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Author(s): Samir Amin

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History Conceived as an Eternal Cycle

Samir Amin

THE THESES OF ANDRE GUNDER FRANK

1. In his latest work (*ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*) Andre Gunder Frank returns to, and expands on, the thesis which he treated in his previous work written in 1993 in collaboration with Barry Gills (*The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?*), with an emphasis on modern times (1500 to date). The thesis itself summarizes the following fundamental proposals: (i) History is, from its inception, dealing with a system that has always been global, in the sense that the evolution of the various regions has never been determined by the interaction of forces internal to the societies in question but by forces operating on the global system; and that consequently, all efforts to write the history of a region of the world (Europe, China, or any other region) can only be illusory, since there is only one history, that of the one and only world system; (ii) This world system has fundamentally remained the same ever since, and that consequently, successive modes or phases (such as those initiated in 1500 and 1800) do not exist and that the attempt to mark out qualitatively different phases based, for example, on the recognition of successive modes of production, is as a result, misleading; (iii) This world history evolves in a cyclical manner.

On the basis of these fundamental principles, Frank transposes a whole set of issues on the relative position of Europe and Asia in the modern age. Frank asserts here that: (i) the position of Asia (China, India, the Middle East) had been dominant until around 1800 and that it was only after this date that Europe (and the United States) began to assert their economic, political and military superiority; (ii) the rise of the West cannot be explained by the construction of a new world system bound for conquest of the globe (as declared by the theses on the world-economy, according to Frank) but by the involvement of Europe in the world system as it was (cen-

tered on Asia), the West, through this involvement, benefiting from the prevailing Asian crisis to usurp the latter's place during the two centuries that followed (from 1800 to today); (iii) we are presently witnessing a repeat of the same scenario now operating in reverse to the advantage of Asia which, through its involvement in the world system, takes advantage of the crisis in the West and, without doubt, will regain the dominant position that had been hers in the world system before 1800, and by so doing complete the cycle.

Frank equally declares that any attempt at a theoretical construction which ignored the three fundamental principles cited much earlier is inevitably Eurocentric, irrespective of whether it is the ideas of Marx (and the more modest ideas of Samir Amin), of the world-economy (Wallerstein et al.), or of Weber, Sombart, Polanyi, Said, Bernal, and the whole lot.

Frank's assertion on these fundamental theses mentioned earlier is summarized by their author in a forceful manner. "[W]e need a global perspective to . . . perceive—'The Rise of the West,' 'the development of capitalism,' 'the hegemony of Europe,' 'the rise and fall of great powers' . . . 'the East Asian miracle' . . . None of these were caused only or even primarily through the structure or interaction of forces 'internal' to any of the above. All of them were part and parcel of the structure and development of a single world economic system" (Frank, 1998: 4). And, to clarify that it is the same identical old world system, he writes: "[T]he 'modern capitalist world-system' was not the re-invention but the *continuation* of Abu-Lughod's version of the *same* world system already in existence since at least 1250 . . . [T]hen why not earlier?" (1998: xix). Just as he adds that the "focus on 'modes of production' only diverts our attention from the much more importantly defining world system . . ." (1998: 24).

One is therefore, certainly dealing with an identical twin system for the most part, which has never undergone any qualitative transformation: "There was no unilinear 'progression' from one 'mode' of production to another; but all manner of relations of production were and remain widely intermingled even within any one 'society,' not to mention the world society as a whole" (1998: 331). Frank further asserts that debates on the nature of systems (feudal, capitalist) are using "procrustean and empty categories" (1998: 336) because the reality is that "historical continuity has been far more important than any and all discontinuities" (1998: 342). Presented in this way, this continuity does not rhyme with the cyclical form it embraces,

and which Frank justifies in general philosophical terms: "Cyclical motion seems to be a universal fact of existence, life and being . . ." (1998: 347).

2. These theses are, in my opinion, not only false, but impotent. By adopting them, one prohibits oneself in advance from analyzing the specificity of modes of organization of society, and one renounces asking a series of questions on the workings of the various aspects of society (the economic life, the social power system and politics, etc.) This gives rise to a split image of history, where nothing else exists except facts juxtaposed one on the other.

