

SAMIR AMIN (for Review of African Political Economy) REV 2

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOVEREIGN AFRICA

Africa and the South, permanent victims of unequal exchange of labor and natural resources:

Africa, Asia (except Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean have been and remain the permanent victims of historical global capitalism, which has built a polarized world, dominated by the historical centers (US and Canada, Europe and Japan –the “triad”) which are simultaneously auto centered and aggressively open; while the rest of the world (the peripheries) are submitted to a permanent asymmetric adjustment to the need of accelerating the process of capital accumulation in the centers. Thus the peripheries remain passively open. I send back readers here to the theoretical model of capital accumulation and development presented in ROAPE in 1974 (see ref).

That permanent contrast between centers and peripheries appear in the double unequal exchange of labor and of natural resources. More labor from the peripheries are exchanged against less labor from the centers. Similarly more ecological resources from the peripheries are exchanged against less from the centers. I refer here to the most consistent proposals for a theory of “unequal ecological exchange” produced by J.B. Foster and H. Holleman (see ref), which I quote:

“Just as unequal exchange theory postulated the exchange of more labor for less, unequal ecological theory had as its basis the exchange of more ecological use value for less. Unequal ecological exchange was first raised by Liebig and Marx... Consistent with this, Marx drew a distinction between real “wealth” to which both nature and labor contributed, and value, where only labor was taken into account.... A major breakthrough came with the ecological footprint analysis (Wackernagel and Rees).... which (allowed) Samir Amin to make possible a more trenchant use-value-based critique of capitalist accumulation..... Howard Odum ... provided a way of calculating the extent of natural wealth... exchanged between countries, or the loss of a country’s natural endowment through commodity trade... Odum provided a common metric for measuring real wealth/use values... (quotations from pages 205,207, 209, 211).

Unequal ecological exchange is of central importance for Africa (and good parts of Latin America) whose economies and political systems had been shaped through history to provide natural resources to the imperialist centers. Pursuing the plunder of these resources remain the priority target for the geopolitics of the “triad”. African resources are important for contemporary imperialism. African peoples are not; they may even become an obstacle to the free access of the Western powers to these resources.

That double unequal exchange which cannot be dissociated from the working of historical capitalist accumulation makes any attempt for peripheries to “catch up” while remaining partners in historical capitalist/imperialist system condemned to failure.

A new phase in the expansion of global capitalism

A look at the immediate reality suggests that we are entering a new phase in the expansion of capitalism on a world scale: we are seeing high growth rates in emerging countries in particular, in contrast to almost flat rates in the historical centres (United States, Europe and Japan). This expansion of capitalism seems therefore manifested by a gradual transfer of its centre of gravity from old Europe and the United States to Asia and Latin America. Historians will view this as a return to normalcy; in 1800, on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, China and India represented a proportion of the world GDP about equivalent to their population. The theory of the expansion of capitalism is correct on one fundamental point: indeed, the paths and the means used by all up to now only reproduce the methods of the historical capitalist system of production that created the developed countries and made them what they are today, for better or worse. Reproducing this system in full, no matter the political context, democratic or not, no matter whether the social context accepts the most devastating effects of pauperisation or greatly mitigates them by means of social policies; in other words reproducing an expansion that develops not only productive forces but at the same time forces that destroy nature, reduces the citizen to the status of television spectator and consumer, thereby annihilating any authentic expression of freedom. Yet this model of destructive development is not challenged, either in the core or in the periphery countries. And it was not challenged during the 20th century in the peripheries that to varying degrees shed the yoke of imperialism and even of capitalism, i.e. in the historical socialisms of the Soviet Union and China. Nevertheless, in the context of this harsh general assessment there are several variations whose impact cannot be ignored. One cannot say that the achievements of China or Ecuador are not different to those of Pakistan or Colombia ! So there are variations... depending on whether these attempts, these advances, are motivated by the will to build a sovereign project or, on the contrary, simply submit to the dominant global demands that impose a model of capitalist subcontracting, that I call “lumpen development”. Between the ideal sovereign project, which does not exist, and subcontracting pure and simple, which is the case of the majority of countries in Africa and the Arab world today, there is often an association of elements of sovereign projects with political strategies of adjustment to subcontracting in an imperialist context. One cannot disregard these nuances. The challenge is not the same for peoples that are the victims of unregulated “lumpen development” as for others that benefit from a global development of their society. These are important differences that guarantee more legitimacy and stability in some cases, much less or none in others.

