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## **IMPERIALISM AND UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **A new stage in the North/South conflict**

#### **At the heart of today's problem: the capitalism of the oligopolies which has been generalized, globalized and financialized**

Capitalism has reached a stage of centralization and concentration of capital out of all comparison with the situation only 50 years ago and I thus describe this capitalism as one of generalized oligopolies. 'Monopolies' (or, better, oligopolies) are in no way new inventions in modern history. What is new, however, is the limited number of registered oligopolies ('groups') which stands at about 500, if only the colossal ones are counted, and 3,000 to 5,000 in an almost comprehensive list. They now determine, through their decisions, the whole of the economic life of the planet, and more besides. This capitalism of the generalized oligopolies is thus a qualitative leap forward in the general evolution of capitalism. The reason given for this evolution – and usually it is the only one – is that it is the inevitable result of technological progress. This is only very partially true. In actual fact the real most important reason is the search after maximum profits which benefits the powerful groups who have priority access to capital markets. Such concentration has always been the response of capital to the long, deep crises that have marked its history. This concentration is at the origin of the 'financialization' of the system, as this is how the oligopolies siphon off the global surplus value produced by the production system, a 'monopoly rent' that enables oligopolistic groups to increase considerably their rate of profit. This levy is obtained by the exclusive access of oligopolies to the monetary and financial markets which thus become the dominant markets.

The capitalism of the generalized and financialized oligopolies is also globalized. Here, again, 'globalization' is in no way a new characteristic of capitalism. I have even gone further in the description of capitalist globalization, stressing its inherently 'polarizing' character (producing a growing gulf between the 'developed' centres of the system and its dominated peripheries). This has taken place at all stages of capitalist expansion in the past and present, as well as in the foreseeable future. I have also advanced the thesis that the new phase of globalization was necessarily associated with the emergence of the "collective imperialism of the Triad" (USA, Europe, Japan).

The new globalization is itself inseparable from the exclusive control of access to the natural resources of the planet exercised by collective imperialism. Hence the contradiction centre/peripheries – the North/South conflict in current parlance – is central in any possible transformation of the actually existing capitalism of our time. And more markedly than in the past this, in turn, requires the "military control of the planet" on the part of the collective imperialist centre.

The capitalism of the generalized, financialized and globalized oligopolies has thus become an 'obsolete' system, in the sense that the socialization of the oligopolies, that is the abolition of their private status, should now become the essential strategic objective in any genuine critical analysis of the real world. If this does not happen the system by itself can only produce more and more barbaric and criminal destruction – even the destruction of the planet itself.

The obsolete character of the system as it has reached the present stage of its evolution is itself inseparable from changes in the structures of the governing classes ('bourgeoisies'), political practice, ideology and political culture. The historical bourgeoisie is disappearing from the scene and is now being replaced by the plutocracy of the 'bosses' of the oligopolies. The drift in the practice of a democracy emptied of all content and the emergence of ideological expressions that are ultra reactionary are the necessary accompaniment of the obsolete character of contemporary capitalism.

The domination of the oligopolies is exercised in the central imperialist Triad in different conditions and by different means than those used in the countries of the peripheries of the system. It is a decisive difference, essential for identifying the major contradictions of the system and then imagining the possible evolutions in the North/South conflict, which will probably increase.

In the Triad, the oligopolies occupy the whole scene in economic decision-making. Not only do the oligopolies dominate the economic life of the countries of the Triad. They monopolize political power for their own advantage, the electoral political parties (right and left) having become their debtors. This situation is, for the foreseeable future, accepted as being 'legitimate', in spite of the degradation of democracy that it involves. It will not be threatened until, sometime in the future perhaps, 'anti-plutocracy fronts' are able to include on their agenda the abolition of the private management of oligopolies and their socialization, in complex and openly evolving forms.

Oligopolies exercise their power in the peripheries in completely different ways. It is true that outright delocalization and the expanding practice of subcontracting have given the oligopolies of the Triad some power to intervene direct into the economic life of the various countries. But they still remain independent countries dominated by local governing classes through which the oligopolies of the Triad are forced to operate.

All these conditions make it impossible to confuse the State in the Triad countries (which functions for the exclusive use of the oligarchy and is still legitimate) and the State in the peripheries. The latter never had the same legitimacy as it has in the centres and it may very well lose what little it goes have. Those in power are in fact fragile and vulnerable to social and political struggles. The hypothesis is unquestionably mistaken – even for the 'emerging countries' – that this vulnerability will be 'transitory' and likely to attenuate with the development of local capitalism, itself integrated into globalization, which derives from the linear vision of 'stages of development' (formulated by Rostow in 1960). But conventional thought and vulgar economics are not intellectually equipped to understand that 'catching up' in the system is impossible and that the gap between the centres and the peripheries will not 'gradually' disappear.

