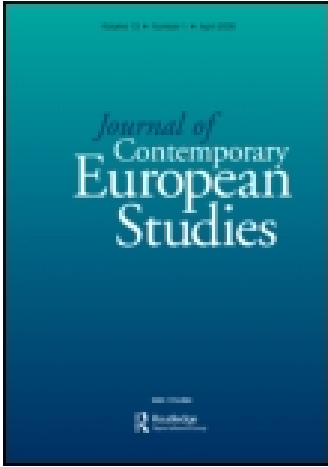


This article was downloaded by: [University of Auckland Library]
On: 09 February 2015, At: 14:05
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:
1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer
Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Area Studies

Publication details, including
instructions for authors and subscription
information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjea18>

The empire of chaos? Europe, the South and the 'new world order'

Samir Amin ^a

^a Lectures at the United Nations
University, Dakar

Published online: 25 Apr 2008.

To cite this article: Samir Amin (1994) The empire of chaos? Europe, the South and the 'new world order', *Journal of Area Studies*, 2:4, 21-29

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02613539408455703>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or

howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

The Empire of Chaos? Europe, the South and the 'New World Order'¹

Samir Amin

Introduction

The history of the whole of the Arab-African region has been one of subjugation to the colonial expansion of the maritime powers of Western Europe. Since the Second World War, that colonial order has been radically altered by four principal factors: 1) the appearance of national liberation movements, thanks to which Arab and African states were able, through war or negotiation, to obtain their independence; 2) the convergence or overlapping of this North-South conflict with the East-West conflict, one consequence of which was the support from the Soviet Union to radical elements within the national liberation movements and within the States born of them; 3) the process of European integration, and the expansion of the EEC from six members to 12; 4) the location of this process of European integration within a deepening of the globalization process of the capitalist system under the hegemony of the USA. From these remarks we can see that any discussion of relations between Europe, the Arab world and subsaharan Africa must be situated within a wider framework than that of their geography, and we must not, in particular, forget the enormous presence of the USA.

The rebuilding of African and Arab countries in the post-war era has had varying degrees of success, and the results have been mixed. The social and political complexion of the whole continent is doubtless radically different from what it was half a century ago and its 'modernization' undeniable—even if the positive and negative aspects of such 'modernization' are inextricably linked, whichever analytic criteria one adopts. I will put the emphasis on the limitations of this period of history, because I believe that the structures within which this historic dynamic was able to function have exhausted their potential. Hence the present 'crisis', of which the Gulf War was such a tragic symptom and which it seems to me will certainly occupy us for the medium-term future².

The limitations of the post-colonial period: I

For the whole of the continent south of the Sahara, 'reconstruction' within the framework under discussion here—balkanization of the political map and neo-

colonial structures of association with the countries of the EEC—could never have gone very far. On the contrary, such 'reconstruction' helped to confine this part of the South to 'specialization' in agriculture and the extractive industries. Such 'specialization' corresponded perfectly well to the principle of polarization which had, from the industrial revolution to the Second World War, defined the relation between the core countries and the peripheries. But it did not correspond very well to the basic principle of the new polarization, namely, the industrialisation of the periphery. The Lomé Conventions thus carry a heavy burden of responsibility for the economic regression of a large part of the continent and its reduction to the status of a 'Fourth World'. And if, as I believe is the case, those with real political power in Europe are unable to conceive of an alternative other than rhetorically, the medium term will probably see a preponderance of centrifugal over centripetal forces in Africa.

The limitations of the post-colonial period: 2

Attempts at radical, 'national' reconstruction were made in what I have called the 'spirit of Bandung' (1955-1975)³. The aim was to put into effect a plan of modernization developed by the national bourgeoisie, a plan which, objectively, took its place within the new dynamic of global capitalist expansion (the industrialisation of the peripheries). Such plans were based on internal economic and social reforms (agricultural reform, nationalisations and populist measures). Conflicts with Western interests were thus limited, and the 'non-aligned' countries were able to mobilize Soviet support for the negotiation of more favourable terms. This strategy failed firstly because of its internal limitations (those of populism), reflecting what I call the illusion of the impossible national bourgeois project, and secondly because of the collapse of Soviet support. In a few cases, such radical nationalism undeniably led to some partial successes (incipient industrialisation and some social change). But in others, particularly south of the Sahara, the little that could be achieved in 'the spirit of Bandung' was quickly undermined by the extreme fragility of State structures. Subsequent collective attempts to negotiate better international terms, known as the 'New International Economic Order' (1975), met with blanket refusal in the West, a refusal which was but a prelude to the 'counter-offensive' begun in 1980 with the aim of reducing peripheral countries once more to the state of 'compradores'. The European States' alignment with US strategy, of which the World Bank and the IMF were the two principal vehicles, was a part of this generalised offensive. So the Bandung project solved fewer problems than are left now after its collapse. Here as well, then, there is a danger that the medium-term future may present the countries concerned with a series of dead ends. These will last as long as it takes for a progressive social and political alternative to replace the false and outdated solutions which demonstrate nothing but the disintegration of

peoples in need of a strategy.

