths.

Amin turned his attention to former French Equatorial Africa with his *Economic History of the Congo 1880-1968* (1969). (The title is slightly misleading, since its actual scope is wider than Congo-Brazzaville alone.) After a short historical first part on the Congo written by the French historian Catherine Coquery-Vidrovich, Amin devotes five chapters to the Congo since 1960 and two chapters to the other four countries of the area (Cameroon, Gabon, Chad and the Central African Republic) during the same period. Again his method is totalizing, and the conclusions are becoming familiar in general: neither 'socialist' (Congo) nor capitalist (the other countries) national strategies can even begin to tackle the real problems of development, which can only be solved on at least a regional basis. The general tone of the book is more militant than hitherto, perhaps because the author was beginning to feel no longer alone (for the first time he cites the work of Gunder Frank and other kindred souls). At the same time, his criticisms of 'socialism' in the Congo are tempered by an

awareness of the particularly rapacious and destructive impact of French colonialism there, which imposed a crippling inheritance from the point of view of any effort at transformation.

The 'statistical' side of Amin's work reaches its climax, and its marriage with his theoretical work (which we have yet to consider in detail) is finally if surreptitiously consummated, in his book *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa*. Here we both review old acquaintances (Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Ivory Coast) some years on, and also see the analysis applied to the remainder of the West African francophone states (plus Gambia): Senegal, Mauritania, Upper Volta, Niger, Dahomey, and Togo.<sup>37</sup> In fact, apart from Senegal, which occupies nearly a quarter of the text, the four countries which he has studied previously receive most attention, the newcomers being generally limited to a dozen pages each.

The work is so constructed that each country is considered twice. The first part constructs a typology of the varieties of 'externally oriented economic development', while, in the second part, the countries are regrouped on the basis of their attempted policy solutions. Both typologies might cause some surprise to those who go by appearances. Part One distinguishes four varieties of external orientation. First the 'plantation economy', such as in Ghana up to 1950 and Ivory Coast since then ('the precocious miracle' and 'the contemporary miracle'). This is marked by a period of more or less rapid export-based growth, which, however, fails to débouch into 'self-centred growth' and sooner or later runs out of steam. Senegal would seem also to belong in this category, having set out along the same road much earlier (from 1830 onwards) and having, therefore, come up against its limits sooner — as now has Ghana, but not yet Ivory Coast.

Second is the 'enclave mining economy', whose prime exemplars in West Africa are Guinea and Mauritania. (These categories are not of course static in their application; thus a third country, Niger, will be moving into this group as its uranium begins to be exploited.) Here again, despite often rapid growth rates (Mauritania's has recently been as high as

13% p.a.) based on exports whose value is generally at least sufficient to avoid balance of payments problems, there is never any prospect of transition to an inward-looking form of development. On the contrary, the mining sector remains an enclave, and in extreme cases the economy is 'totally disarticulated'.

A third category consists of countries whose development was actively blocked or destroyed by colonialism. Amin's main example here is Dahomey (now Benin) which as an independent kingdom in the mid-19th Century was already exporting as many palm oil products as it would be in 1960. French colonialism destroyed the social structure and diverted the surplus from this trade to itself: the result has been economic stagnation, a permanent financial crisis, and political instability. Togo is also placed in this category; although here the 'blocked' development was itself colonial in origin, namely Germany's 'model colonization' which had already reached 1960s income level by 1914.

Lastly, in contrast to the foregoing varieties of underdevelopment (understood as an active process of perverse transformation), there is also the exception which proves the rule: namely, countries which by and large remained undeveloped by colonization. In West Africa these 'reservations', as Amin calls them, were mainly inland: Mauritania (before the iron and copper discoveries), Niger (similarly in transition, as we saw), Mali, and Upper Volta. Here, colonialism either failed or never tried to institute any form of underdevelopment. Nonetheless, such countries have played an important role as labour reserves: Upper Volta has had nearly a million workers in the Ivory Coast, and Mali and Mauritania still send tens of thousands of workers to France itself.

In Part Two of *Neo-Colonialism in West Africa*, Amin discusses the various policy measures that have been attempted to cope with these situations. He distinguishes two modes of 'liberal' strategy ('liberal' in financial terms), although in the long run there is only one: some countries (Dahomey, Niger, Togo, Upper Volta), within the context of the present system, are permanently doomed to budge-

tary and balance of payments instability, while others (Ivory Coast, Mauritania) are for the time being less hard pressed on account of export revenues. But there is always the example of Senegal as a portent of what happens when the 'boom' is over.

The only attempted alternative to 'liberal' policies is, as we saw labelled by Amin, not 'socialist' but merely 'inflationist'. Here he returns to the trio of Ghana, Guinea and Mali, showing how, in the absence of substantial investment revenues, they all attempted to advance through deficit financing, with inevitable inflationary consequences but little else to show at the end.

Amin's general conclusions are the same as before, although perhaps stated more forthrightly. More basic than the variety he describes is the essential uniformity these countries exhibit — external orientation and dependence, to which there are no purely national solutions. Planned inward-looking economic development is only possible on the basis of 'large spaces' economically integrated. On that premise, but on that alone, West Africa's prospects are good: Guinea's bauxite and Mauritania's iron could form a basis for industrialization in Senegal, for instance.

There remains one further empirical book of Amin's from this period to be discussed, somewhat different in character from the others. *Senegalese Businessmen* (1969) is a socio-historical account of an entire class (and I mean 'entire', not a sample: Amin claims to have interviewed all of them!), the Senegalese commercial bourgeoisie. Fanon's withering contempt for the 'national bourgeoisie' as a whole<sup>38</sup> has perhaps tended to pre-empt concrete investigation of this class in different countries. Amin restores the balance, but although his tone is far from Fanonist — many of those interviewed, he says, became his friends — the results of his investigations largely provide empirical reinforcement for Fanon's *a priori* judgements. The Senegalese commercial classes have had their ups and downs, but in either case it has been as reagents rather than independent actors. In the 19th Century the French used them to penetrate inland and pave the way for



formal political colonization. That same colonialism then turned on them in the 20th Century, when competition from 'petits blancs' and Lebanese led to severely discriminatory measures against indigenous traders. Since 1958 their fortunes have revived somewhat, as foreign capital (large and small) has withdrawn from certain sectors as profitability declined. Yet they remain essentially weak: credit is still scarce, they depend on the market provided by the state, and very few have made the crucial leap from commerce to industry (except in the service sector). The conclusion is inevitable: there is no prospect of this class playing the role of a classical 'national bourgeoisie' in terms of accumulation and industrialization.