The oligopolies and the political powers that serve them in the countries of the Triad continue their sole aim of 'emerging from the financial crisis' and basically restoring the system as it was. There are good reasons to believe that this restoration – if it succeeds, which is not impossible, although more difficult than is generally thought – cannot be sustainable, because it involves returning to the expansion of finance, which is essential for the oligopolies if they are to appropriate monopoly rent for their own benefit. A new financial collapse, still more sensational than that of 2008, is therefore probable. But these considerations apart the restoration of the system, with the aim of allowing the expansion of the activities of the oligopolies to be resumed, would mean increasing the accumulation process by dispossessing the peoples of the South (through seizure of their natural resources, including their agricultural land). The main victims of this restoration will be the nations of the South, both the 'emerging' countries and the others.

So it is very likely that the 'North/South' conflicts are destined to become much greater in the future. The responses that the 'South' will give to these challenges could thus be pivotal in challenging the whole globalized system. This may not mean questioning 'capitalism' directly, but it would surely mean questioning the globalization commanded by the dominating oligopolies.

### **Capitalism, a parenthesis in history**

The principle of endless accumulation that defines capitalism is synonymous with exponential growth and this, like cancer, ends in death. Accumulation, which necessarily generates pauperisation, constitutes the objective background for struggles against capitalism. But it takes place mainly through the growing contrast between the opulence of the societies of the centre, that benefit from the imperialist rent and the destitution of the societies in the dominated peripheries. This conflict thus

becomes the central theme of the alternative ‘socialism or barbarism’. Historically, ‘actually existing’ capitalism has taken place in successive forms of accumulation through dispossession, not only at the outset (‘primitive accumulation’) but at all stages of its development. Once constituted, this ‘Atlantic’ capitalism set out to conquer the world and to rebuild it on the basis of a permanent dispossession of the conquered regions, which thus became the dominated peripheries of the system. This ‘victorious’ globalization has proved incapable of imposing itself lastingly. Hardly half a century after its triumph, which could have seemed even then to inaugurate the ‘end of history’, it was challenged by the revolution of the Russian semi-periphery and the (victorious) liberation struggles of Asia and Africa which mark the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – the first wave of struggles for the emancipation of workers and peoples.

In this context, I put the ‘new agrarian question’ at the heart of the challenge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The dispossession of the peasantry (Asian, African and Latin American) constitutes the main contemporary form of the tendency towards the pauperisation (in the sense that Marx gave to this ‘law’) that is associated with accumulation. Its implementation cannot be separated from the seizure of rent-seeking imperialism by the oligopolies, with or without agro-fuels. I deduce from this that the development of struggles on the land, the response that will be given through them to the future of the peasant societies of the South (almost half of humanity) will determine the capacity of workers and peoples to progress towards an authentic civilization, liberated from the domination of capital, for which I see no other name than that of socialism.

The plunder of the natural resources of the South makes it necessary to continue wasteful consumption for the exclusive benefit of the rich societies of the North and destroys all prospect of a development worthy of the name for the people of the South and it thus constitutes the other side of the medal as concerns pauperisation at the world level.

### ***From one long crisis to another***

The capitalism of the oligopolies, the political power of the oligarchies, the barbarous globalization, financialization, the hegemony of the United States, militarization of the management of a globalization at the service of the oligopolies, the decline of democracy, the pillage of the planet’s resources, the abandonment of the prospects for the development of the South: all these are indissolubly linked. The real challenge is thus: will the struggles succeed in converging to open the way, or ways to the long road of transition to world socialism? Or will they remain separated one from another, even coming into conflict with each other, and thus be ineffective and leave the initiative to the capital of the oligopolies?

It is worth going back to the first long crisis of capitalism, which shaped the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the parallel between the stages of development in these two crises is really striking.

The industrial capitalism that triumphed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century entered into crisis as from 1873. Capital reacted in two ways: by concentration and globalized expansion. The new monopolies seized the rent levied on all the surplus value generated by the exploitation of labour and accelerated the colonial conquest of the planet. These structural transformations enabled them to obtain soaring new profits and opened the way to the ‘*Belle Epoque*’ – from 1890 to 1914 – which represented the globalized domination of the capital of financialized monopolies. At the time the dominant discourse praised colonization (the ‘civilizing mission’) and described globalization as being identical with peace. The social democracy of the European workers rallied to this discourse. And yet the ‘*Belle Epoque*’, which was proclaimed as the ‘end of history’ by the leading ideologues of the era, ended in a world war, as only Lenin had foreseen. And the period that followed, up until the aftermath of the second world war, was to be a period of ‘wars and revolutions’. In 1920, the Russian revolution (the ‘weak link’ in the system), having been isolated after the defeat of the hopes for revolution in central Europe, the capital of the financialized monopolies restored the ‘*Belle Epoque*’ era, against all odds. This restoration, which was denounced by Keynes at the time, was at the origin of the financial collapse of 1929 and the subsequent depression that continued until the second world war.