Frank's work is a beautiful example, alas, of this kind of flattened history. The "world system" which he describes is in fact reduced to a network of interregional trading links. The composition and the volume of these exchanges are therefore determined by the "relative competitiveness" of producers, which are directly influenced by the combination of natural resources, more or less, of human labor and technology. It is the vision of the economic life that the "standard" view of economics offers us generally. The work is completely silent on everything that concerns the political organization of the societies in question, or the current idea systems which legitimize power and the issues at stake.

On the contrary, of course, I assert the decisive importance of the affirmation that the capitalist mode of production represents a qualitative rupture with systems that preceded it (including Europe of course). We are then obliged to specify: (i) the exact definition of the specificity of capitalism; (ii) the date from which capitalism can be considered to be constituted; (iii) the stages and shapes of its evolution.

3. In his work, Frank asks us to reappraise three centuries of mercantilism (1500–1800) founded on his central thesis, seeking to convince us that there has always been only one economy—the world economy—and that the latter has always been driven by the same logic over space and time. Based on this assumption, Frank takes up the issue of the "rise of the West." The sequence of his reasoning is as follows: (i) Europe created nothing new during these three centuries, only imitating what had already existed in Asia; (ii) and in doing so, Europe continued to lag behind its model until the nineteenth century; (iii) Europe featured in this world economy very marginally, and only began to integrate into it seriously during the period under consideration; (iv) Europe was able to do so through

the precious metals extracted from America to close its trade deficit with the more advanced Asia. Frank develops what he hopes is a striking comparison between this model of the “rise of Europe on the back of Asia” by way of its integration into the erstwhile world system (during the Asia-centric era) and that of contemporary Asia that operates in the same way by its growing involvement in the contemporary world system (henceforth centered on the West—Europe beefed up by the United States).

Citing Wallerstein (1997: 252), “Entrepreneurs or companies who make large profits . . . by being simultaneously producers, merchants and financiers . . .,” Frank adds: “Of course, but Wallerstein fails to observe that the same was and is equally true throughout world economy and not only in the small European ‘capitalist’ part” (1998: 31). Furthermore, in this imitation, Europe continues to lag behind in relation to its Asiatic models. Frank writes: “Europe was certainly not central to the world economy before 1800. . . . [The] Chinese Ming/Qing, Indian Mughal, and even Persian Safavid and Turkish Ottoman empires carried much greater political and even military weight than any or all of Europe” (1998: 5). And again: “The world economy continued to be dominated by Asians for at least three centuries more, until about 1800. Europe’s relative and absolute marginality in the world economy continued, despite Europe’s new relations with the Americas, which it used to increase its relations with Asia. . . . Productive and commercial economic activities, and population growth . . . also continued to expand faster and more in Asia until at least 1750 . . .” (1998: 53). “Europe was not a major industrial center in terms of exports to the rest of the world economy” (1998: 177).

The weak and inferior position of Europe, which is certainly rooted in its delayed scientific and technological take-off, makes its “industries” noncompetitive (I will come back to this inappropriate qualification that Frank uses). Frank goes on: “All serious inquiries . . . show that this ‘stage’ (superiority of Europe’s science and technology) did not begin until the second half of the nineteenth century . . . , that is two centuries after the scientific ‘revolution’ and one after the industrial ‘revolution’” (1998: 190). Frank completes this affirmation by expatiating on developments concerning the use of sophisticated financial mechanisms in the management of trade and credit practised in Asia (1998: 210 ff.). Generalizing the assertion, he says: “[The] Asians were no more ‘traditional’ than Europeans and

in fact largely far less so" (1998: 259). Also, it is not surprising that the volume and density of merchandise trade remained much stronger in Asia than in the rest of the world. "Thus, in 1750 and 1800, Asian production was much greater, and it was more productive and competitive than anything the Europeans and the Americas were able to muster ..." (1998: 172).