In itself, such a judgement was almost commonplace in radical circles a decade ago (although rarely grounded in such firm empirical and historical evidence).<sup>39</sup> Yet history moves on: some recent studies, especially of Kenya, have suggested that obituaries of the national bourgeoisie were written prematurely.<sup>40</sup> More generally, it has also been argued *contra* Amin, that capitalism's allegedly moribund state in the Third World was exaggerated. In some areas at least, the patient is said to be making a remarkable recovery. There are even those who claim that it was never ill in the first place.<sup>41</sup> These are important questions, to which we shall more aptly return when explicitly discussing Amin's theoretical problematic.

Before this, however, it should be noted that Amin's book on the Senegalese business class is not the only example of his work that focuses on specific and 'sub-national' topics and themes. We have not dealt with (and alas, have little space to elaborate on) the considerable volume and range of shorter pieces — articles, introductions, etc — which he has also produced. Still pursuing the correlation in Amin's output between chronology and changing levels of analysis or themes, we can say that many of his shorter pieces are 'intermediate' in this double sense. Amin would appear to have published no papers at all (remarkably enough for him) during the years 1964-66. Prior to that, as we saw earlier,

his articles were nearly all about Egypt (with one signal exception, to which we shall return). From 1967 onwards, however, he evidently resumed writing in this form — and has not stopped since.

Our concern here, then, is with a number of his papers dating mostly from the late 1960s to the early 1970s. Nearly all are collected in a 1976 French volume entitled *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Africa*<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately, this has not been translated as such; although there are English versions of most (but not all) the key pieces, they are widely scattered and some are inaccessible. Generally, as the title of the compilation indicates, they are about Africa. Some papers explore specific themes: one of the earliest (1967), and untranslated, is a detailed empirical study of inter-African trade, including recommendations as to how it might be both augmented and structurally transformed.<sup>43</sup> Or again, a paper on population roundly declares that Africa is *under-populated*.<sup>44</sup> There is also Amin's substantial introduction to a book (edited by him) on modern migrations in West Africa,<sup>45</sup> a particularly effective example of the welding together of empirical data and theoretical argument. There are papers on the Green Revolution, Africa's food shortage, the franc zone, and indeed just about everything from slavery to the development of the Senegal river basin.<sup>46</sup>

Besides those already alluded to, four more stand out. Two general articles offer summary accounts of the development of capitalism in Africa, and of its historical and contemporary underdevelopment and dependence.<sup>47</sup> Much reproduced, these papers offer interesting typology and periodization, while probing what is general and what specific about Africa's experience. Both articles were later absorbed (typically, without notification) into Amin's subsequent major works of theory (*Accumulation on a World Scale* and *Unequal Development*, respectively).<sup>48</sup>

Two important articles remain. Amin's critique of the Pearson Report, in the light of two decades of 'development' in Africa (1950-70),<sup>49</sup> shows him at his most effective, marshalling data to make a cogent theoretical and political

case for the practical bankruptcy of extraverted growth and the need for autocentrism. Finally (although actually earliest), there is his somewhat inaccessible but seminal paper on the class struggle in Africa.<sup>50</sup> This was originally published anonymously in 1963 in a short-lived French Third Worldist journal, and therefore presumably written while Amin was still working for the Malian Government. Here he develops an explicit critique of 'socialism' in Africa, and indeed the anti-colonial movement generally, as being principally guided (*faute de mieux*, in the virtual absence of a proletariat) by the petty bourgeoisie; to be precise, the new urban lower middle classes. Nor does Amin, unlike Fanon, look in this case to the rural masses for revolutionary salvation. On the contrary, he repeatedly stresses that 'nothing is further from socialism than primitive communism'; he calls for 'the reinforcement of small merchant production at the expense of collective forms', and insists on the over-riding need to 'break the family [*briser la famille*] and its traditions . . . to develop individualism, to free the individual from the chains of tradition.'<sup>51</sup>

Such a programme, in both tone and content, recalls the perspectives of a Warren more than Amin as he is usually known. Striking as this paper is, two major questions remain. How far can such views be reconciled with Amin's more general critique of peripheral capitalism? (This pertains also to a more general question of the overall consistency or evolution of Amin's thought: is it a seamless web, or are there explicit or implicit shifts of position?) Secondly: given this scenario of a non-existent proletariat, a backward peasantry, and a self-serving petty bourgeoisie, who then will be the *agent* of Amin's project of transformation at any level, from smashing the family to forging African unity? An almost plaintive comment in Amin's latest text<sup>52</sup> (in this volume) suggests that even now, almost 20 years on, this question of an agent cries out for an answer.

It is time to turn to Amin's major theoretical writings. The greater familiarity of at least the major works here, plus the palpable absurdity of attempting a 'potted' summary,

perhaps make it permissible to be even more brief and allusive than hitherto.

The main points of reference are of course *Accumulation on a World Scale* and *Unequal Development*. Originally published in 1970 and 1973 respectively, each appeared in English some years later; there are at least a further half-dozen translations of both into different languages. It is at this point that Amin's international fame took off. Also, to add one more brief note of biography, it coincides with his assumption in 1970 of the post of Director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP) in Dakar, Senegal (where he had previously held a university position). Those who by now were following Amin's ideas may, from this point on, have begun to receive them first in the form of an unceasing stream of roneo'd papers that poured off the IDEP duplicators; materials that would later form part of *Unequal Development*, for example, were circulating a year or two earlier in Dar es Salaam in the early 1970s.

What then can be said about Amin's two *magna opera*? One thing that has been said, by a careful and sympathetic critic, bears repeating:

These two works cover virtually identical ground, and *Unequal Development* is perhaps better regarded as a second edition of *Accumulation on a World Scale* . . . Substantial passages are taken virtually unchanged from [the latter] and incorporated into [the former].