The second systemic crisis of capitalism started in 1971, when the dollar lost its convertibility to gold, almost exactly one century after the first crisis. The rate of profit, investment and growth all shrank (and were never to return to the same levels they had enjoyed from 1945 to 1975). Capital responded to the challenge in the same way as in the preceding crisis: by a double movement of concentration and globalization. Thus it established the structures that were to define the second '*Belle Epoque*' – 1990 to 2008 - of financialized globalization that enabled the oligopolistic groups to maintain their monopoly rent. There was the same accompanying discourse: the 'market' guaranteed prosperity, democracy and peace – it was the 'end of history'. And, as before, the European socialists rallied to the new liberalism. Yet this new '*Belle Epoque*' was, from the outset, marked by war, waged by the North against the South, starting in 1990. And as the first financialized globalization led to 1929, the second produced 2008. We have now reached a crucial point when there is a probability of a new wave of 'wars and revolutions', at least global chaos.

***The second wave of peoples' emancipation: will it be a remake of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or an improvement?***

The contemporary world is governed by oligarchies. The management of contemporary globalization by these oligarchies is now in crisis.

The oligarchies of the North are counting on staying in power, once the period of crisis is over. They do not feel threatened. On the other hand, the fragility of the powers of the autocracies in the South is very visible. Thus the current globalization is vulnerable. Will it be challenged by the revolt in the South, as happened in the last century? Probably, but that is not enough. Because, for humankind to embark on the path to socialism, the only human alternative to chaos, it will be necessary to dismiss these oligarchies, their allies and their servants, both in the North and in the South.

This exclusive and total domination of capital had been inexorably imposed by the governing classes during the whole of the long, preceding crisis up to 1945. Only the triple victory, of democracy, socialism and the national liberation of peoples made it possible, from 1945 to 1980, to substitute for this permanent model of the capitalist ideal, the conflictual coexistence of three regulated social models, which were the Welfare State of the West's social democracy, the actually existing socialisms of the East and the popular nationalisms of the South. The loss of impetus and the consequent collapse of these three models made it possible to return to the exclusive domination of capital, called neoliberalism.

Thus everything was set to ensure the triumph – temporary, in fact, but believed to be definitive – of the alternative of so-called 'liberal democracy'. It is a miserable way of thinking – a veritable non-thinking – that takes no notice of Marx's decisive remarks about this bourgeois democracy which ignores the fact that those who decide are not those who are affected by the decisions. Those who decide, profiting from the reinforcing freedom of the control of property, are today the plutocrats of the capitalism of the oligopolies and the States that are their debtors. Obviously the workers and peoples concerned are hardly more than victims. But such illusions could have seemed believable, at least for a short while, because of the drift of the post-war systems, the origins of which the dogmatics did not allow themselves to understand. Liberal democracy could then seem to be the 'best of possible systems'.

The meeting of the G20 (London, April 2009) in no way starts up a 'reconstruction of the world'. And it is not perhaps by chance that it was followed by that of NATO, the militarized arm of contemporary imperialism and by the reinforcement of its military occupation in Afghanistan. The permanent war of the 'North' against the 'South' must go on. That reminds us of the reality: that the crisis of the system of oligopoly capitalism is inseparably linked to that of the hegemony of the United States, which is running out of steam. But what will take its place? Certainly not 'Europe' which does not exist apart from atlanticism and has no ambition to be independent, as the NATO demonstrates. China? This 'threat', which the media endlessly conjure up (a new 'yellow peril') is

baseless. The Chinese authorities know that their country does not have the means and they have no desire. The strategy of China is content with working towards a new globalization, without hegemonies, i.e. a negotiated pluricentric globalization. This is not considered acceptable either by the United States or by Europe.

Thus the chances of a possible development in that direction lie entirely with the countries of the South.

