

SAMIR AMIN

WHAT IS 'EMERGING'?

This term has been used by some to mean one thing and by others something entirely different in different contexts, often without any caution regarding precision around the meaning of the term. I will therefore here define the sense that I will give to the set of economic, social, political, and cultural transformations which permit one to speak of the 'emergence' of a state, a nation, and a people who have been placed in a peripheral place in the capitalist world system. (The term peripheral having the meaning that I have defined in my own work.)

Emergence is not measured by a rising rate of GDP growth (or exports) over a long period of time (more than a decade), nor the fact that the society in question has obtained a higher level of GDP per capita, as defined by the World Bank, aid institutions controlled by Western powers, and conventional economists.

Emergence involves much more: a sustained growth in industrial production in the state in question and a strengthening of the capacity of these industries to be competitive on a global scale. Again one must define which specific industries are important and what is meant by competitiveness.

Extractive industries (minerals and fossil fuels) must be excluded from this definition. In states endowed by nature with these resources, accelerated growth can occur in these countries without necessarily leaving in its wake productive activities. The extreme example of this situation of 'non-emergence' would be the Gulf States, Venezuela, Gabon, and others.

One must also understand that the competitiveness of productive activities in the economy should be considered as a productive system in its entirety and not a certain unit of production alone. Due to the preference for outsourcing and subcontracting, multinationals operating in the South can be the impetus for the creation of local units of production tied to transnationals, or autonomous and capable of exporting to the world market, which earns them the status of competitive in the language of conventional economists. This truncated concept of competitiveness, which proceeds from an empiricist method, is not ours. Competitiveness is that of a productive system. For this to exist, the economy must be made up of productive elements with branches of this production sufficiently interdependent that one can speak of it as a system. This competitiveness depends upon diverse economic and social factors, among others the general level of education and training of workers of all levels and the efficiency of the group of institutions which manage the national

political economy – fiscal policy, business law, labour law, credit, social services, etc. The productive system in question cannot reduce productive transformation to only activities involved in manufacturing and consumption – although the absence of these annuls the existence of a productive system worthy of the name – but rather must integrate food and agriculture as services required for the normal functioning of the system.

A real productive system can be more or less ‘advanced’. By this I mean that the group of activities must be qualified: is it involved in ‘banal’ productions or high technologies? It is important to situate an emerging state using this point of view: in what measure is it on the path of generating value added products? It is important to see emergent states from this point of view: at what stage are they in mounting the ladder towards producing value-added products?

The question of emergence therefore requires both a political and holistic examination. A state cannot be emerging if it is not inward (rather than outward) looking with the goal of creating a domestic market and thus reasserting national economic sovereignty. This complex objective requires sovereignty over all aspects of economic life. In particular it demands policies which protect food security and sovereignty, and equally sovereignty over one’s natural resources and access to others outside of one’s territory. These multiple and complementary objectives are contrasted with those of the comprador class who are content to adopt growth models which meet the requirements of the dominant global system (liberal-internationalism) and the possibilities which these offer.

This proposed definition of emergence does not address the political strategy of the state and society: capitalism or socialism? However this question cannot be left out of the debate as the choice made by the leading classes will have major effects, both positive and negative, for a successful emergence. I would not say that the only option is to follow a capitalist perspective, which implements a system of a capitalist nature – control and exploitation of the workforce and a free market. Nor would I suggest that only a radical socialist option which challenges these forms of capitalism – property, organized labour, market controls- is able to last over long periods of time and move the society forwards in the world system.

The links between the politics of emergence on one hand and the accompanying social transformation, on the other hand, do not depend solely on the internal coherence of the former, but equally its degree of complementarity, or conflict, with the latter. Social struggles, whether class based or political, do not adjust themselves to fit the logic of a state’s implementation of an emergence. Rather they are a determinant of this program. Current experience shows the diversity and dynamism of these links.

Emergence is often accompanied by inequalities. One must examine the nature of these: inequalities where the beneficiaries are a tiny minority or a large minority (the middle class) and are realised in a framework which promotes the pauperisation of the majority of workers, or, on the contrary, one where the same people see a betterment in their quality of life, even if the growth rates of compensation for workers will be less than those who benefit from the system. Said in another manner, politics can associate emergence with pauperisation or not. Emergence does not follow a definitive set of rules. Rather it is a series of successive steps; the first can prepare the way for following successes, or bring about deadlock.