The argument that is still being put forward today to justify the dominant choices regarding coherent sovereign projects is that there are no other ways of developing productive forces: it is only possible to catch up by copying. This is the easy way and perhaps the historically inevitable way, up to a point. This argument is both true and false: in order to catch up one must copy to a certain degree, even if one knows – and one doesn't always know it – that this option has negative aspects to it. During the Russian and then the Chinese revolutions, much more than in our region during the Nasserist experiment, Boumediene's Algeria, African “socialisms”, there was at least the beginning

of an awareness that led the revolutionary parties to believe that they had to catch up and at the same time do something different, i.e. build socialist relations of production. But gradually the sole objective of catching up became dominant and “doing something different” was forgotten. This is serious, and I think that if the terms “socialism” and “communism” have lost the appeal they had for the world’s working classes 50 years ago, it is precisely because circumstances have made it imperative to give priority to “catching up”.

The current global stage is dominated by the attempt of historical centres of imperialism (“the Triad”) to maintain their exclusive control over the Planet through a combination of: a- so called neo liberal economic globalization policies allowing financial transnational capital of the Triad to decide alone on all issues to their exclusive interests. b- the military control of the Planet by US and its subordinate allies (Nato and Japan) in order to annihilate any attempt of any country out of the Triad to move out of their yoke. In that respect all countries of the World out of the Triad are enemies or potential enemies. Except those who accept a complete submission to the economic and political strategy of the Triad. Such as the two new “democratic republics” of Saudi Arabia and Qatar! The so called “international community” to which the western medias refer continuously is indeed reduced to the G7 plus Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Any other country, even when its government is currently aligned, is a potential enemy since the peoples of those countries may reject that submission. For Africa the instrument used by imperialism to day to this effect is known; its name is *Africom* (i.e. US military command for Africa) whose function is to ensure the control of major mineral areas located on the continent, leaving the rest of the society to chaos and self-destruction.

What is a sovereign project for Africa and the South ?

The symposium held in Algiers in September 2013 (organized by Third World Forum, the World Forum of Alternatives and Algerian associates) resulted in rich discussions that revolved around a central axis: the question of the “sovereign project”, understood as the need for the peoples and states of the contemporary world to overhaul their policy choices (economic, social cultural, management of power, etc.) in a way that allows them to distance themselves from the pattern of globalization unilaterally imposed by the monopolies of the imperialist centres of the historically and still dominant Triad, raising themselves to the rank of active agents in shaping the world, in initiating new forms of just and sustainable development. That involved : defining the means by which economic policies can end the processes of dispossession and impoverishment that are intrinsic to the logic of capitalism, ensuring instead the sharing of the benefits of development in favour of the popular classes; defining the means of exercising political power that paves the way for real and progressive democratization of societies; defining the means for guaranteeing the sovereignty of peoples and states, paving the way for a polycentric negotiated globalisation and not one unilaterally imposed by the powerful for their own exclusive profit. The "sovereign projects" of those countries of the South referred to as "emerging", leaving aside the diversity of their origin and the efficiency of their results, fall far short of the requirements of social development, as they emerge from pathways that are based on the fundamental logic of capitalism, a logic that is itself founded on forms of development of productive forces that are destructive of human

beings and nature.

The alternative project to which we wish to contribute is that of a creative utopia. It is good to know what one wants, all things considered, even if history shows us that the future never turns out exactly as one expected. Successive generations will bring unforeseeable innovation. One could, if one so wished, give that future, that vision a name: one could call it “value-based development,” in other words development based on a body of moral, ethical and social values that integrate democracy, liberty and equality, solidarity, or more simply : socialism.

This means many things and, among others, that socialism will be ecological or it will not be at all, according to Elmar Altwater. It means that we must integrate all the requirements of respect for ecological sustainability into our critique of the organization of production and the consumer destination of that production. In the same way, a sovereign project in a long run socialist perspective will be democratic or it will not be at all. It must go beyond the historical experiments of State socialism. State socialism, or State national populism, has gradually lost a good deal of its credibility in the eyes of the working classes. It retained its legitimacy as long as it was able to deliver results in terms of improving the people’s living conditions. It finally lost it when, having reached its historical limits, it ran out of steam. This was true of Nasser’s Egypt, Boumediene’s Algeria, Modibo’s Mali, Nyerere’s Tanzania, Nkrumah’s Ghana. But also of the State socialism of Eastern countries. State socialism was then brutally thrown over in favour of the establishment of private capitalism: it was the strategic objective of shock therapies and structural adjustment. The shock therapy implemented by Yeltsin and Gorbachev in Russia was denounced by many intellectuals as remarkably stupid. In fact, it was an intelligent strategy to open the way for private capitalism. In other countries, in Asia, in Africa and in the Arab world, the same ruling classes that had been the architects of real sovereign projects, in spite of their limitations, converted to private capitalism in order to remain in power. In other cases, State socialism was transformed into State capitalism. I am referring to those countries that refused to conform fully to the formulas of neo-liberalism, privatisation, etc.: China, Vietnam, Cuba. In any case we are confronted with the same challenge: the concept and practice of development of productive forces in State socialism and State capitalism are not fundamentally different to those of private capitalism. But in political and social terms the challenge is different because the strategic objective of imperialism is to destroy any aspiration to autonomous aspiration. In Africa South of the Sahara the pattern of “lumpen development” associated with contemporary globalization has produced economies and societies which are non viable. Chaos, self destruction through civil pseudo ethnic or pseudo religious wars are testimonies of that non viability. . Chaos is not a problem for imperialism; it is only a problem for the peoples considered.