### **“Democracy”, what “democracy”?**

By choosing democracy as the battlefield to launch their offensive which primarily aimed at dismantling the Soviet Union and re-conquering East European countries, the *Atlantic Alliance* diplomacy had a stroke of genius. This idea had been floated since the 1970s and soon materialised with the creation of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – Abbreviation CSCE – and signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. In a book with a telling title by Jacques Andreani, (*Le Piège, Helsinki et la chute du communisme*; Odile Jacob 2005), the author explained how, following the agreement, the Soviets who expected NATO disarmament and real *détente*, were simply duped by their Western partners. It is noteworthy that the Atlantic Alliance countries’ “democratic” discourse is something relatively recent. Originally, did NATO not quite accommodate itself to Salazar, the Turkish generals and the Greek colonels? In the meantime, triad diplomacies lent their support to (and often installed) the worst dictatorships ever in South America, Africa and Asia.

Drawing the lessons from this victory, the ruling classes of imperialist triad have decided to pursue the strategy of centre-staging the debate on “democracy”. China has not been criticised for opening up its economy, but because its political management has been monopolised by the communist party. Cuba’s achievements which have no match across South America have been ignored, putting the focus instead, time and again, on its one-party-system. The same discourse has been on even in relation to Putin’s Russia.

Has this strategy been really aimed at making democracy prevail? The answer is clearly "no", unless you are naive. The single and only objective is to force resisting countries to accept a “market economy” open and integrated in the so-called liberal but actually imperialist global system and to reduce them to the state of dominated peripheries in the system. Once achieved, this objective prevents the advancement of democracy in the victimised countries concerned and cannot, in any way, enhance the response to the “democracy issue”. Incidentally, the “democracy” theme has been invoked only against countries resisting globalized liberal overture. The others have been less criticised for their clearly autocratic political management. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are perfect illustrations. But Georgia (pro-Atlantic Alliance) can also be cited and many others as well.

At best, the proposed “democratic” formula is no more than a caricature of an “electoral multiparty system” deprived of concerns for social progress but again and always – or almost always - associated with the type of social regression required and produced by dominant really existing capitalism (oligopolistic capitalism). The formula has already done a lot of damage to the credibility of democracy because peoples in disarray have given up and prefer instead to believe in backward-looking religious and ethnicity illusions.

As it appears, it is now necessary more than ever to step up *radical* criticism. I mean the type of criticism which associates rather than dissociates the democratisation of societies (and not only their practice of political management) with social progress (in a socialist perspective). This criticism cannot dissociate the struggle for democratisation from the struggle for socialism. There can be no socialism without democracy and neither can there be democratic progress outside a socialist prospect.

### **Ecological issue and would-be sustainable development**

Here again, one has to start with the real problem: continuous capitalist accumulation would lead to the destruction of our natural environment and ultimately life on the planet.

Capture of ecology by vulgar ideology operates on two levels: on the one hand by reducing measurement of use value to an “improved” measurement of exchange value, and on the other by integrating the ecological challenge with the ideology of “consensus”. Both these manoeuvres undermine the clear realisation that ecology and capitalism are, by their nature, in opposition. The “ecological costs” are, in this way of thinking, assimilated to external economies. The vulgar method of measuring cost/benefit in terms of exchange value (itself conflated with market price) is then used to define a “fair price” integrating external economies and diseconomies. And Bob’s your uncle. In fact, as can already be seen, oligopolies have seized hold of ecology to justify the opening up of new fields to their destructive expansion. The capture of ecological discourse by the political culture of the consensus (a necessary expression of the conception of capitalism as the end of history) has an easy ride. For it is responding to the alienation and illusion which feed the dominant culture, that of capitalism. An easy ride because this culture is actual, and holds a dominant place in the minds of the majority of human beings, in the South as well as in the North. In contrast, the expression of the demands of the socialist counter-culture is fraught with difficulty. Because socialist culture is not there in front of our eyes. It is part of a future to be invented, a project of civilisation, open to the creativity of the imagination. Slogans (such as “socialisation through democracy and not through the market”) are not enough, despite their power to pave the way for the historical process of transformation. For what is at stake is a long “secular” process of societal reconstruction based on principles other than those of capitalism, in both the North and the South, which cannot be supposed to take place “rapidly”. Socialism is a higher stage of civilization. But construction of the future, however far away, begins today.

### **Defeating military control of the planet by imperialists**

To maintain their monopoly guaranteed rent, oligopolies cannot content themselves with draining their own “national economies” alone. Given their global dimension, they can even drain more from the economies of dominated, emerging and marginalised peripheries. Looting the resources of the whole planet and worker overexploitation provide the material for imperialist guaranteed rent, which in turn, constitutes the condition for a social consensus that has then become possible in the opulent societies of the North. The real challenge confronting the peoples is therefore first and foremost the militarisation of globalisation. “*Empire of chaos*”, as I have been describing the system since 1991 and permanent war against the peoples of the South are synonymous. This is why defeating the triad armed forces, forcing the United States to abandon their bases deployed on all continents, dismantling NATO must become the primary strategic objectives of democratic progressive forces in both North and South. (1)