The new world capitalist system: prospects and contradictions

The era which followed on the end of the Second World War is now clearly over, and the suddenness of the Soviet Union's collapse is but the most glaring manifestation of that fact. Does this, then, provide the basic conditions for a reconstructed, integrated world system and thence for a more or less generalised economic expansion (even if, inevitably, accompanied by persistent inequalities)? The discourse of the dominant powers sees only this prospect. Such discourse perceives only 'minor', 'temporary' problems, and is incapable of understanding the real obstacles to such a development, and still less the growing and explosive internal contradictions which, to my mind, make their projection highly improbable. We should add that the Gulf War provided an opportunity for the Western media to produce a lot of talk about the additional virtues of such a development, which would, according to them, open the way for the building of a new world order based on the rule of 'law' (!) and 'justice' (!!), the basis for a long-lasting peace, etc.

Contrary to these claims, which have no scientific basis whatsoever, I shall insist on the enormous unknowns which render any attempt at prediction totally valueless. All scenarios, even the wildest, have been made 'possible' by the fact that one can manipulate more or less as one wishes—on paper—a whole range of factors whose future development is, in all cases, extremely uncertain. In such conditions it is better to content oneself with identifying the principal contradictions inherent in the new world capitalist system and with analysing the explosive situations to which they are leading. In my opinion, two major unknowns will in the medium term determine how we find our way across the uncharted and stormy seas ahead. The first concerns the answers that China and the countries of the ex-USSR find in response to their own internal problems and to the problem of their (greater or lesser) integration into the world capitalist system. Chaos, disintegration and peripherization? Reconstruction on capitalist lines, enabling these nations relatively quickly to regain strong positions in a balanced world system? Or evolution towards a more progressive redefinition of social relations? The second unknown concerns the ways—which will unavoidably be violent—in which the peoples of the South manifest their opposition to the 'actually existing' world capitalist system of which they are the victims. Will these reactions lay the foundations for social and political reconstruction on a national or regional basis, opening up the prospect of a progressive, 'national and popular' way forward? Or will they remain trapped in the chaos of discrete, short-term reactions to the impossible adjustments demanded by liberal ideology and to the imposition of 'comprador' status? As far as these questions relating to the evolution of the East and the South are concerned

—and these regions represent four fifths of the world's population, thus determining the future of the world in the longer term—nothing can be certain in the medium term.

Will this uncertainty (which will thus continue to reign in the East and the South) not render problematic the postulated reconstruction of the world system, supposedly based on the increasing integration of its core regions (North America, Japan, Western and Central Europe), and taking along with it the more dynamic parts of the semi-periphery? Generally speaking, the dominant analyses put the emphasis on the development of the conditions for economic competition between the USA, Europe and Japan. On that basis they put forward the different possible scenarios for the realignment of global economic relations, within which are situated the process of European integration and possible regional polarizations. Yet it must be made clear that such analyses presuppose a positive answer to the question posed above. This seems to me highly dubious. Moreover, the future of European integration⁴, of the posited regional polarizations and of the nature of the competition between the US, Japan, Germany and the rest of Europe is itself very uncertain. Even before the Gulf crisis, I had expressed several doubts about these matters. Firstly, it seemed to me that European integration had been brought into question by Germany's new desire to expand eastwards and by Britain's resolute following of the American line, which tended to marginalize France and ran the risk of making Europe a 'political dwarf' (as I wrote at the time). The Gulf crisis would tend to support this view. Secondly, I found a little hasty the conclusion that we were moving towards a tripartite regional polarization around the US and Latin America; Europe, the Arab world and Africa; Japan and South-East Asia. This seemed too uncertain and unstable to be regarded as very probable, it seemed very unbalanced (to the detriment of Europe) and presupposed a different policy on the part of Germany to the one which was already becoming clear. Thirdly, it seemed to me that in this 'tripartite' competition the real partners were the USA, Japan and Germany (and not Europe); that the US would maintain and reinforce their 'military' advantage (accentuating the subordination of the European states, now called upon to support the US in the North-South conflict, substituted for anticommunism and for 'The East' as bogey man); and that, in these conditions, it was hasty to talk of the decline of US power, since the effects of any such decline will only really be felt in the more distant future.