Which may be some relief to the reader, facing the daunting prospect of two works totalling over 1,100 pages! There are other difficulties too. Neither work is especially well structured. *Accumulation on a World Scale* apparently began life as lecture notes<sup>54</sup> (in addition to its partial 'pre-history', in connection with Amin's Ph.D. thesis). Subtitled 'A critique of the theory of under-development', for much of the time it is indeed an extremely-detailed engagement with numerous aspects of 'bourgeois' economic theory in relation

to the actualities of underdevelopment and the world system. It is hard to avoid the impression, as Amin 'worries' all this material, of someone trying to exorcise from his thinking the last vestiges of a body of thought which at one time he had learned all too well. (To take just one example, monetary mechanisms alone are the subject of a chapter of nearly 100 pages.)<sup>55</sup>

All in all, *Accumulation on a World Scale* was very much a book for the economist. Perhaps wishing to reach a wider social science audience and public, *Unequal Development* has relatively less economic and more 'sociological' material (although it sorely lacks an analytical contents list). Beginning with a part schematic, part historical account of pre-capitalist modes of production and social formations (also published as a separate article),<sup>56</sup> successive chapters revert to broadly economic accounts of central capitalism, international aspects (including unequal exchange), and the creation and growth of peripheral capitalism. The final chapter is a more sociological account of the contemporary periphery (distinguished by region), and concludes by broaching broader questions on the question of 'transition'.

Despite the problem of having no specific footnotes (it is self-styled an 'essay'), *Unequal Development* remains the most accessible account of the mature Amin's general positions. It is also, like *Accumulation on a World Scale*, avowedly a work of synthesis; in other words, at some level these books can be taken to 'represent' not only Amin but the 'rise to maturity' of an entire school, variously characterized as 'theories of underdevelopment' or 'dependency'.

Amin's fundamental theses have been brilliantly summarized — better than he does it himself, and more succinctly than one would have thought possible — by Cheng Ngai-Lung in a work which unfortunately remains unpublished.<sup>57</sup> (The following is a slightly formalized and paraphrased version of her account.)

1) The world capitalist system, consisting of social formations in the centre and the periphery, is integrated into

- a single world system primarily through relations of exchange and unequal specialization of production;
- 2) There exists in this global system a hierarchial structure of modes of production/sectors, with uneven productivity and heterogeneous relations of production;
- 3) Modes of production/sectors of the periphery are: (a) articulated with capitalist social formations at the centre, but (b) disarticulated with respect to social formations at the periphery;
- 4) This structure of articulation/disarticulation is the result of the centuries-old evolution of forms of international specialization, dictated by the internal dynamics of capitalist social formations and imposed on the periphery by the centre — initially through political domination, and subsequently through the mechanism of unequal exchange;
- 5) Transfer of value/economic surplus takes place from peripheral capitalist to central social formations as a result of primitive accumulation. This process survives the pre-history of capitalism; its persistence to the present constitutes the essence of the problem of accumulation on a world scale.

There is little essential which this remarkable summary fails to state. Here is the insistence on the analytical primacy of the global level, in practice constituted through unequal exchange and *continuing* 'primitive' accumulation (here Amin reformulates Emmanuel's<sup>58</sup> concept of 'unequal exchange'). Here, too, is Amin's basic distinction between 'centre' and 'periphery', which we should elaborate at least a little. As it happens, the 'pure' model, implicitly at the heart of *Accumulation on a World Scale* and *Unequal Development* is expounded more directly than in either book in a much cited paper, 'The theoretical model of accumulation and development in the contemporary world'.<sup>59</sup> Structurally, the 'central' formation is an organic whole, dynamized by mass demand; for Amin it also tendentially corresponds to the capitalist mode of production. The 'extraverted' periphery lacks such an organic link, being principally fuelled by the external demand which created it as a periphery. Moreover, — or is it the same point, made a

different way? — the development of the capitalist mode of production in the periphery is structurally incomplete: pre-capitalist sectors not only survive but are functional for the system. Hence, the characteristic peripheral 'distortions' as Amin calls them: incomplete proletarianization, 'marginality' of the masses, light industry only, and others.

There is much else of interest in these two works, for example, on periodization, on the detail of different peripheral experiences (by continent and region) and so on. Travesty though it is, we have 'noted' and must pass on: Amin has subsequently not only developed these themes further but expanded his range of concerns. For analytical convenience, we shall continue to distinguish his more specifically economic contributions from more recent *excursus* into political and social aspects of theory. On this basis, two further major and some minor works of principally economic focus must be mentioned.

We have already alluded to the place of 'unequal exchange' in Amin's schema. This was the topic of a short and highly formal book published in 1973, and rather immodestly titled *'End of a Debate'*.<sup>60</sup> (Amin does nothing to endear himself to critics by adopting, here and elsewhere,<sup>61</sup> the intrinsically implausible notion that *any* question of Marxism and social science should be seen as having been 'settled', whether by him or anyone else.) This was later included in Amin's general volume of papers, translated into English as *Imperialism and Unequal Development*. The latter volume also includes a number of other pieces whose focus is principally economic. Often first published as introductions to collections or prefaces to other people's monographs, these discuss *inter alia* 'project appraisal', ground rent, and (again) international trade.<sup>62</sup> (Amin's version of unequal exchange is well discussed by Brewer).<sup>63</sup>

Samir Amin's final 'economic' work to which we have to allude is his quite short book *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism* (1977, 1978).<sup>64</sup> Although billed as a contribution to general aspects of Marxist theory and method, much of its substance is, in fact, a strictly economic

and formal account of the mechanisms involved in for example, ground rent (again), the 'transformation problem', and even 'the theory and practice of mining rent'. Around this, however, are some rather heterogeneous chapters in which Amin not only conducts an increasingly strident polemic against various 'revisionists' and critics, but also seeks to establish an 'objective' basis for such backsliding in a global analysis of economic classes founded on a strictly reaffirmed law of value. The issues this raises may more appropriately be discussed in the next section, which considers the more general contribution made by Amin to Marxism as social theory.

It is perhaps possible to trace, in Amin's developing work, a two-stage process of 'coming out'. The first, we have seen, was the crystallization of a *theory* of economic development and underdevelopment, arising out of his earlier empirical case studies of blocked development. Now, on and within the plane of theory itself, we can see how in recent years he broaches ever more explicitly broader questions of politics and indeed of method. It is not always easy to separate these.

