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success in selling in international markets both fair trade and organic products - coffees, teas, chocolate, tropical fruit, nuts, wines, cottons etc., and thereby improving the terms of trade.¹³

It is impossible to end this review without commenting that anyone who reads every page, as I did, will find that, at least in the second of the *Long Twentieth Century* volumes, when opening up the pages the whole bulk of the 262 pages falls out from the binding. In going to an Indian printer the OUP seems to have made a false economy, but it must be said that the first volume did not fall apart in the same way, despite the same treatment, nor did the much longer Tulika and Zed Press book on *The New Development Economics*, which was also printed and bound in India, but by a different printer. Such are the diversities of technological development. It is a good example of the varying results of transfers of technology in differing conditions, discussed by Sonali Deraniyagala of SOAS in his contribution to this book. The message of these books is obvious: you need horses for courses.

Endnotes

1. Michael Barratt Brown, *Economics of Imperialism*, Penguin, 1974
2. Michael Barratt Brown, *Africa's Choices: After 30 Years of the World Bank*, Penguin, 1995.
3. Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, OUP, 1962.
4. Basil Davidson, *The African Genius*, James Currey, 1969.
5. Barratt Brown, see note 2.
6. Ibid.
7. Michael Barratt Brown, *Models in Political Economy*, Penguin, second edition 1995, chapter 17, 'The African Model'.
8. Barratt Brown, see note 2.
9. Ibid.
10. S.B.Saul, *Studies in British Overseas Trade, 1870-1914*, Liverpool, 1960.

11. Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism*, Heinemann, 1963

12. See Peter Robbins' studies in Michael Barratt Brown and Pauline Tiffen, *Short Changed: Africa in World Trade*, Pluto Press, 1992.

13. Michael Barratt Brown, 'Fair Trade with Africa' in this issue of ROAPE.

A Life Looking Forward: Memoirs of an Independent Marxist, by Samir Amin; London: Zed Books, 2006; 266pp; £16.99 (pb). ISBN: 1842777831. Reviewed by Jeggan C. Senghor, ICS, University of London.

As is to be expected, the memoirs of Samir Amin depart from conventional methods and approaches to recording life experiences. He goes beyond presenting a linear evolution of the more prominent events in his life in relation to his own growth and development. Rather, he intimately intertwines three levels of analysis, namely, the personal, the historical-political statement of ideology, and the transmission of the ideology to his institution-building operations in Africa and globally.

Concerning matters of a personal nature, the first chapter which deals with his childhood is somewhat in the tradition of a biography. Not only does the writer trace his maternal and paternal lineage but the normal warmth and closeness of family life pervade these early sections of the book. The comfort of family is particularly strong with his grandparents and intricate bonds were cemented within the nuclear family. Similarly, school life and the large network of friends and acquaintances established in the communities in Port Said and Qift made for a very happy childhood. In this regard, relationships with his teachers at the *lycée* were particularly influential. Throughout other stages in this life journey personalities – high-brow and low-brow – turn up here and there. Not

only does the author have an incredibly extensive network of friends and comrades but human relations are highly valued by him. Perhaps nowhere is this more vividly illustrated than in life in Bamako, Mali (pp. 120-131)

Even a cursory reading of these early chapters leads to the observation that Samir Amin was a scion of a privileged family. His was a bourgeois upbringing, with good food, beach visits, cars, country rides, and visits to different parts of the country. In terms of ancestry, his father's family belonged to 'the Coptic aristocracy' (p.1); his maternal grandmother 'was one of the descendants of the French revolutionary Jean-Baptiste Drouet who played a role in the arrest of Louis XVI at Varennes in 1791' (pp.3-4). His paternal grandfather was a railway engineer – 'he should have become a "director" (that is, at that time, a minister)' (p.2). His father and mother were medical doctors, having both been trained in Strasbourg; for much of his career his father was a health inspector and general purpose state physician. Samir himself went to Paris at the age of 16 years and over the next 10 years had his post-baccalaureate and university education up to the doctorate level. All this in the 1930s and the war years.

The family and broader childhood experiences provided a 'vanguard way of thinking and a system of values' (p.1) which left more than an indelible impression on a young mind which, in response, as early as the age of six years, declared a commitment to changing the circumstances of poverty and inequality to which the vast majority of fellow citizens were condemned. Samir Amin's ancestry 'was a happy meeting between the line of French Jacobinism and the line of Egyptian national democracy'. Grandfather was a freemason and socialist and father's strong communist sympathies grounded on what Amin refers to as a 'social sense' and 'social vision of problems'. Compared to Victoria College, the

local English school, the liberal and progressive educational philosophy of the *Lycée* in Port Said also created an environment in which the young Amin was encouraged to read extensively the classics of marxism, to debate with schoolmates and teachers and to organise the group of 'young communists' on the premises. Similarly for life at Lycee Henri IV and at the Institute of Political Science (Sciences Po) in Paris.