The 'ideal' model and its preconditions

Let us return then to the principal subject of this paper, the medium-term prospects for Europe, the Arab world and subsaharan Africa. Rather than begin our analysis by creating a picture of what the 'ideal' relations between the different parts of this region 'should' be like, it seems to me more

worthwhile to look at what would actually be required for such an objective to be achieved. One will then see that developments in the recent past, as analysed by Michel Capron *et al*⁵, have made the future attainment of this ideal more rather than less problematic. One will also see that the convulsions which are already on the horizon can in no way be seen as compatible with the ideal scheme of development, but that they will on the contrary aggravate the contradictions in the system.

The 'ideal' model, of course, rests on a certain set of values, on certain criteria of assessment. I would define these criteria as follows: 1) a closing of the gap (in terms of levels of development) between the different partners of the region (Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the countries of the ex-Soviet Union, the poor, semi-industrialized Arab countries, the populous and financially rich oil-producing countries, the countries of the Fourth World, South Africa, the semi-industrialised countries of Southern Africa); 2) an acceptable degree of national autonomy, enabling the elaboration of policies appropriate to the specific problems of these greatly differing countries, policies which provide progressive solutions to their essential social problems; 3) a controlled opening up of the countries of this region towards each other and towards other regions of the world, but within the framework defined in points 1 and 2 above.

It goes without saying that the realisation of this 'ideal' would necessitate profound changes in the existing power structures, the substitution of new social hegemonies for those which currently define those power structures. To be more precise, such substitution would involve: 1) the creation of a working-class hegemony in the countries of Western Europe which could replace the hegemony of capital; 2) the building of a popular social alliance to replace the hegemony of the State bureaucracy in the ex-USSR, tempered today by the chaotic rise of the confused and ambiguous forces of nationalism and populism; 3) the building of national popular alliances to displace the hegemony of the comprador classes in Africa and the Arab world. Thus we can see the enormity of the tasks necessary for the attainment of the 'ideal' model for the region; for the social and political actors who might form the basis of such developments exist only as potential forces, whilst the political organisations and ideologies which currently occupy the stage are unable to come to grips with what is really at the heart of present-day conflicts.

If, by an effort of the imagination, we leave behind us the obstacles to the achievement of these transformations, one can see that the 'ideal' model in question would presuppose the consolidation of our three great regions (Europe, the Arab world and Africa) and the articulation of their interdependencies in such a way as to promote their development on the progressive and

democratic social lines defined above. But we must also define the structure of the regional consolidations envisaged and the obstacles which will have to be overcome in the process. Some form of 'European integration' is to my mind not only desirable but necessary, though certainly not according to the model of the EEC (integration of the market according to liberal principles without any common, progressive political or social dimension), whether the latter remains limited to its present 12 members, or expands progressively eastwards. The concept of a 'common home', however vague, corresponds better to the requirements of our vision, because it presupposes a margin of relative autonomy which would make possible the specific application of appropriate policies in the less competitive partner states. Such a formula would not exclude a greater degree of integration within a smaller group of the more advanced countries, provided that any such integration fully maintained its progressive social dimension (the hegemony of the working classes), something which is absent from the EC's conception of integration. The building of 'African unity' and 'Arab unity' is the Southern corollary of this, and a precondition of progress towards the 'ideal' model, if only for the obvious and oft-repeated reason that the states born of the balkanization of the continent are incapable of taking up the challenges of modern development. In a progressive vision of a truly common future, Europeans, Africans and Arabs must accept that they will be mutually strengthened by the consolidation of their respective regional unities and they must therefore cease to see the latter only as a danger.

Developments in recent years have certainly reinforced all the negative aspects of the polarization between the core countries and the peripheries which is inherent in 'real existing capitalism': an increasing gap between the EC States and the countries of the Arab and African 'Fourth World'; the consolidation of the balkanization of the continent and the increasing vulnerability of the countries of the region; an increase in internal social inequalities in almost all countries; limits placed on the cause of democracy, etc.

Neo-imperialism

It appears to me even more serious that in Europe the dominant political and ideological forces on the Left, as on the Right, have been unable to conceive of Arab unity as something which might be desirable. Europe has still not rid itself of its traditional imperialist attitude, which sees the 'other'—especially if this 'other' is culturally different—as an enemy who must be kept weak and divided. The world system of real existing capitalism rests on this fundamental principle and there is no sign that Western opinion is about to abandon it. For the last fifty years in the Middle East that barbaric world order has had only one strategic aim: to maintain what is coyly described as access to oil—in plain English, the Western powers' domination over that resource in

order to ensure that its exploitation be subordinated solely to the demands of the West's economic expansion (a situation which does not exclude conflict—albeit muted—between OPEC countries over how to exercise control over the oil). In pursuit of this aim, two complementary means are used: 1) the divisions of the Arab world have been perpetuated and the survival of the archaic Gulf regimes of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Emirates ensured, in order to prevent any possibility of the oil revenues being used for the benefit of the Arab peoples; 2) the absolute military supremacy of Israel has been guaranteed (notably by helping in its development of nuclear weapons), so that it is capable of intervening at any time. The Gulf war—the principle of which was proclaimed by Israel and the USA even before the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, which served only as a pretext—demonstrated that Europe had no specifically European conception of its relations with the Arab world independent of the American approach. The permanent blackmail of Israel, forcing the West as a whole to side with it against the 'barbarians' of the Orient, operates in this context and is indeed effective only to the extent that Europe does not have a vision of its own with regard to the Arab and African worlds.