Already in the first chapter of *Unequal Development*, for example, we find an ambitious reformulation of traditional 'stage' theories of modes of production. The major outcome is to subsume feudalism under a broader category, the 'tributary' mode of production, which also includes such variants as the notorious 'Asiatic' mode.<sup>65</sup> More recently, in Amin's latest (at the time of writing) major book *Class and Nation*, this has been further developed as a reconstructed stage theory, multilinear in character, whereby all societies go through one or another of three broad 'families' of modes of production — communal, tributary, and capitalist.<sup>66</sup>

Or again, there is Amin's challenging idea that the periphery, being structurally unable to 'catch up' with the centre, is forced to surpass it. This too, for Amin, is a general law of historical development: in its time feudalism, too, grew up on the periphery of the civilizations of classical antiquity

and their successors.<sup>67</sup>

What is at issue in formulations of this kind? Evidently, insofar as they bear on historical interpretation they can be judged accordingly. There seems no reason to rule out *a priori* the, at least, heuristic value of such ideas; even if it is hard to envisage what would constitute their definitive 'settlement'. But more than historical understanding is at stake. As becomes clear above all in *Class and Nation*, Amin is self-consciously fighting a political battle on several fronts.

Partly, it is a battle for the 'soul' of Marxism. As such, it is often conducted in terms, and by appeal to criteria, which are remarkably orthodox, considering the innovativeness or even heterodoxy of some of Amin's substantive contributions. Thus, Amin finds it crucially important to identify himself with what he evidently conceives as the true Papal line of Marxist succession, via Lenin and Mao, giving due weight to imperialism and (hence) national liberation, as key driving forces of the anti-capitalist struggle in the conditions thrown up by the 20th Century.<sup>68</sup>

Equally, he deems it no less important (as mentioned above) to construct an 'objective' basis for all these trends. This entails, amongst other things, not only virtually deducing his critics' revisionism from their participation in the fruits of unequal exchange,<sup>69</sup> but also more generally in *Class and Nation* totting up the global battalions in what purports to be a table of 'world income distribution' on the basis of international transfers of surplus value.<sup>70</sup>

It may be apparent that I think Amin has gone astray here, giving a golden opportunity to the very critics whom he wishes to combat.<sup>71</sup> For one thing, *Class and Nation* is for the most part pitched at such a stratospheric level of generality that it is hard to see how *anything* could be 'established' on this basis. More importantly, Amin's method here seems to me to be misguided. He tries to do both too much and too little. It is neither necessary nor possible to reduce political-analytical disagreements so crudely to different class forces, nor these class forces themselves so mechanically to senders or receivers of alleged quantitative

flows hither and thither. For all his critique of economism, Amin remains extraordinarily reductionist in his reflexes; just as, for all his analytical openness and daring<sup>72</sup> — entirely admirable, justifiable, and Marxist — towards new facts and trends, he remains at a deeper level excessively fideistic. A Luther in some respects, he attacks Pope and Vatican — or rather, *this* Pope, *this* Vatican. It is not, alas, that he wants these not to be; Amin wants them to be — somewhere else, someone else.

Whether or not Amin will subsequently feel moved to purge his Marxism of Vaticanist tendencies altogether remains to be seen. But it is hard not to conclude that with *Class and Nation* he has reached (or passed beyond) the outer limits of further development — at least, in this direction. What would constitute further progress? In general, a recognition that neither political processes nor class action can profitably be analysed very far in the reductionist terms here used by him.

Fortunately, there is evidence elsewhere in his work that Amin is not only aware of the need for analyses explicitly focussed on politics and class, but is himself quite capable of making a valuable contribution in this regard. The obvious reference point here is his book *The Arab Nation* (1976, 1978)<sup>73</sup>: a text which does not slot easily into the major categories of Amin's work, but which is important both in itself, and especially in connection with the themes of his subsequent work on the contemporary Arab economy included in the present volume. Here Amin allies historical and theoretical discussion to the recent political history of the countries of the region, which he conceives of as potentially able to move towards an 'autocentric Pan-Arab development' under working-class leadership.<sup>74</sup>

While work on this level is by far preferable to the difficult generalities of *Class and Nation*, I would venture the opinion that methodologically, in one particular respect, Amin still has further to go. It seems to me that the 'national question' — which, I agree with Amin, is of vital salience for Marxism — will not even be posed, let alone resolved, without a return

to a very different tradition in Marxism which gives due weight (analytically and *methodologically*) to real human beings' perception of and action upon their world.<sup>75</sup>

Evidently, in such a view, it is the terrain on which Amin chooses to fight, rather than his particular position on it, which is itself deemed faulty. It follows that I believe many of his critics are no less at fault in contesting this terrain. But before moving on to examine some of the criticism in more detail, we should conclude our brief survey of Amin's work to date by just mentioning some of his more particular themes.

Amin as social theorist has recently meditated on a number of issues; ranging from the fairly specific (education, technology, the environment), to broader questions: 'universality and cultural spheres', 1984, socialism itself.<sup>76</sup> In some of these writings a rather different Samir Amin seems to emerge: profoundly anti-capitalist *per se*, socialist, humanist; a critic of the *cultural* dehumanization brought about by capitalism, even (especially) in its 'central' form. Nor can this be reduced — as critics might wish — to just another manifestation of Third World or 'Narodnik' nostalgia for rural *gemeinschaft* and the simple life. That is not Amin's tone at all. His vision of communism may well be utopian; but it is neither more nor less so than that of Marx himself.<sup>77</sup>

#### Amin and His Critics

It was to be expected that the elaboration of such an ambitious synthesis, as Amin's would attract critical attention. What was perhaps less predictable was the form that this would take. With a few distinguished exceptions, most critics of Amin seem to me to have left something to be desired. Generally, they have not considered his work as a whole. Then, having seized on this or that 'error' on the basis of a restricted reading, they jump to the conclusion that the entire edifice is (or should be) destroyed. Finally,

some add insult to injury by 'explaining' his errors as flowing from various deviations: ideologist of the 'national bourgeoisie', Third Worldism, and so on.

These days, Amin gives back as good as he gets, and then some.<sup>78</sup> The air is thick with smoke. Foolhardy, no doubt, is he who would still like to rush in, pull the adversaries apart, and maybe knock their heads together to bring them to their senses. The wrath of both parties may descend upon him; by now, it appears, they simply want to be left to get on with their war in peace. Yet it is hard to resist the conclusion that the issues are not *quite* so polarized as both Amin and his critics are now making out. Let us see if we can briefly unravel some themes.