This is probably the objective pursued by the “Shanghai Group” which has engaged in reviving the spirit of “Non-alignment” to be defined now as “non-alignment with imperialist globalisation and the triad political and military project”

### **“Aid”, an additional tool for controlling vulnerable countries**

“International aid”, described as something essential for the survival of “Least Developed Countries” (UN terminology to designate many African and a few other countries) is relevant here because the real objective of aid, which is destined to the most vulnerable of the peripheral countries, is to erect an additional obstacle to their joining an alternative South front.(2)

Aid concepts have been narrowly framed; its architecture was defined in the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005), a document written by OECD staff and later imposed on recipient countries. The overall conditionality defined by an alignment with the principles of liberal globalisation – to open up markets, to become “attractive” to foreign private investments – is omnipresent. From this perspective, the *Paris Declaration* is a regression compared to the practices of “development decades” (1960-1970)

when the principle of free choice by the South countries of their system and economic and social policies was admitted. Under such conditions, aid policies and their apparent immediate objectives are indissociable from the geopolitical objectives of imperialism. Obviously, the different regions of the Planet do not have identical functions in the globalised liberal system. It is therefore not enough to indicate whatever constitutes their common denominator (trade liberalisation, opening up to financial flows, privatisation etc.).

Sub-Saharan Africa is perfectly integrated into the global system and not at all “marginalised” as many people unfortunately too often speculate without thinking: the external trade of the region represents 45 % of its GDP, compared to 30% for Asia and South America and 15% for each of the three regions making up the triad. Quantitatively therefore Africa is “more” and not “less” integrated but in a different way (3). The geo-economy of the region is based on two sets of productions which are decisive in the shaping of its structures and definition of its position in the global system: (i) “tropical” agricultural exports: coffee, cocoa, cotton, peanut, fruits, palm oil etc, (ii) hydrocarbons and mining: copper, gold, precious metals, diamond etc. The former provide the “survival” means beyond the food produced for their own consumption by farmers who are financing the State’s graft on the local economy and also the reproduction of the “middle classes” through public spending. The local ruling classes are more interested in these productions than the dominant economies. The latter are much more interested in the proceeds from the natural resources of the continent. The interest today is in hydrocarbons and rare minerals and tomorrow it may well be in reserves for the development of agro fuel, the sun (when long distance conveyance of solar energy becomes possible in the next few decades), water (when its direct or indirect export will be made possible).

The race for securing rural territories that can accommodate the expansion of agro fuels has already started in South America. From this perspective, Africa offers vast possibilities. Malagasy has ignited the movement and has already conceded large areas of lands in the western part of the country. The implementation of the Congolese Rural Code (2008) inspired by Belgian cooperation and FAO will certainly allow agribusiness to secure agrarian lands on a large scale for the purpose of “developing” them just as the Mining Code had allowed the plundering of the colony’s mineral resources in the past. The useless farmers will pay the price; their foreseeable extreme impoverishment will perhaps attract the interest of future humanitarian aid and “aid” programmes for poverty reduction! The new phase of history that has just started is characterised by sharpened conflicts for access to the natural resources of the planet. The triad intends to have exclusive access to this “useful” Africa (that of reserves of natural resources) and prevent the “emerging countries” whose needs in that area are already overwhelming and will grow bigger and bigger, from gaining access to them. The guarantee of this exclusive access requires political control and reducing vulnerable African States to the state of “client States”. It is therefore not misleading to consider that the objective of aid is to “corrupt” the ruling classes. Beyond financial levies (alas widely known though usually commented upon as if donors played no part in it!), aid discharges very well this political function having become “essential” (since it has become an important source of budget financing). It is then necessary to conceive aid to become permanent and not to prepare for its disappearance through consistent development. Also important is the fact that this aid should not be exclusively and entirely reserved for the ruling classes, the “government”. It should also arouse the interest of the “oppositions” capable of succeeding them. At this point, the role of the so-called civil society and some NGOs becomes relevant. To be really politically efficient, the aid in question should also contribute to maintaining farmer integration into this global system, as this integration feeds an additional source of government revenue.

### **Poverty, civil society, good governance: the poor rhetoric of the dominant discourse**

This allegedly self-assigned objective of the dominant discourse is “to reduce or even eradicate poverty” by relying on the “civil society” to replace a “bad governance” by a good one. The very term of “poverty” pertains to a language as old as the world, the language of charity which belongs to the past, not the present and to the future. It precedes the formation of a developed language by modern social thinking which seeks to be scientific that is, by discovering the mechanisms that engender an observable and observed phenomenon. The massive literature on poverty exclusively – or almost –

puts the focus on “locating” the phenomenon and quantifying it. It does not ask some upstream questions such as: what are the mechanisms that engender the poverty in question? Can they be related to fundamental rules (like competition) forming the base of our systems? And in particular, concerning the assisted South countries, the development strategies and policies designed for them?