Frank notes, for example, that Chinese internal trade in grains was ten to fifteen times greater than the "normal" trade of the Baltic (1998: 222). Frank asserts, forcefully, the centrality of Asia in the world system of the time. "[I]f anything, the modern world system was under Asian hegemony, not European" (1998: 166). Nonetheless, Eurocentric prejudice points to the contrary: "Yet the mythology has grown up that world trade was created by and dominated by the Europeans, even in Asia" (1998: 178). Therefore, mercantile Europe invented nothing—not anything better than what contemporary Asia invented anew when it integrated further in the contemporary system. Europe was content to integrate into the system of the Asia-centric era. The means used to achieve this end was gold and money from the Americas. Frank summarizes his thesis thus: "[T]he Europeans *bought* themselves a seat ... on the Asian train ..." (1998: 277).

Displaying a map indicating the movement of international transactions of the time (1998: 65), backed up by numerous references on their volume, noting the European trade deficit (gold and money representing two-thirds of these exports—see the chart on 1998: 148), Frank summarizes his thesis with a beautiful sentence: Europe built itself by "climbing up on Asian shoulders" (1998: 277). Furthermore, money transferred from America to Asia via the European trade deficit was in no way "buried" in Asia as Eurocentric prejudice would have it. It was used to strengthen the expansion of Asian production and trade. The money going into Asia "did oil the wheels of production and trade and was not just 'dug up in the Americas to be buried again in Asia'" (1998: 138).

In reference to this issue, he cites Wallerstein who said: "[B]ullion brought into Asia was largely used 'for hoarding and jewellery' ... [This is] evidence that the East Indies remained *external* to the European world-economy ..." (Frank, 1998: 153). Frank takes up the other side of this argument: "For, contrary to Wallerstein, the worldwide flow of money to Asia ... is evidence that they *were* parts of the same world economy ..." (1998: 153). In Asia the increased arrival of money "did not substantially raise prices as it did in Europe ...

[Instead] it generated increased production and transactions ...” (1998: 157). In China, “merchants advanced capital (presumably ... derived from exports and the import of silver) to peasant producers in return for later receipt of their crops” (1998: 161). It therefore stands to reason that Europe is integrating into the already existing, Sinocentric world system. “This global Sinocentric multilateral trade expanded through the infusion of American money by the Europeans” (1998: 126). Whereas Eurocentric bigotry would have it that it was Europe that shaped the world, one may suspect “that maybe it was the world that made Europe” (1998: 3).

As if to make his thesis more convincing, Frank proposes an analogous assessment of the rise of Europe (as NICs, New Industrial Countries) with that of present-day Asia. He writes on this matter: “The contemporary analogy is that the present world economic crisis permits the rise of what are now called the Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs) in East Asia ... [L]ike these East Asian NIEs now, Europe then engaged first in import substitution (at that time in what was the ‘leading’ industry of textiles previously imported from Asia) and increasingly also in export promotion—first to their relatively protected markets in West Africa and the Americas and then to the world market as a whole ...” (1998: 263).

What should therefore be explained, in either case, is the reversal of the position respectively occupied by Europe and Asia—by finding out why Europe usurped Asia’s central position (around 1800) and why and how Asia might be able to rehabilitate the latter (at the present time). Frank poses the question: “The question is how and why beginning around 1800 Europe and then the United States, after long lagging behind, ‘suddenly’ caught up and then overtook Asia economically and politically in the one world economy and system” (1998: 284). Frank’s answers to this question are vague and fragmented. “The argument is that it was not Asia’s alleged weakness and Europe’s alleged strength in the period of early modern world history but rather the effects of Asia’s strength that led to its decline after 1750. Analogously, it was Europe’s previously marginal position and weakness ... that permitted its ascendance after 1800” (1998: 37).

I will return to this formulation enacted like some sort of law of unequal development, (of which I propose a version that I think is more convincing). “The decline of the East preceded the rise of the West” (1998: 264). I will specify much later how I would analyse the causes of this “decline.” “The industrial revolution was an unfore-

seen event, which took place in a part of Europe as a result of the continuing unequal structure and uneven process in and of the world economy as a whole" (1998: 343). I will equally come back to this question, to which the method utilized by Frank does not effectively give room for an answer.