One might say that things got off on the wrong footing, and that Amin was quite early on the victim of a largely unprovoked assault. The first substantial consideration of him launched straight in on an unpromising note. Jean-Pierre Olivier's massive two-part article was entitled 'Africa: who exploits whom? On Samir Amin and the African state bourgeoisies'.<sup>79</sup> Strangely insubstantial for all its bulk, Olivier's message was in essence to characterize Amin as an implicit ideologist of the aforesaid bourgeoisies. Given the facts of Amin's early formation, and the texts of his writings (not least the case studies), this has always seemed to me the most implausible of views. It is, therefore, hardly surprising (although it peeved Olivier) that Amin 'replied' in three pages to his own seventy.<sup>80</sup>

That set the tone for much subsequent 'debate', as witness this recent unsparing judgement:

Why is Amin taken seriously? . . . Amin provides a pseudo-scientific justification for a political position which is nationalistic, simplistic, and economistic. . . . All ills of all Third World countries are attributable to imperialism . . . Thus he supports the crudest kind of Third Worldism.<sup>81</sup>

For good measure, the same author concludes by tarring Amin with Pol Pot's brush: 'The tragedy of Kampuchea is

a bitter example of where this kind of reasoning might lead.<sup>82</sup>

I doubt that Amin (or indeed anyone) deserves this kind of treatment. Yet there are real or apparent problems at various levels in Amin's work, which should be distinguished from the name-calling. For convenience we can divide these into 'errors' of mathematics, logic, method, theory, substance, and fact.

The first can be rapidly disposed of. Anyone working in the Marxist (or any other) economic tradition, and hence handling quantitative concepts, not only has to confront old familiar difficulties (for example, Marx's 'transformation problem') in this sphere but may also produce new ones. In this respect Brewer has identified inconsistencies in Amin's account of autocentric accumulation.<sup>83</sup> However, just as no one would advocate a root and branch rejection of Marx simply because not all his equations are readily soluble, so Brewer allows that 'the arguments that I criticize . . . can be removed by surgical excision without destroying the whole'.<sup>84</sup>

Strictly, mathematics is but a formalized branch of logic (*pace* J.S. Mill). It seems convenient, however, to distinguish it here from more general, lower-level logical problems. Looming large for some of Amin's critics is the problem of *contradiction*: not in the Marxist sense, but simple inconsistency. Thus Bernstein, in the course of a major assault on 'radical underdevelopment theory' and all its works, picks out apparently contradicting conceptualizations in different passages of *Unequal Development* concerning peripheral social formations: roughly dualistic, articulationist, and tendentially unitary.<sup>85</sup> Generally, Bernstein characterizes Amin's major theoretical texts as 'an encyclopaedic tangle of categories and method which is self-reinforcing and results in a series of mutually contradictory propositions'.<sup>86</sup>

This criticism, while in my view overstated, does point to a real difficulty. Brewer rightly describes Amin's essential role, notwithstanding his original contribution, as a *synthesizer* in his field: in itself nonetheless 'an essential original

contribution', but one that leads to ' . . . corresponding weaknesses. On many issues, Amin tries to reconcile ideas that are in fact irreconcilable.'<sup>87</sup>

That this is so, is apparent even from Amin's method of work, which I would characterize as *accretive*. (Dare one say 'piecemeal accumulation', *a la* Karl Popper?) Although it would seem to be a long way (as I hope to have shown) from the empirical early works to *Class and Nation*, Amin offers little more than hints<sup>88</sup> as to any actual change in his *views* as distinct from his *level* of work. There is no suggestion of an 'epistemological break' between the early and late Amin. Yet, neither is his *oeuvre* a seamless web, gradually unfolding. The fact is that Amin rather eclectically (not a term of abuse in my view) has done constant 'running repairs' to his model over time. A new theme or a new debate (for example, the 'articulation of modes of production' school of P.P. Rey<sup>89</sup> and others) is grafted on and more or less assimilated. Even so crucial a concept for Amin as 'peripheral capitalism' can be seen, textually, thus to have crept in.<sup>90</sup>

Does this matter? Yes, at some level. Concrete instances of contradiction obviously demand to be resolved, and the onus is on Amin to do this. But does this strike fundamentally at Amin's whole edifice? Whether this is deemed to be so will depend, at least in part, on the critic's own theoretical persuasion.

Here issues of logic debouch into those of method. For Bernstein, who adopts Hirst's (then) essentially Althusserian approach to theory, it suffices to dub Amin's 'general characteristics of peripheral formations' as 'empirical generalizations (and of a low order)'.<sup>91</sup> Others less ascetic, even while accepting this at least in part, may still find considerable heuristic and empirical value in such generalizations; find them 'richer', in fact, than the actual results produced by the purveyors of 'correct' theory.<sup>92</sup> To be clear: I am not saying that Amin should not be brought to book (like anyone else) to explain himself. But I am saying that a bankruptcy order seems premature.

From a rather different perspective (partially based in a later-model Hirst *et al*, than that used by Bernstein)<sup>93</sup> Sheila Smith has drawn no less sweeping conclusions. Her criticism of Amin is in some ways that he is *too* Marxist, at least in the sense that he propounds 'a fully elaborated theoretical scheme'<sup>94</sup> of a kind which the new Cutler (so unlike the not so old) deems inadmissible *per se*. Conversely, Smith praises as 'a wealth of illustrative material which is scholarly and useful'<sup>95</sup> precisely those parts of Amin's work which Bernstein dismisses as 'crudely inductivist'.<sup>96</sup>

In other respects their substantive criticisms are closer. Smith and Bernstein both fasten on Amin's 'assertion of central capitalism as a "standard" and peripheral capitalism as a "distortion"',<sup>97</sup> not an occasion of any difficulty for the present writer, it must be said. (Although Bernstein is right to observe that Amin says too little about 'central' formations, and what he does say may be over-general and in part wrong.)<sup>98</sup> Smith's more general point is that Amin so constructs his theoretical schema that there are 'built-in immunities'. For instance, 'tendencies' are specified in the model; but if these fail to show up in reality, Amin appeals to the 'dialectic'. As a result 'Amin's analysis is tautological, uninformative and sterile'.<sup>99</sup>

So Amin displeases Bernstein because his statements are 'not theoretically specified', while Smith finds him 'uninformative because the basis for selection of the information is given by the theory'.<sup>100</sup> Critics are hard to please. I would not claim that Amin's conceptualization (in *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism*) of 'objective' and 'subjective' forces, economic laws and class struggle as dialectically interacting,<sup>101</sup> is better than anyone else's in confronting this classic methodological problem intrinsic to all social science. But I am not convinced that what the critics propose — Bernstein's theoreticist rigour, or Smith's ultimate empiricist scepticism — is better.