The ruling classes of Western countries have realized that they cannot maintain their domination, which is at the root of the huge profits and monopoly rent of capital, otherwise than through military control of the planet. For Africa the objective is, as already mentioned, controlling the access and plunder of the natural resources of the continent through combined policies of so called “aid” (ref the critique that Yash Tandon produced of aid as an instrument of domination), military interventions (*Africom*) and neutralization of the dangers of growing

chaos. For the Middle East, this objective implies the destruction of societies, the annihilation of the capacity of States to refuse to submit to “neo liberalism”. Reactionary political Islam is an ally of choice for the promoters of the new imperialist project. Intellectually limited and opportunistic in its behaviour, reactionary it guarantees the destruction of our societies. If the FIS [Islamic Salvation Front] had come to power, there would be no more Algeria. If the Muslim Brotherhood had remained in power for ten years, there would be no more Egypt. The destruction of Iraq and Libya testifies to this. The danger concerns not only the Arab world. Mali is likewise threatened, as were Somalia and Central Africa. Foiling the plot for military control by Washington and its allies will determine any future progress.

The start of a different development begins, in the initial phase, with the implementation of the best (or the least-worst) possible sovereign projects, while accepting the limitations of any revolutionary advance. I am favourably inclined towards all the revolutionary advances that were realized in Latin America, even if I am aware of the danger of potentially disastrous setbacks. One must proceed with caution and not condemn an advance on the pretext that it has not ushered in “communism of the year 3000”, nor allow oneself to call its instigators traitors, thereby playing into the hands of the imperialists. Therefore, one must imagine a real sovereign project that is part of a historical heritage. Before justifying or condemning, one must try to understand. And one cannot understand China or any other country if one disregards its history and the real challenges it has faced during the different phases of its history. The start of a sovereign project implies making decisions and establishing specific economic programs. It is not a key that opens all doors, a blueprint like the prescriptions of the World Bank, which proposes liberalism as a universal remedy – whereas in fact it makes everyone ill. Move gradually away from neo-liberalism through economic policies that allow more social justice, truly improve working conditions, offer more education, better healthcare. One cannot achieve these with the neo-liberal recipe – anywhere. Not even in wealthy countries, in spite of the safety cushions available there. How could one achieve it in any country of the South?

A sovereign project worthy of the name creates and reinforces the working class base that supports it, a condition of its success. A regime that has no working class base is vulnerable – in particular to military attack. This is the situation in which Iraq found itself after years of dictatorship under Saddam Hussein. And one cannot conquer legitimacy by means of magical nationalist rhetoric alone (or pseudo religious or pseudo ethnical rhetoric). One can do it only based on an authentic development project: democratization cannot be dissociated from social progress. Bandung gave the signal for the recovery of our independence. The recovery of our independence in today’s context is still on the agenda. The sovereign project, by breaking with the neoliberal doctrinaire approach and the diktats of financial globalization, makes it possible to initiate social advances and the reconstruction of a negotiated polycentric world respectful of national sovereignty, and thus prepare the best possible conditions in which to forge ahead and invent a new civilisation respectful of the environment and the human being.

The very notion of the "sovereign project" must be a subject for discussion. Given the level of penetration of transnational investments in all sectors and in all countries, one cannot avoid the question: what kind of sovereignty is being referred to? The global conflict for access to natural resources is one of the main determinants of the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

The dependence of the USA for numerous resources and the growing demands of China constitute a challenge for South America, Africa and the Middle East which are particularly well endowed with resources and shaped by the history of the pillage of those resources. Can we develop national and regional policies in these domains as the beginning of a rational and equitable global management of resources that would benefit all peoples? Can we develop new relations between China and the countries of the South that subscribe to such a perspective, linking access to these resources by China with support for the industrialisation of the countries concerned (that which the so-called "donors" of the OECD refuse to do)?

The framework for the deployment of an effective sovereign project is not limited to the fields of international action. An independent national policy remains fragile and vulnerable if it does not have real national and popular support, which requires it to be based on economic and social policies that ensure that the popular classes are beneficiaries of "development." That is the price of the social stability that is the condition for the success of the sovereign project against the political de-stabilization of the imperialist project.