4. Refusing to recognize the central importance of the turning-points in universal history, and therefore the necessary attention to the modern (capitalist) system of production, its new character, qualitatively better than those of all previous systems (both European and Asian of course), Frank is forced to descend to a bland philosophy of history, which has never produced anything new worthy of attention. ("The more things change, the more they remain the same.") Consequently, for Frank, monotonous cycles follow each other. This is all that is possible, once one has the prejudice that nothing of importance can change in the course of history. These cycles are furthermore declared to have been global and never specific to any region of the world.

The same goes with the arguments given to us on the issues of "hegemonies." Refusing to read modern history (of 1500 to the present day) as a succession of hegemonies, Frank writes: "At no time during the four centuries under review was any economy or state able to exercise any significant degree of hegemony, or even leadership, over . . . the world as a whole" (1998: 333). Although I have rejected this particular thesis—popular, it is true, among many authors of the school of the world-economy—it is for very strong but different reasons other than those cited by Frank.

Frank also asserts that his general theses constitute a condition *sine qua non* for a non-Eurocentric reading of history. Evidently, since his theses are neither those of Marx, or his bourgeois rivals, nor those of the school of the world-economy, nor those of the culture which accompany the standard Anglo-Saxon economies (we would rather say implicit in the dominant discourses), the combination is possible. Everybody is accused of involvement in the common search for the origins of everything in "European exceptionalism" (1998: 336). With disconcerting nonchalance, Frank almost reduces Marxism to the thesis on the Asiatic mode of production. He writes: "If several parts of Asia were richer and more productive than Europe [until at least 1750] . . . how is it possible that the 'Asiatic mode of production' could have been as traditional, stationary . . . as Marx, Weber, Sombart and others alleged?" (1998: 35).

The explanations of universal history, alternative to the one that he proposes, would therefore necessarily be Eurocentric in the sense that they affirm that the invention of capitalism could only be the fruit of the European history. It would be an impossible likelihood in China, because of the existence of an Imperial State, in India because of the caste system, in the Islamic world because of the inheritance system of nomadic tribalism (see 1998: 323–26). From the foregoing, because all analysts of universal history have been Eurocentric bigots, critics of this prejudice are banded together and labelled ideological critics. Frank writes: In their criticism of Eurocentrism, Said, Bernal, Amin, etc. “concentrate on ideological critiques ...” (1998: 276).

For me, it will be enough to recall here that I did not, as Frank suggests, wait for Perry Anderson to bury the Asiatic mode of production in 1974 (see 1998: 322) before criticizing it. Certainly, there have been Marxists who succumbed to Eurocentric prejudice. Perhaps Marx himself was one of them, to some extent, and certainly Perry Anderson, and quite a number of others. But I don't consider myself to be among them. I had buried the Asiatic mode of production already in 1957, while advancing the same arguments very precisely (almost word-for-word), that Frank uses. I described the theory of this so-called Asiatic mode of production as “West-centric bigotry” (obviously synonymous with Eurocentric). Furthermore, the interpretation of universal history that I proposed, both in *Class and Nation* and in *Eurocentrism*, is entirely founded on research on the “general trends” in social evolution. This research aimed at reducing the range¹ of the specifics in space and the time, to insert them in this general trend. The arguments that Frank put together to support his theses—according to which one finds the same forms of social organization in the Europe of the Middle Ages, the Islamic world, India, or China (for example, trade guilds) were those I advanced at least 30 years ago, but within the framework of another general concept of universal history, the fundamental non-Eurocentric character of which I shall demonstrate further on. My criticisms

¹ Amin (1980; chs. 3 and 4, 46–103) and Amin (1989). The reader will find in these books my views with respect to the central and peripheral forms of tributary mode of production, unequal development throughout history, as well as a critique of Eurocentric culturalism. The conclusions of those analyses are briefly summarized in the following pages. Cf. also Amin & Frank (1978).

of Eurocentrism were never restricted to its ideological dimensions. I am surprised that Frank, who read me, did not see this. Should this be the case, it probably is that Frank preferred to throw away the baby with the bath water. Having rejected—rightly so—the Asiatic mode of production, he wanted in the same vein to rule out any debate on modes of production.