On one matter of *substance*, I believe Smith to be quite simply wrong about Amin. Again taking a theme from Cutler *et al*, who stress the importance of analyses at the level of the

national economy,<sup>102</sup> she accuses Amin of ignoring this level; nay more, of ruling it out *a priori*. Evidently Smith is simply unaware of Amin's earlier work; else it would be gratuitous — not to say grotesque — to inform him of all people that 'analysis of particular national economies is an important area of work, *despite Amin's denial*'.<sup>103</sup>

But what she is getting at, is that Amin's more global analysis *pre-empts* economic and political initiatives at the national level. Again, considering that Amin's constant refrain — from his earliest monographs, right up to the present volume — has been to propose *concrete* strategies for *concrete* countries (or groups of countries; but the logical point is the same), this criticism seems altogether misplaced. And, once again, it is hard to please everyone; for inasmuch as Amin *does* enter into the terrain of the national economy, he is at once pounced upon by those other critics who have dubbed him an ideologist of the national bourgeoisie!

Or the *same* critics, even. For the trenchant dismissal (quoted earlier) of Amin as 'nationalistic, simplistic',<sup>104</sup> was also by Smith, who appears to want to have it both ways. After all, the 'break with the world capitalist system', which Amin is held to advocate, is nothing if not a project at the level of the national economy! 'Dangerous arrogance' is Smith's (somewhat unspecified) judgement on the idea of the 'break'.<sup>105</sup> I have argued elsewhere that it is possible (and indeed unavoidable) to specify a theory of 'national self-reliance' as a Marxist project.<sup>106</sup> Admittedly, Amin scarcely does this in any detail; but there are other examples, both in theory (for example, Senghaas, Thomas) and practice (North Korea notably, but also China, Albania, and others).<sup>106</sup>

And Pol Pot? I do not know what Amin's position on the Khmer Rouge *debacle* is now. His short article on 'The Lesson of Cambodia', dating from 1976, retains its interest as a political sociology of how the revolution was made.<sup>108</sup> But the type of economy, polity and society subsequently 'built' (if that is the word) so bloodily by the Khmer Rouge, has not the slightest connection with the kind of regionally based, interacting, and above all *industrializing* self-reliance



favoured by Amin — and practised in what are the real test-cases of the 'autocentric' path, notably North Korea.<sup>109</sup>

Any dependency theorist has to face up to Pol Pot, just as (no more and no less) any Marxist has to face up to Stalin. Both of these horrors of our century require the most honest and rigorous thought. Yet, at the end of the day, in neither case, do I believe that the general project is gainsaid by its horrendous exemplar. Amin does not deserve this 'guilt by association'.

The claim that Samir Amin's theories simply do not fit the facts is on a different level altogether. An article by Schiffer offers a mountain of statistical evidence about post-war development trends, which, in his view, simply controvert Amin's theses in almost every particular.<sup>110</sup> Clearly this demands more detailed consideration than is possible here, but some general comments may be ventured.

Schiffer's position is basically Warrenite: the 'facts' (that is, the figures) show that 'the post-war performance of the LDCs [less developed countries] has been extremely impressive.'<sup>111</sup> Everything hinges, no doubt, on the *interpretation* of the facts. Nothing in Amin's model denies the possibility of rapid quantitative growth, in terms of the usual indicators (one has only to recall his study of the Ivory Coast). Even so, the countries on whose performance Schiffer focuses are often the notable 'heavyweights' of the Third World (cf. especially his Tables 1, 2 and 6).<sup>112</sup> Equally notable, for an article about Samir Amin, is the relative lack of specific consideration of Africa in the tables (e.g. Tables 3, 5 and 10).<sup>113</sup>

Obviously, much hinges on the choice of indices. What would trends in *unemployment* show, for example, alongside Schiffer's vaunted increases in employment? As long as the latter's overall rate of increase fails to keep pace with population growth,<sup>114</sup> then *both* employment and unemployment may rise. In other instances, one wonders about the relation between percentage and absolute magnitudes. Thus, Table 2 suggests that LDCs now have higher rates of saving than developed countries, and further that this is generated

'overwhelmingly from local resources'. (Even multi-national corporations, adds Schiffer insouciantly, are 'safely' tapping local capital markets rather than — as Amin would have it — importing fresh capital.<sup>115</sup> But origins aside, is the *rate* of saving so crucial as the *amount*? Is either adequate, quantitatively or qualitatively, to *transform* these economies? Amin is talking about transformation, not growth.

One issue where it can be granted that Schiffer does confront Amin on his own ground is the question of the domestic market: its presence or absence, its dynamic potential, its composition as between 'luxury' or 'mass consumption' goods. Schiffer rejects the latter distinction of Amin's, even though he finds a relationship between the growth of the capital goods sector and the production of consumer durables which precisely matches Amin's model.<sup>116</sup> The key evidence here is in Table 4, where Schiffer claims (via a complex process of deduction and subtraction) that much the largest component of total value added is 'attributable' to consumer non-durables. Nor, he adds, should this surprise any Marxist.<sup>117</sup> Yet this is not the same as *directly* investigating the structure of the home mass market, difficult though this is.

Nonetheless, it has to be said that other dependency theorists (notably Cardoso)<sup>118</sup> do not base their theories, as does Amin, on the alleged impossibility of such a market, which, indeed, is plausibly claimed to exist in Brazil and elsewhere. In some sense, obviously, there is always a domestic 'mass' market: short of absolute subsistence, the masses have some money and they spend it on some things. This must be studied concretely. But the interesting questions about the type, composition, and dynamizing potential of this market only begin here. Data such as Schiffer's are suggestive, but on their own they can tell us little one way or the other about the *distortions* in structures of production and consumption which are Amin's concern. Schiffer could hardly raise such questions, since he appears to operate with a unilinear and quantitative model of capitalist progress (like Warren); thus automatically entailing

that everything in the garden is lovely, provided the growth rates keep up.