Even taken seriously (therefore overlooking its abusive use), does the “civil society” concept has the necessary elevation that is required of a concept to kick off and be given consideration in a serious and scientific-oriented debate? As proposed to us, “the civil society” in question is associated with a consensus ideology. A double consensus: (i) that there is no alternative to the “market economy” (a gross expression by itself to serve as a substitute for the analysis of past and contemporary “really existing capitalism”); (ii) that there is no alternative to representative democracy founded on electoral multiparty system (conceived as “democracy”), to serve as a substitute for a society democratisation concept which by itself is a never-ending process.

In counterpoint, struggles in history have allowed the emergence of political cultures founded on the recognition of conflict of social and national interests, giving, inter-alia, some meaning to the terms “right” and “left” by which the right and power to imagine alternatives and not exclusively “alternations” in the exercise of power (changing names to do the same thing) is conferred on creative democracy.

”Governance” is an invention substituted for “power”. The opposition between the two adjectives – good or bad governance – is reminiscent of manichaeism and moralism substituted for reality analysis as scientific as possible. Once again, this fashion came from the USA where sermon has often dominated political discourse. “Good governance” implies that the “decision-maker” is “fair”, “objective” (retains the “best solution”), “neutral” (accepting symmetrical presentation of arguments), and on top of all “honest” (even of course in the meanest financial sense of the term). Reading the literature produced by the World Bank on the subject is like you are re-reading the grievances submitted – in general, by religious and/or law men (few women!) – to the “just despot” (not even enlightened!) in the ancient times of the Orient.

The visible ideology behind this is simply trying to overlook the real issue: what social interests does the incumbent regime whatever it may be represent and defend? How can the transformation of power be advanced such that it gradually becomes the instrument of the majorities, in particular, that of the victims of the system as it is? Given that the multiparty electoral recipe has shown its limitations on this aspect.

### **“Post-modernist” discourse**

Post modernist discourse concludes the discourse titled by some “new spirit of capitalism”, but which should be better described as the ideology of tardy capitalism/imperialism of oligopolies. I wish to refer the reader to the book written by Nkolo Foe (*Le Post modernisme*;2009) who strongly established the perfectly functional substance aimed at serving the real interests of the dominant forces (4). Modernism was inaugurated by the discourse of Enlightenment in the European XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century, in parallel with the triumph of European historical form of capitalism and imperialism the latter being consubstantial, and later conquered the world. It conveys its contradictions and limitations. The desire for universalism which it formulates is defined by the affirmation of human rights (not necessarily women’s) which in substance are those of bourgeois individualism. What is more, the real capitalism with which this form of modernity is associated is an imperialism that denies similar rights for non-European peoples conquered and submitted to the demands for producing an imperialist guaranteed income to the benefit of oligopolies. Criticism of this bourgeois and capitalist/imperialist modernity is certainly necessary. The new Reason wanted to be emancipating; and it was to the extent that it freed the society from the alienations and oppressions of the old regimes and as such constituted a guarantee for progress, more precisely a form of limited and contradictory progress because this Reason is that of a society ultimately managed by capital.



Post modernism proposes no radical criticism that would lead to the emancipation of individual and society. Instead, its proposal is to return to pre-modern and pre-capitalist alienations. So the forms of sociability it tries to promote is bound to be in keeping with “tribalist identity” membership of (Para-religious or Para-ethnic) communities at the opposite extremes of what is required to deepen democracy which has become synonymous with “tyrannizing the people” who dare question the wise management exercised by *executives* at the service of oligopolies. The criticisms levied against the “grand discourses” (Enlightenment, democracy, progress, socialism, national liberation) are not future-oriented; instead they look back at an imaginary and false past and by the way perfectly idealised. The extreme fragmentation of popular majorities has thus been facilitated, making them accept to adjust to the logic of reproducing the domination of oligopolies and imperialism. Fragmentation does not hinder domination; it even makes it easier. Far from being a conscious and lucid agent of social transformation, the individual in question is enslaved to triumphant merchandizing. The citizen gives in to being a consumer/spectator. He/she is no longer a citizen longing for emancipation; he/she has become instead a colourless being who accepts submission.