5. I intend, therefore, to expatiate on my analysis of Frank's theses by going to the roots of our divergent views in the pages that follow. I will therefore explain the grounds on which I advance the idea that capitalism and the world capitalist system did bring something new and do not constitute in any way an extension of previous systems. This will make it possible to understand why capitalism produced and will continue to produce polarization in past history, a fact of enormous importance that Frank does not take into consideration in his theses. I will further propose my work on the centuries of mercantilism, a work that, while retaining as true and important many of the "facts" highlighted by Frank, integrates other fundamental aspects of the reality that the latter chose to ignore here. One will then see that my analysis on the rise of Europe on these conceptual bases has nothing to do with Eurocentrism. I will then examine "matters for the future." I will show that the cyclical concept which Frank relies on to analyze the rise of contemporary Asian countries does not make it possible to understand the nature and magnitude of the issues in the conflicts of today and tomorrow. I will conclude by highlighting the dead end in which Frank locks himself in the manner in which he handles the issue of Eurocentrism.

WHAT IS NEW IN CAPITALISM AND THE WORLD CAPITALIST SYSTEM?

1. Having shied away from asking himself the question "What is capitalism?," "What is modernity?," Frank takes refuge in a poor conceptualization of reality, that of the empiricism of conventional economics. Societies are all confronted with the same problems: how to use natural resources and their technological knowledge to produce and trade. It even amounts to the hypothesis of conventional economics. I have already cited an example of this in passing, when Frank speaks of the European and Asian textile industries before 1800. This, of course, had more to do with crafts production and

less with manufacturing and industrial production. But for Frank, this is of no importance. The social relations which support these methods of production (crafts or industrial) are more or less of no significance, since they only constitute stages of technological development. For the same basic reason, Frank refuses to see that the capitalist mode of production is not a method of production technologically defined by the use of machines, but a social pattern of organization that concerns not only production but also social life in all its ramifications.

The capitalist mode of production represents a qualitative break with the system that preceded it. The law of value controls not only economic life, but indeed the entire social system of the modern (capitalist) world. It has command over the content of the specific ideology peculiar to this new system (“economism” or better, “economist alienation”), since it controls the new and specific relationships between the economic base of the system and its ideological and political superstructure (wealth controls power while previously it was power which controlled wealth).² This system is, in certain respects superior, not only because of the prodigious development of the productive forces it has permitted, but also because of its specific function within the political and ideological spectrum (the modern concept of democracy). It is at the same time a system destined by necessity to be surpassed, because the exponential growth that characterizes it finds no solution in the framework of its immanent logic. But, as Wallerstein notes, exponential growth is cancerous; it leads invariably to death. Marx’s intuitive genius is precisely to have understood that, for this reason, capitalism must be replaced by a qualitatively new system subjecting the development of productive forces to a controlled social logic and no longer to the sole mechanical logic of the alienated economy.

If, as I maintain, in the Marxist tradition, capitalism is defined, first of all, by its specific mode of production, one must await the Industrial Revolution, that is to say, the dominance of big industry founded on the wage-earning class, to speak of the capitalist mode in its finished form.

² See my views on the conceptualization of the social systems and capitalism by Karl Marx, Braudel, and Polanyi in Amin (1996b).

In preindustrial systems, labor was exploited through the ruling class's control of the access to natural resources, basically land. Since the industrial revolution, the type of property that ensures exploitation of labor has shifted to industrial equipment, which therefore became the dominant form of full-fledged capital. That major shift is unseen by Frank and overlooked by those who play down the qualitative change from the mercantilist capitalist transition to full-fledged industrial capitalism. This change has thoroughly modified the patterns of social relations, as well as the relationship between political power and economic laws.