Perhaps the last word in criticism of Amin<sup>119</sup> may go to a trio of commentators, who describe his model as at once composed of 'platitudes' and 'far-fetched'. They, too, criticize as a 'reactionary utopia' his call for a break with the world market, as also his advice that the rules of profitability should be rejected in the allocation of resources. *Contra* Amin, planning is allegedly possible even in a dependent country. Increasing exports should not be rejected. Doubtless it will do nothing to weaken Amin's present rather frantic excoriations of the unholy alliances of revisionist Marxism, social democracy, Trotskyism, etc., etc. ('Northern Marxism', might one suggest?) to reveal that the authors of these criticisms are Soviet scholars.<sup>120</sup>

### Conclusion

I hope that the foregoing has succeeded in giving some impression of the range and scale of Samir Amin's work. It will be evident that I view it, not as a closed system or a rigorous theory (although it certainly contains rigorous theories), but more as a Herculean attempt to confront the many-faceted and rapidly changing phenomenon of underdevelopment in our day — in general and in its specificities; in theory, and in practice.

Samir Amin is barely 50; his work is by no means at an end. Where does he go from here? It is in this connection that the present work is intriguing. Slight as it is, it appears to mark a double return for Amin: to empirical work, and to his earliest roots (personal, political, and academic) in the Arab world.

Essentially, Amin here offers a quantitative analysis with a message, hence a project. He aims to show how the countries of the Arab world *could*, with their heterogeneous resources and revenues, combine to form a '*grand espace*', an integrated and dynamic economic unit. Thus would the oil revenues

benefit future generations, rather than simply revert to the financial centres and hence, industries, of the West.

Although questions could be raised about the present work — its brevity, its indices, and particular points etc., etc., — the *direction* which it suggests for Amin's work seems promising. Yet it is only a beginning and a small one at that (contrast it with his 500 pages of intricate detail on the Maghreb of 15 years ago!). Is it too much to hope that he might expand this into a fuller and more closely argued study, offering the kind of painstaking detail combined with structural analysis which his work of the 1960s achieved so well? 'Back to the concrete' seems to be the rallying cry of the moment. Certainly, it is hard to imagine how further progress at the level of totalizing theory can be made, at least for a while.

Meanwhile, for an assessment of Amin's accomplishment to date, one cannot do better than to quote that most painstaking and fairest of critics (not only of Amin), Anthony Brewer:

[Amin's] is the only serious attempt to tackle what is surely the central problem, that of analysing accumulation on a world scale, a dynamic process involving social formations of very divergent structures linked into a single world capitalist economy. In the process, he has tried to link together a range of subjects that had previously been studied in virtual isolation from each other: modes of production, class structures in the periphery, the pattern of international trade and specialisation, the formation of international prices, the (economic) problems of national development in the periphery, the periodisation of capitalist development and so on. To pose the problem is often the most important step.<sup>121</sup>

That the questions which Amin has raised (and, in at least some cases, gone a long way towards answering) are real questions, and are *the* questions, has been the premise of this paper. It is to be hoped that future work will go forward on this basis, the basis which Amin has done so much to illu-

minate. Above all, I hope there will be no widespread or lasting retreat into a Eurocentric Marxism disguised as universalism, twinned with a 'Socialism' whose practical message to the Third World would appear to be an undifferentiated paean of praise for capitalism.<sup>122</sup>

Quite possibly, in the Third World as once in Europe, the staying power and transformative capacity of capitalism have been underestimated. In this case, I doubt whether Amin will ignore the principle which he eloquently expressed in the afterword to *Accumulation on a World Scale*:

History did not come to a halt in 1880, nor in 1917, nor in 1945. In each decade, new facts appear which indicate new developments  *unsuspected at previous stages*. History is no more unilinear today than it was five centuries ago . . . Uneven development remains the only rule, and it always confounds the would-be prophets. Besides, the outcome of political struggles determines at each moment new alternatives which are both unforeseen and unforeseeable. So it is necessary at each stage to take seriously the task of integrating new facts into the analysis. This appears quite obvious. And yet there will always be individuals searching for absolute certainties who will refuse to do this, thereby being forced either to ignore the facts or to try and squeeze them at all costs into a scheme which did not anticipate them . . .

They prefer the reassuring religious vision of apocalyptic catastrophe and a golden age miraculously created at a single stroke, instead of the disturbing prospect of perpetually changing conditions which necessitate continuous rethinking.<sup>123</sup>

## Notes

1. See Section III below, 'Amin and his critics'.
2. Notably in the case of Amin's collected essays; see n.7 below.
3. B.9 (e), B.10 (e). (See Bibliography for key to abbreviations used for the titles of Amin's works).
4. B.6

5. B.4
6. B.7.
7. B.14(e), B.15. For further details on these, see my review of both volumes: Foster-Carter (X.15).
8. See B.14(e), esp. chs. 3, 4, 7, 9, 10; also 74.10.
9. T.1 (1955).
10. T.2 (1957).
11. B.11, p.1; also p.303, n.1.
12. B.11(e), p.1.
13. B.11(e), p.303, n.1.
14. *Ibid.*
15. 55.01.
16. See e.g. 56.02, 60.02, 62.03, 70.03, 70.05.
17. 55.01, 56.01, 58.01, 58.02, 59.01, 60.01, 60.02, 60.03, 61.01, 62.03, 63.01.
18. See especially 58.01, which is in fact a series of seven such papers.
19. See Olivier (X.9.a), and the discussion in Section III below.
20. B.1.
21. B.2.
22. B.3.
23. B.4.
24. B.5. (Interestingly, this book seems to have appeared a year earlier in its Polish translation).
25. B.9(e).
26. B.6.
27. T.3.
28. B.7.
29. B.8.
30. B.10(e). The choice of English title is all the more perverse, inasmuch as Amin has said that he regards the term 'neo-colonialism' as 'unscientific'. (B.15, p.32, n.9).
31. B.19(e).
32. B.10(e), p.236.
33. See, for Latin America, e.g. Dos Santos (1973).
34. Frank (1967), and subsequent works.
35. Thomas (1974).
36. B.6., back page.
37. Other West African states receive cursory reference in the Introduction (pp. xv-xvii).
38. Fanon (1967).
39. See also Amin's two summary articles on aspects of the Senegalese business class: 69.02, and 71.06.
40. See the controversy between Kaplinsky, Leys, and others in *Rev. Af. Pol. Econ.* (1980).
41. Above all, Warren (1980).
42. B.15.
43. 67.01.
44. 71.09.
45. 74.02.
46. 69.01, 70.02, 72.04, 72.05, 73.01, 75.05.