## **Two conclusions**

### ***First : The rising North-South conflict***

*Global capitalism does not call into question the opposition centre/periphery; on the contrary it accentuates its conflict.*

Contemporary capitalism has reached an extreme stage of centralisation of capital ownership: three to five thousand groups, nearly all located in the countries of the Triad (United States, Europe, Japan) control, for the first time in history, all the systems of production, distribution and consumption at the scales of the nations of the Centre and, indirectly, that of the global system. These generalised monopolies centralise for their benefit an increased imperialist rent. The latter comes from multiple sources that are visible (the low wages paid in the export industries of the peripheries) or hidden behind their control of the globalised financial market, overprotection of industrial patents, their quasi-exclusive access to the natural resources of the whole planet, and lastly, the globalisation of the powerful political means at the disposal of Western powers, strengthened by their quasi monopoly over weapons of mass destruction. Thereby, the contradiction centre/periphery, far from being alleviated by the deepening of globalisation, is accentuated.

Yet, to all appearances, the so-called emerging countries (China, India, Brazil and others) have benefited from the globalisation of the 1990s and 2000s that enabled them to accelerate their growth pace. It is those appearances that made us say – hastily – that the conflict centre/periphery is for them almost extinct (“they are catching up” in and through capitalist globalisation). The question is to know why it has been so and whether the pursuit of this evolution is sustainable. Capitalism has entered into a long structural crisis as from the 1970s. The capital reacted to this crisis with centralisation and financiarisation. Liberal globalisation crowned it all. The success of this response has created the conditions for a marked blooming from 1990 to 2008 (which I qualified as “*Belle Epoque 2*”). The emerging countries’ strategies of growth acceleration through prioritisation of their exports fell within that era which ensured their immediate success.

The pursuit of this globalised capitalist option is unsustainable for many reasons. The main one is that this way will not make it possible to absorb the gigantic mass of peasantries (nearly half humanity still, located for almost all in the three continents: Asia, Africa and Latin America) in a development of modern industries and services. The historic capitalist way based on private ownership of the agrarian soil and its reduction to the status of merchandise was possible only for Europe, thanks to the massive emigration permitted by the conquest of the Americas (the “Europeans” accounted for 18% of the world population in 1500; in 1900, Europeans from Europe and migrants outside of Europe represented 36%). The people for Asia and Africa, who have no such opportunity, cannot follow the

same development path. In other words, while historic capitalism did solve the agrarian issue for Europe, it remains unable to do so in the peripheries.

Those among the countries in the South who would persist in this way and accept to “adjust” on a day-to-day basis to conditions that would be increasingly severe with the deepening of the crisis, will find themselves not to have built a “national capitalism” capable of dealing on equal terms with the collective imperialism of the Triad, but in the situation of countries ravaged by a *lumpen* capitalism, for all that vulnerable and thereby dominated. Imperialist powers only see in these countries “emerging markets” whose development will necessarily fall within this deplorable perspective. But the countries concerned see themselves as “emerging nations”. The difference is significant.

The nations in the South, therefore, are to loose their illusions relating to the “accelerated development in and through globalisation”. The increasing difficulties of adjustment already promote the fights of the victims – peasants for land, workers for better wages, peoples for the conquest of democratic rights. In order to meet the challenge, the powers will have to refocus their development on the domestic market. This new self-centred development path – unavoidable – will remain certainly difficult. It must associate complementary but also conflicting means: the recourse to the “market” (which, in the modern world, is always a “capitalist” market) and to social planning (as little bureaucratic as possible, paving the way, as much as possible, to the active intervention of popular classes).

The conflict between the collective imperialism of the Triad and the nations of the South is to intensify around issues relating to access to world services, technologies, and the globalised financial market. Imperialism is aware that the monopolies that ensure its rent are fragile and the countries in the South can annihilate their power; that’s why its sole response consists in the deployment of the project of military control of the Planet by the armed forces of the United States and their subordinated allies in NATO.

Will the conflict centre/periphery mobilise all the Southern countries? This was the case in the Bandung era, despite the huge differences between the Southern countries of the time, not less marked than today. But this possibility is not certain. The emerging countries – the real periphery of contemporary capitalism – could nurture the illusion that they can, like the imperialist countries, even if it is in acute competition with them, benefit from the plundering of the resources of the devastated peripheries (a reality that was repeated in history) which are thereby particularly powerless.

I would like to suggest here a comparison with the history of Bandung. Even before the Conference called by the same name, (1955) and “non-alignment” (1960), radical reflection groups had stood up to propose the States of Asia and Africa, possible and efficient counter strategies that forced the imperialism of that era to step back. Today, similar independent initiatives from the South, ignoring the seek for an impossible acceptable consensus are absolutely necessary.