In a sense the second level relates, first, to an update on developments in the socialist/communist camp and in the anti-colonialist struggles in the 1940s and 1950s, building on the author's *Re-reading the Postwar Period: An Intellectual Itinerary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994). One such was the establishment of the new world system involving a radical transformation in the structure of the world political system. Naturally, some epochal events had a decisive impact on the thinking of the author. An example was the relationship between bourgeois revolution and socialist revolution on the periphery of the capitalist system; the rise of the national bourgeoisie in the periphery demonstrated the simplistic nature of the belief that the radical development of national liberation towards socialism was a natural progression. These and related issues are the subject of a separate chapter on the political context in the 1960-1998 period which summarizes sections in the above-mentioned tome.

A fundamental principle in marxism is the unity of theory and praxis. The third level of analysis in these memoirs relates to concrete activities undertaken by Samir Amin, an independent marxist, in (re)shaping objective conditions. For him the period spent working in Mwasasa Iqtisadia (an autonomous state holding institution) in Cairo, synchronized with that at the Service des Etudes Economiques et Financières (SEEF) in Paris, in that was professionally satisfying and it was punctuated by communist political

activities which, in the case of Cairo, led to his escape from arrest. The three years spent working for the newly-born Government of Mali – which had declared Marxism Leninism as the ‘state religion’ – opened up new vistas on the realities of underdevelopment and the challenges of socio-economic planning in such a context. As he notes, ‘The idea was not to dream up some spectacular advance on the highway of progress, but to predict the dangers on the winding road ahead’ (p.114). The actual process of producing the first Plan is instructive, especially in that the constraints confronted were to be replicated in many other African countries. Likewise the fate of the first Plan – which he summarized as ‘from drift to debacle’.

IDEP (United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, Dakar, Senegal), Codesria (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), and the Third World Forum are institutions that produce knowledge through research, process knowledge through seminars, workshops and conferences, and disseminate knowledge through teaching and training activities. Samir Amin played a central role in the birth and nurturing of these institutions and, accordingly, he devotes about one-fifth of the memoirs to this phase. This slice of the memoirs is of particular interest to the reviewer. As a young researcher at IFAN, University of Dakar, I spent many hours sitting in on lectures in IDEP, participating in debates, and engaging in discussions with the staff. As fate would have it the reviewer was also to succeed the immediate successor to Samir Amin (Essam Montasser of Egypt) as Director, from 1990 to 2000. From this vantage position I can confirm that ‘The 1970s were the high point for IDEP’ (p.208). Amin’s tenure not only brought stability to the institute but its reputation was established throughout the continent and beyond. Likewise, in terms of numbers and quality of professional staffing, range

and diversity of activities, productivity and impact, and any other indices of successful institution-building this period has not been matched. Indeed, it served as a point of reference for the management of the 1990s.

Two other comments on this part of the memoirs. First, Samir Amin casts his term in IDEP in the context of the intricacies of the UN bureaucracy and the machinations of UN bureaucrats. This is interesting, if even one does not agree completely with his views. Second, as defined by the author, the strategic objective of IDEP was ‘to create an independent centre in Africa for critical thought’, a channel for promoting African thinking and reflection on the continent’s development strategy (p.210). On the other hand, those he termed the ‘enemies’ of IDEP, within and outside the UN, perceived his intention as one of using the institution as a base for propagating marxist socialist ideology and building an anti-West coalition of radical ideologues masking as academics. Eventually, the more powerful antagonistic forces marshalled against the institution were overwhelming and IDEP was never to be the same again. The offsprings, Codesria and the Third World Forum, were ‘saved from the wreckage’ (p.209).

A Life Looking Forward, a translation from the French original (1993), is a companion to all the numerous works of Amin, especially in that it re-emphasises some of his major theoretical contributions to a critique of global capitalism and the struggle against world hegemony. Equally valuable is the fact that it brings out the person out of an avant guard intellectual. His life experiences in a multiple of cultures – Egypt, France, and West Africa – and the vast panoply of personalities mentioned through the book add considerable to the value of the well-rounded book. *A Life Looking Forward* is a model for Third World and African scholars, notably those of Samir Amin’s pioneering generation.