

## **External colonialism and internal colonialism**

The centres/peripheries contrast is inherent to the global expansion of actually existing capitalism at all the stages of its development, since its origins. The imperialism typical of capitalism has of course taken various successive forms in close relation with the characteristics specific to the successive phases of capitalist accumulation: mercantilism (from 1500 to 1800), the classical industrial capitalism (1800 to 1945), the post-war multi-polar system (1945-1990) and the current “globalisation” under construction.

Beyond the specificity of each of these phases, actually existing capitalism has always been synonymous of the conquest of the world by its dominant centres. One should then not be surprised the “colonialist” dimension (a generic term by which I will designate the conquest) constitutes an important element in the formation of the political cultures of the countries under consideration. Nonetheless, articulation of that colonialist dimension to other political aspects of the political culture is particular to each of the regions in discussion. For Europe, colonialism was “external”, in America it was “internal”; a difference of important impact.

1. In that framework of analysis, colonialism is a particular form of expansion of certain central formations (qualified, owing to that, as imperialist powers) based on submission of conquered nations (the colonies) to the political power of metropolises. Colonisation is then “external” in the sense that metropolises, on the one hand, and colonies, on the other, constitute separate entities even if the latter entities are integrated in a political space dominated by the first ones. This imperialism under consideration is capitalist and must not be understood for – preceding – different forms of possible domination exercised by a regime over different peoples. The amalgamation which views the imperialism of modern capitalism in similar terms to the ones through which we analyse Roman imperialism does not hold much sense. Multinational States (The Austro Hungarian, Ottoman, Russian Empires and the USSR) equally constitute distinct historical phenomena (in the USSR for example, financial transfers moved from the Russian centres to the Asian peripheries; reverse way as what it is in colonial systems).

Capitalist colonisation starts first with the one of the Americas, conquered by the Spanish, the Portuguese, the British and the French. In their American colonies the dominant classes of the conquering metropolises enforce particular economic and social systems designed to serve accumulation within the dominant centres of that time. The Atlantic Europe/colonial America asymmetry is neither spontaneous, nor natural but, perfectly constructed. Submission of the conquered Indian societies is part of that systemic construction. Grafting of the African slave trade into that system is equally made to enhance its efficiency as a peripheral system under domination of the necessities of accumulation in the centres of that time. Black Africa from where the slaves were shipped is, from that fact, a periphery of the American periphery. Colonisation expands rapidly beyond the Americas, among others through the conquest of British India and the Dutch Indies in the XVIIIth century then, from the XIXth century Africa and Southeast Asia. Countries which had not been conquered as such – China, Iran, the Ottoman Empire – were submitted to unequal treaties which give full meaning to their qualifier as semi-colonies.

Colonisation is “external” viewed from the metropolises, the most industrialised nations, and what is more, most advanced in terms of social modernisation, the development of their workers and socialist’ movements and democratic conquest. But these advances have never benefited the peoples of the colonies. Slavery at the anterior stage of that development, forced

labour and other forms of over exploitation of the popular classes, administrative brutality and colonial massacre punctuate that history of the actually existing capitalism. One should talk, referring to that period of the truly “dark book” of capitalism, in which the number of the victims are counted by the tens of millions (among which those of famines provoked in India). Such practises have of course exercised devastating influences in the metropolises themselves; they provided for the foundation to the racist drift of the cultures of the leading elites and even of the popular classes, being the means of legitimisation the contrast democracy in the metropolis/barbaric autocracy in the colonies. Exploitation of the colonies benefits to capital of the centres in their totality, even if the metropolises draw an addition profit which determines their position in the world hierarchy (Great Britain owes it hegemony to the importance of its Empire which Germany, being a late comer, ambitions to conquer).

2. Internal colonialism phenomena are produced by particular combinations of Settlement colonies, on the one hand, and the logic of imperialist expansion on the other. Primitive accumulation in the centres takes the form of systematic expropriation of the poor segments of the peasantry, and thus creating an excess population the local industrialisation has not always be capable of totally absorbing, triggering thereby powerful emigration currents. Later on, the demographic revolution associated with social modernisation materialises through a decrease in mortality rate preceding the one of the birth rate, reinforcing from that very fact emigration. Great Britain provides the precocious example of that evolution with, from the XVIIth century, the generalisation of the “enclosures”.

The formation of New England is the product of that context which gives account of the nature of the political/ideological movements which go with that immigration. The poor – victims of the capitalist development inside the metropolis – react through adhesion to anti Enlightenment sects which organise there departure and settlement in New England. That origin will strongly impregnate the American ideology to give it a marked reactionary feature (Cf. S. Amin, *The Liberal Virus*). But the essential is not for the leading classes of Capitalist/imperialist Britain of that time in that emigration but, the constitution of ordinary colonies constructed to serve the objectives of accumulation within the metropolises: the slave colonies of British North America. Superposition of these sets of entities will then give the United States social construction its specific characteristic based on a model of internal colonialism. Because New England will benefit from little interest from the metropolis, it will erect itself into an autonomous centre, imposes itself as an intermediary for the exploitation of the slave colonies (taking first the maritime trade which enables control over them), and initiating precocious industrialisation.