In the same manner the relation between the emerging economy and the global economy is constantly transforming as well. From these two different perspectives come policies which can promote sovereignty or weaken it, and at the same time promote social solidarity in the nation or weaken it. Emergence is therefore not synonymous with growth in exports and an increase in power measured in such a manner. Growth in exports can strengthen or weaken the autonomy of an emerging state relative to the world market.

We cannot speak of emergence in general, nor can we speak of models – Chinese, Indian, Brazilian and Korean – in general. One must concretely examine, in each case, the successive steps in the evolution of their emergence, identify the strong and weak points, and analyse the dynamic of their implementation and the associated contradictions.

Emergence is a political and not only economic project. The measure of success is therefore determined by reducing the means by which the dominant capitalist centre perpetuates their domination, in spite of the fact that economic success of emergent states is measured in the conventional economic terms. I define the means as control of the dominant powers over the areas of technological development, access to natural resources, the global financial system, dissemination of information, and weapons of mass destruction. The imperialist collective triad – United States, Europe and Japan – intends to conserve, using all of these means, their privileged positions in dominating the planet and prohibiting emergent states from bringing this domination into question. I conclude that the ambitions of emergent states enter into conflict with the strategic objectives of the triad and the measure of the violence emanating from this conflict will be determined by the degree of radicalism with which the emergent state challenges the aforementioned privileges of the centre.

Economic emergence is not separable from the foreign policies of the states. Do they align themselves with the military and political coalition of the triad? Do they accept strategies put in place by NATO? Conversely, will they oppose

them?

Emergence and Lumpen Development

There can be no emergence without state politics, resting on a comfortable social bloc, which gives it legitimacy, capable of constructing a coherent project an inward looking national productive system. They must at the same time ensure the participation of the great majority of social classes and that these groups receive the benefits of growth.

Opposing the favourable evolution of an authentic emergence is the unilateral submission to the requirements of the implementation of global capitalism and general monopolies which produce nothing other than what I would call 'lumpen development'. I will now liberally borrow from the late Andre Gunder Frank, who analysed a similar evolution, albeit at a different time and place. Today lumpen development is the product of accelerated social disintegration associated with the 'development' model (which does not deserve its name) imposed by the monopolies from the imperialist core on the peripheral societies they dominate. It is manifested by a dizzying growth of subsistence activities (called the informal sphere), otherwise called the pauperisation associated with the unilateral logic of accumulation of capital.

One can remark that I did not qualify the emergence as 'capitalist' or 'socialist'. This is because emergence is a process associated with complementarity, while at the same time conflict, of the logic of capitalist management of the economy and the logics of 'non-capitalist' – and potentially socialist - management of society and politics.

Among the experiences of emergence, some cases merit special mention as they are not associated with the processes of lumpen development. There is not a pauperisation among the popular classes, but rather progress in the living standards, modest or otherwise. Two of these experiences are clearly capitalist – those of South Korea and Taiwan (I will not discuss here the particular historical conditions which permitted the success of the implementation in the two countries). Two others inherited the aspirations conducted in the name of socialism – Vietnam and China. Cuba could also be included in this group if it can master the contradictions which it is currently going through.

But we know of other cases of emergence which have been associated with lumpen development of a massive nature. India is the best example. There are segments of this project which correspond to the requirements of emergence. There is a state policy which favours the building of an industrial productive system. Consequently there is an associated expansion of the middle classes

and progress in technological capacities and education. They are capable of playing autonomously on the chessboard of international politics. But for a grand majority, two thirds of society, there is accelerated pauperisation. We have therefore a hybrid system which ties together emergence and lumpen development. We can highlight the link between these two complementary parts of reality. I believe, without suggesting too gross a generalisation, that all the other cases that are considered emergent belong to this familiar hybrid, which includes Brazil, South Africa, and others.

But there exist also, and it is most of the other Southern countries, situations in which there are no elements of emergence as the processes of lumpen development occupy much of the society.