It is possible to provide, in this context, a "balance sheet" of "sovereign projects" that have been implemented by "emerging" countries. Among other things: What are the characteristics of the project of China: their various possible futures. State capitalism based on the illusion of a leader of the national bourgeoisie, or state capitalism with a social dimension, evolving towards a "state socialism", itself a step on the long road to socialism ? Is there a sovereign project being implemented in India, Brazil or South Africa? Can non-continent size countries develop sovereign projects? What forms of regional coming together could facilitate such progress ?

Exiting from financial globalization

One assumes that the financial aspect of globalization, not globalization in all its dimensions, in particular commercial, is the weak link in the established neo-liberal globalized system. No significant progress could be achieved in the construction of the sovereign alternative unless countries involved, whether of continent size or not, exit from financial globalization. The subject matter is complex; it stems out of the question of the future of the dollar as the universal currency, taking account of the growing external debt of the USA. An end must be put to "full convertibility" of the currencies of the South, associated with the under valuation of most of them, which facilitates the super exploitation of their labour power and the plunder of their resources. Nonetheless countries of the South are unequally equipped to respond to the challenge in this area. China is resisting the temptation of moving toward the convertibility of the yuan (ref my paper on the Chinese Yuan). Russia is probably now moving toward the exit of global financialisation (ref the paper of Umberto Pascali). Continent size countries (India, Brazil) can do so with no harm, if so they decide. But for other countries, in particular the most vulnerable countries in Africa, the task involves more courage. In all cases no progress in that direction could become possible unless the political ruling powers take distance from the local comprador class, whose monopoly rents depend on their submission to financial globalisation. Of course, with respect to most of those countries, regional cooperation could make the task less uneasy. South America provides examples to that effect (such as Alba, the Sucre project, the South Bank), even if, to this day,

these agreements have not been seriously mobilized to exit from financial globalization.

Thwarting the geopolitical and geostrategic plans of the United States and its allies of the Triad.

As already stated, the pursuit of global domination by the capitalist monopolies of the historic imperialist powers (United States, Europe, Japan) is threatened by the growing conflicts between the objectives of the triad (to maintain its domination) and the aspirations of emerging countries and the revolt of the peoples who are the victims of "neo-liberalism". Under these conditions the United States and its subordinate allies (partners in the "collective imperialism of the triad") have chosen the headlong rush ahead through the use of violence, military interventions and further plans of intervention, particularly in the Middle East, in the Chinese Seas, in the countries of the former Soviet Union (Ukraine is indicative of these intentions). Should we remind the reader of military interventions in the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, tomorrow Iran?), the military encirclement of China, the provocations by Japan, the manipulations of the conflicts China / India and China / South East Asia, and finally the continuous deployment and strengthening of U.S. military bases (*Africom* and others)?

As a result of the limited results of these interventions (Afghanistan and Iraq in particular) it seems that while violent interventions by imperialist powers remain in fact on the agenda, evidence of them being part of a of a coherent strategy a condition for eventual success, is increasingly hard to find. Is the US at bay? Is the decline of this power a passing phase or decisive? The responses of Washington, which are apparently, it seems, decided from one day to the next, do not making them less dangerously criminal.

Therefore it appears possible now to start responding to the challenge through the deployment of defensive counter political (including military) strategies which could reduce the chances of the USA's project of military control of the planet.

Further readings:

Samir Amin, *Accumulation and Development, a Theoretical Model*; *ROAPE*, 1974.

Samir Amin, *The Implosion of Capitalism*; MRPress, N.Y. 2013.

(concepts of emerging countries, the case of China and others, lumpen development, to which I made reference in the text are further developed in this book)

Samir Amin, *The Law of Worldwide Value*; MRPress, N.Y. 2010.

(concepts related to the working of the globalized law of value and the plunder of natural resources are discussed in this book)

Samir Amin, *Three Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*; MRPres, N.Y.2013.

(ref in particular to the measurement of the imperialist rent)

Samir Amin, *The Chinese Yuan*, site *Pambazuka*, 21/6/2013

John Bellamy Foster and Hannah Holleman, *The Theory of Unequal Ecological Exchange*; *The Journal of Peasant Studies*; Taylor and Francis, march 2014.

Wackernagel and Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint*; New Society Publishers, Vancouver 1996.

Howard Odum, *Systems Ecology*; John Wiley, N.Y. 1983.

Elmar Altvater, paper presented at the Conference of World Forum for Alternatives, Caracas, 2008

Yash Tandon, *Ending Aid Dependence* ; Oxford, Fahamu Books, 2008.

Umbert Pascali, La Russie, « contrainte et forcée » par les sanctions internationales, crée un système indépendant du dollar ; Article original en italien : *popoff.globalist.it*, 3 avril 2014.

The papers presented in Algiers meeting will be available on the web sites of World Forum for Alternatives and of Third World Forum.