The different medium-term 'scenarios' proposed for North-South relations within this region can now be reconsidered in the light of what has been suggested above. The basic criterion which distinguishes these different scenarios from each other is always in the final analysis the degree of independence of (Western) Europe vis-à-vis the United States, and the degree of regionalization within the world system which could accompany such independence.

The scenario of a collective European neo-imperialism dominating 'its' Arab and African South may have appealed to certain nostalgic minds, but the Gulf war showed it to be impossible. If the oil is to be controlled by 'the West', the only way it can be done is directly by the American military, and the only alternative that Europe might be able to suggest would be friendship with the Arab peoples. This is no longer an option: since 1945, Great Britain has opted for absorption by the United States; Germany, preoccupied with the prospect of economic expansion eastwards, will keep a low profile in other areas; and France, having abandoned the Gaullist principle of refusing to amalgamate its interests with those of the US and Israel, has in the process marginalized itself. Even the hope of breaking up the Arab world by coupling the Maghreb to Europe did not last very long. As a result, 'regionalization' within the world system remains very relative. For if it is true that the US and Japan have a greater and more direct presence in the Southern part of 'their' regions (Latin America and South-East Asia respectively), the Arab world does not belong to the 'sphere of influence' of the EC but to that of the

United States just as the whole of Southern Africa reorganized around South Africa probably will tomorrow. The 'European sphere' risks being reduced to the African Fourth World. Moreover, Germany seems to be aware of this and is acting accordingly. As for the countries of the ex-USSR, they are far from having regained the capacity for having any kind of presence beyond their own borders. In the medium term, Europe does not exist, it is a political dwarf.

The empire of chaos

Should we then be talking about the restoration of US hegemony, which has been laid to rest a little hastily? What is beginning to develop is, in my opinion, something quite different: a trio, formed by the United States, Japan and Germany, in which these countries have quite distinct roles and prospects. Japan and Germany will increase their advantage in the competition for economic markets, while the United States will play the role of gendarme charged with maintaining this rather peculiar world order—a role which will be damaging to their economic competitiveness over the longer term. This order, which will probably be with us for the foreseeable future, I have called 'the Empire of chaos'. It is not a question of a new world order a little less bad than the one we are leaving behind us (the post-Second World War era), but a kind of military world order as complement to the savage, neo-liberal capitalist order. With this in mind, the Americans have already produced a theory of low-intensity conflict management, although, with the Gulf war, the North-South conflicts inherent in this conception of the world order may already have exceeded the intended 'ceiling' of intensity. I rather fear that the medium-term future will demonstrate only that real existing capitalism is without a doubt barbaric, but that in its new, neo-liberal clothing it is nothing more than barbarism unrestrained.

Translated by David Berry (with thanks to Tony Chafer)

Notes

¹ This is a translated and slightly edited version of the preface to Capron, Michel (ed.) (1991), and is reproduced with kind permission of the author and of the publisher, l'Harmattan. Many of the themes of this article are also discussed in Amin, Samir (1992). See also Mármora, Leopoldo & Peltzer, Roger (1992).

² It should be noted that the book cited above (note 1) was completed before the Gulf War broke out.

³ Bandung, Indonesia, was the venue of the first Afro-Asian conference (1955), which brought together representatives of 24 countries, including 16 independent states which had previously been colonies [DB].

⁴ This was written before the Danish and French referenda on Maastricht (June and September 1992) and before the crisis in the European Monetary System (September 1992) [DB].

⁵ See Capron, Michel (ed.) 1991

Bibliography

Amin, Samir (1992) La nouvelle mondialisation capitaliste. L'Empire du chaos, in Bidet, Jacques & Texier, Jacques (eds.) *L'idée du socialisme a-t-elle un avenir?*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 107-125.

Capron, Michel (ed.) (1991) *L'Europe face au Sud. Les relations avec le monde arabe et africain*, Paris, Editions l'Harmattan.

Marmora, Leopoldo & Peltzer, Roger (1992) Europe '92 and the South: Neocolonial Continuity or the Chance of a New Beginning?, in *Journal of Area Studies* 1, September, pp.31-47.