The United States associate then in their formation a new capitalist/imperialist centre and their own internal colony. The abolition of slavery does not eliminate that internal dichotomy but gives it a new form associated with the massive immigration of the Blacks from the South to the industrialised towns of the North, following the one of the Poor from the regions of Europe hit by capitalist development. The internal colonialism specific to that history has produced devastating effects similar to the ones remind of earlier as regards European imperialism but, with renewed intensity. The political culture produced under such conditions in the United States society is fundamentally racist (and communitarianist). By opposition, racism in Europe – formulated by the leading classes to legitimise their colonial endeavour – penetrates less the popular masses; owing to the fact the colonies are external. The dominant political culture remains the one of the Enlightenment (undecided on that issue as demonstrated by Yves Benot) which is being itself overtaken left by the socialism of the worker’s movement. In the United States, fundamental racism and communitarianism are

closely associated. Communitarianisms praise the racist concept of “gemeinschaft”. Succession of waves of migrants aborts maturation of a class consciousness to substitute it communitarianisms themselves always hierarchical. Internal colonialism enables understanding why the United States pretension that their history ignores colonialism – specific, to Europeans – is rigorously meaningless. The United States model of internal colonialism has been, and still is more devastating than Europeans external colonisations. The United States are the colonialist power par excellence.

Internal colonialism has not been the exclusive product of the history of the United States. We find partly comparable characteristics in Latin America and South Africa. The Iberian peninsular was not at the vanguard of the development of capitalism. But nonens volens, that conquest was in the context of the mercantilist formation of capitalism in the making. Brutal domination of the Indians, followed by the import of African slaves found the place in that new context to that slight difference that, the system did not operate to the profit of new centres; neither in Spain, nor in Portugal and even less so in the colonies of America. The colonial function of Latin America was then to be recuperated by the true centres in formation at the forefront of which Great Britain, taken over later in the XIXth century by the United States (which proclaimed their vocation of becoming the only master of the continent with the Monroe doctrine – 1823), the Spaniards and Portuguese fulfilling functions of intermediaries similar to the ones the comprador bourgeoisies would fulfil in Asia and the Ottoman Empire.

Internal colonisation in Latin America has all the same brought about political and social consequences of the type of the one generated by colonialism in general: racism towards Black people (in Brazil especially), despise as regards the Indians. That internal colonisation has only been challenge in Mexico, the Revolution (1910-1920) of which is, for that reason among the “great revolutions of modern times”. It is may be underway of being questioned in the countries of the Andes, with the renaissance of the contemporary “indigenist” claims, but of course, in a new local and global context.

3. In South Africa, the first settlement colonisation –the one of the Boers – was in the perspective of the creation of a “purely white” State involving expulsion (or extermination) of Africans rather than submitting them. By opposition, the initial objective of the British conquest was to submit the Africans to the requirements of the metropolis’ imperialist expansion (primarily the exploitation of the minerals). Neither the first colonisers (the Boers) nor the new ones (the British) were authorised to stand as autonomous centres. The Apartheid Boers State of the post-war period attempted to do so, basing its power on its internal colony (Black for the essential part) but did not reach its ends owing to an unfavourable numerical balance (an important majority of black people) and to the growing resistance of the dominated populations who will finally be victorious. The powers in place after the end of Apartheid have inherited of that issue of internal colonisation without having, up to now, brought in its radical solution. But, that constitute a new chapter of history.

The case of South Africa is especially interesting from the point of view of the effects of colonialism over political culture. It is not only that here, internal colonisation was bluntly visible, even to blind people or, not even that it had produced the political culture of apartheid. It is also because; communists in that country had been able to draw from the situation a lucid analysis of what actually existing capitalism is. The Communist Party of South Africa has been in the 1920’s the promoter of the theory of internal colonialism (a theory adopted in the 1930’s by a black leader of the United States CP – Harry Haywood – but, not followed by his “white” comrades). He drew from that theory the consequences that:

the high revenues for the “White” minority, and incredibly low for the “Black” majority constitutes the front and back faces of the same issue.

Going even further, the CP dared make the analogy with the contrast which opposed – within the British Empire – the salary of the Brits and the income of labour in India. For that party, as for the III<sup>rd</sup> International of that time, those two aspects of the same issue – the one of actually existing capitalism – was undissociable. The South African communist theory of internal colonialism led to that same conclusion I formulated (in chapter two) because, at the scale of the global capitalist system, apparently external colonialism for the major imperialist powers, is evidently internal. The South African CP and the III<sup>rd</sup> International of that time had interiorised that conclusion in the political culture of the (communist) left; and this was a radical breakaway from the political culture of the socialist left of the II<sup>nd</sup> social-colonialist International, which negated that association inherent to the global reality.

I wrote that South Africa is a microcosm of the global capitalist system. It gathers on its territory the three components of that system: a minority which benefits from the rent of situation of the imperialist centres, two majority components of more or less equal importance distributed into an industrialised “Third World” (the emerging nations of today) and an marginalised “Fourth World” (in the former Bantustans), similar to the non industrialised regions of non-industrialised contemporary Africa. What is more, the proportions between the figure of the populations of those three components and the ones which describe the hierarchies of their per capita income draw more or less close to the ones which characterise the current global system. That fact has certainly contributed in giving the South African communists of that time the clairvoyance which was theirs.

That political culture has died out today, not only in South Africa, with the (belated) adhesion of the CP to the commonplace thesis of “racism” (which gives the status of a cause to what is a mere effect); but also at global level, with the adhesion of the majority of communists to social-democracy.

4. Is the contemporary global system evolving in the direction of a generalisation? The hypothesis of a generalised internal colonialism which would characterise the coming phase of global capitalism remains disputable owing to the real political and ideological resistance in Europe to adopt such a model which would imply institutionalisation of “racism”. By opposition, the “communitarianist” model, inspired by the practises of the United States, seem here to constitute a totally actual danger of an “Americanisation of Europe”.