47. 67.02, 72.01.
48. B.11(e), pp.364-77; B.12(e), pp.317-32.
49. 70.07.
50. 63.02.
51. 63.02, e.2, pp.42-3.
52. See pp.80-1 of this book.
53. Brewer, (X.2.a), p. 233.
54. B.11(e), p.2.
55. *Ibid.*, ch.3.
56. 74.15.
57. Cheng, (X.4), pp. 59-60.
58. Emmanuel (1972).
59. 72.02.
60. 13(e), 14(e).
61. See e.g. 14(e), Introduction, pp.6-7. Debates which Amin here declares 'appear closed, at least provisionally' include: ideology — infrastructure relations in pre-capitalist modes of production; alienation; the 'transformation' of values into prices; and 'the discussions of underdevelopment' *tout court*.
62. 14(e), chs. 1,2,6; cf. 74.01, 74.03, 75.04.
63. Brewer, *op cit.* pp. 243-50; see also his chapter 9, on Emmanuel.
64. 18(e).
65. B.12(e), pp.13-16.
66. B.19(e), p.X.
67. B.12(e), p.383; B.19(e), p.17.
68. E.g. B.18(e), p.122 ff.
69. *Ibid.*, p.108, pp.113-9 and ff.
70. B.19(e), p.149 ff (esp. table 1, p.151).
71. E.g. Smith, (X.14.b).
72. See the passage from B.11(e) quoted at the end of this Introduction.
73. B.16(e). See the interesting review of this by Ja 'far (X.7).
74. B.16(e), pp. 113-4.
75. This point is argued in a forthcoming paper: 'Conceptualizing Nations: a problem in Marxism revisited'.
76. B.14(e), chs 9.10,7;4,3; cf. also 78.02, and many of Amin's articles over the last five years or so.
77. See especially B.17(e); 74.13.
78. E.g. B.18(e), pp.117-122, in which our hero lays about him at a motley host of dragons, including: the Soviet Academy, Perry Anderson, 'Western Marxism', Geoffrey Kay ('Marxism a la Cecil Rhodes'), unspecified 'American radical' writers on M.N.C.s., Palloix, 'the Trotskyist cohort and the revisionist and semirevisionist academicians', ethnography (especially Sahlins), Tokei, Godelier, and the *nouveaux philosophes*.
79. Olivier, (X.9.a).
80. Amin, (X.9.b; 75.11). See also Olivier's last word, *ibid* (X.9.c).
81. Smith, (X.14.b).
82. *Ibid.*
83. Brewer, (X.2.b).
84. *Ibid.*, p.115.

85. Bernstein, (X.1), p.88.
86. *Ibid.*, p.98.
87. Brewer, (X.2.a), p. 233.
88. E.g. in 19(e), p.vii.
89. Rey, (1973).
90. Compare these two formulations, which conclude passages otherwise identical: (a) '... not the general difficulties characteristic of capitalist development, but those peculiar to a late development in the context of a world where capitalism is dominant.' (B.15, p.94; 1967 version). (b) (The same, except) '... those peculiar to the development of peripheral capitalism'. B.11(e), p. 377; 1970 version. (My emphasis, in both instances).
91. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p.89.
92. For such an argument in favour of the richness of neo-Marxist writing more generally, even if its theoretical shoelaces are sometimes undone, see Mouzelis (1980), p.369.
93. Cutler, Hindess, Hirst and Hussain (1977).
94. Smith, (X.14.a), p.5.
95. *Ibid.*, p.9.
96. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p.89.
97. Smith, (X.14.a), pp.13, 14-15.
98. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p.91. The analysis of 'central' formations in underdevelopment theory is a nettle which few have grasped; but see Senghaas and Menzel (1980).
99. Smith (X.14.a), pp.12-13.
100. Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p.89; Smith (X.14.a), p.13. (My emphasis).
101. B.18(e), e.g. ch.2 pp.31-5, and *passim*.
102. Cutler *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, e.g. pp.243-54 of Vol.2.
103. Smith, (X.14.a), pp.18-19.
104. Smith, (X.14.b).
105. Smith, (X.14.a), p.20.
106. Foster-Carter, n.d.
107. See Thomas (1974), *op. cit.*, Senghaas (1981), on North Korea, Foster-Carter (1977); on other countries, works produced as part of the research project guided by Senghaas, and cited in his (1981).
108. B.14(e).
109. I discuss further the difference between Pol Pot's Kampuchea and genuine examples of autocentric development in Foster-Carter, n.d.
110. Schiffer (X.13), p.532.
111. *Ibid.*, p.518.
112. *Ibid.*, p.519,520,529.
113. *Ibid.*, p.522,528,532.
114. As is indeed the case; cf. Schiffer's tables, p.530.
115. *Ibid.*, p.520 (original emphasis), 521.
116. *Ibid.*, p.528.
117. *Ibid.*, pp.523-7.
118. I have heard Cardoso stress this as a major point of difference with Amin and others.

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119. Shortage of space precludes detailed consideration of other critiques of Amin; e.g. Leaver's interesting if somewhat idiosyncratic attempt to 'situate' him. Leaver (X.8.)
120. Rubinstein *et. al.* (X.12), pp.104,105-6,107-8.
121. Brewer (X.2.a), p.257.
122. This seems to me to be the unfortunate effect of 'Warrenism'; cf. Warren (1980).
123. B.11(e), p.590, emphasis in original. (I have chosen to retain my own translation, made before the English edition had appeared, only because I happen to prefer it on minor stylistic grounds to Brian Pearce's — here, as always — undoubtedly excellent rendition).

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(other than works by Amin, and by those who debate his ideas; these are listed separately, in the main Bibliography).

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