What will the world be “after the crisis”? Impossible to tell. Let us not forget that the first long crisis which started in the 1870s, and to which the capital of that time had responded also with monopolisation, (colonial) globalisation and financierisation, has led – after the short bloom of the first “*Belle Epoque*” (1894-1914), to 1914-1945, *i. e.*, World War I, the Russian revolution, the 1929 crisis, Nazism, World War II, the Chinese Revolution. It is those “events” – not easily qualified as minor – that shaped the “post crisis” world, that is, the combination during the Glorious Thirty of social-democracy in the West, the really existing socialisms in the East, and the popular nationalisms of the Bandung era (1955-1980) in the South. The second crisis will call for transformations of equal scope (even if they will be “different”). The conflict centre/periphery and the conflict capitalism/perspectives that requires going beyond that one are indissociable.

***Second : Africa, a particularly vulnerable region in globalisation in crisis***

Africa had been plunged in the dark night of colonisation, a brutal form of globalisation imposed by the capitalism of the monopolies in response to its first great depression in the late XIXth Century, taking over from the slave trade, itself at the root of its historical regression. The national liberation movements, which finally succeeded in imposing the independence of the continent's states, then conceived a big project of African Renaissance: an ambitious project as was required, associating an accelerated development, both agricultural and industrial, to the universalisation of education and to constructions of regional integrations falling within a pan-African perspective.

The historical blocks built by the National Liberation Movements imposed this perspective equal to the challenge. And the radical intelligentsia, in conceptualising and implementing this project, had been able to respond to the requirements of the challenge, think with audacity and think by itself. During the 1960s and 1970s, Africa has thereby made giant progress, to the extent that the new image of the continent made forget the image of desolation inherited from colonisation.

But this social progress was gradually bogged down under the combined effect of the internal contradictions whose emergence it developed, and the hostility of imperialism. The peasantries have been gradually marginalised in the historical blocks in power, to the benefit of the ruling classes – and sometimes new middle classes – whose desire is to become the absolute masters of local power, thereby having to make the degenerate forms of the State fulfil the functions of a comprador State.

Two major constraints to the first achievements of independent Africa are at the origin of this drift. The first one has to do with the insignificance of the results in the unavoidable industrialisation, stemming from the illusions that foreign capital was able to help resolve the issue of its financing. The second one relates to the cultural stagnation of African nations which remained prisoners of the exclusive use of the colonisation's foreign languages.

These failures have created the conditions that enabled imperialism to resume the offensive in view of the recolonisation of Africa during the 1980s/90s, through the structural adjustment programmes, privatisation, the destruction of States, their submission to the diktats of "aid donor clubs", accompanied by the insipid discourses in fashion on "poverty", "good governance" and civil society.

Africa today is then bound to no longer have ambition beyond its adjustment on a day-to-day basis to the requirements of the pursuit of the expansion of the capitalism of oligopolies; a way which we said could only lead to absolute disaster. In this perspective, Africa only exists for her natural resources it offers to plunder: the resources of its subsoil (hydrocarbons, gold, diamonds and even more important, rare minerals), her lands now offered to the expansion of agribusiness for new export productions (agrofuels and other).

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## **SAMIR AMIN ABSTRACT**

Contemporary capitalism has reached an extreme stage of centralisation of capital ownership. These generalised monopolies centralise for their benefit an increased imperialist rent. Thereby, the contradiction centre/periphery, far from being alleviated by the deepening of globalisation, is accentuated. Yet, the emerging countries (China, India, Brazil and others) have benefited from the globalisation of the 1990s and 2000s that enabled them to accelerate their growth pace. The pursuit of this globalised capitalist option is unsustainable: this way will not make it possible to absorb the gigantic mass of peasantries in a development of modern industries and services. The historic capitalist way based on private ownership of the agrarian soil was possible only for Europe, thanks to the massive emigration permitted by the conquest of the Americas. The people for Asia and Africa, who have no such opportunity, cannot follow the same development path. In other words, while historic capitalism did solve the agrarian issue for Europe, it remains unable to do so in the peripheries. Those among the countries in the South who would persist in this way and accept to “adjust” on a day-to-day basis to conditions that would be increasingly severe with the deepening of the crisis, will find themselves not to have built a “national capitalism” capable of dealing on equal terms with the collective imperialism of the Triad, but in the situation of countries ravaged by a *lumpen* capitalism, for all that vulnerable and thereby dominated. Imperialist powers only see in these countries “emerging markets” whose development will necessarily fall within this deplorable perspective. But the countries concerned see themselves as “emerging nations”. The difference is significant. Will the conflict centre/periphery mobilise all the Southern countries?

## **KEY WORDS**

**Generalized oligopolies, financialization, imperialist rent, accumulation by dispossession, aid, postmodernism**