The three centuries of European mercantilism (from the Renaissance to 1800) thus constitute only a transition to capitalism, which appears as such only *a posteriori*. One recognizes then, *a posteriori*, the ruptures that make it possible to qualify the actual period of transition: the reversal of the preoccupation with the metaphysical peculiar to the tributary ideology, the reinforcement of absolute monarchy founded on the equilibrium of the ancient feudal social forces and of the bourgeoisie, the democratic expression of the English and French revolutions, etc.

I will return much later to this transition. I do not feel, however, any hesitation in qualifying this period as the "first phase of capitalism." Marx suggested this in his analysis on "primitive accumulation," which characterizes the centuries others call "mercantilist." Whatever the case, 1500 and 1800 then represent the cut-off points of this period.

2. The modern world not only requires that one conceive the nature of the break that the capitalist mode of production represents. It also requires understanding that the modern system is global. Whether we accept or reject the idea that there had been previous world-systems, Frank, Wallerstein, and I (and no doubt many others), all agree that the modern system is global, in the sense that all parts are integrated into the system by virtue of their involvement in the world division of labor, one that involves essential consumer goods whose production runs parallel with a level of commodification incomparable to that obtained in previous periods. Undertaking a more in-depth analysis of this trite evidence, it can be seen that this system takes the form of the world economic system governed by what I would call "the law of globalized value," which necessarily engenders polarization and, manifestations of pauperization associated with accumulation at the world level, which is a new phenome-

non, without precedent in history. This law governs all the major conflicts which have taken center stage: those which originate from the revolt of people on the periphery and those between rival groups seeking domination of the global system, determining the efficacy of the various strategies which seek to prevail in the system.

The socialist criticism of capitalism emerged essentially as a criticism of the mode of exploitation of labor by capital. This criticism rose progressively from the plane of moral refusal to that of a more scientific comprehension of the mechanisms and the laws of the system, of its contradictions. However, socialist criticism has remained—historical Marxism included—relatively underdeveloped with respect to the other dimension of capitalism, its spread as a world-system. Therefore, the decisive consequences of the polarization on a worldwide scale has been systematically underestimated. The analyses of capitalism proposed in a global perspective have been instrumental in correcting the inadequacies of historical socialism precisely by pointing out the worldwide character of the capitalist system and its polarizing effect on that scale. In that sense, they are irreplaceable. In its immediate expression, the capitalist system appears indeed as a world-economy operating in the political framework of a system organized by sovereign states. One must say, however, that the opposition world-economy/world-empire refers necessarily to the qualitative opposition revolving around the capitalist mode of production.

In previous modes of production, the laws of the economy do not affirm themselves as autonomous manifestations of necessity, but, on the contrary, as expressions of the ideological and political order. The dominant capitalist centers do not seek to extend their political power through imperial conquest because they can, in fact, exercise their domination through economic means.³ States of earlier periods did not have the guarantee of the benefits derived from the economic dependency of their possible peripheries as long as the latter remained outside the sphere of their political domination.

The theoretical and ideological arguments which have been put forth—most often deliberately as responses to the challenge of socialist criticism of the system, and particularly as responses to Marx—

³ On the question of “territorialism” (the tendency to establish large areas governed as single political unit), see Amin (1996b: 235–38).

omit the qualitative contrast expressed here, and therefore seek to describe, on countless possible levels of immediate apprehension, specific characteristics of modernity.⁴ Such phenomenal analysis flattens history, raises the debate to heights too lofty for abstraction, and, therefore, trivializes the propositions that one may deduce from it.

Be that as it may, the constituent regions (vast empires or modest seigniories) of the tributary world of earlier periods were not necessarily isolated from one another; on the contrary, all historical research corroborates the intensity of their relationships. Nonetheless, the nature of these relationships is different from that which qualifies the connections within the world capitalist system. Certainly, in all cases, it is a question of commercial relationships. But the Marxist critique that insisted on the necessary distinction between the “market” on the one hand and the “capitalist market” (in which exchange is based on capitalist production) on the other remains valid. The importance of the market and the intensity of the exchanges, observed here and there through time and space, are not synonymous with capitalism. They indicate only that the replacement of the tributary system—that is to say, the passage to capitalism—had been the order of the day, here and there for a long time, and that the European mercantilist transition is not the product of a specific law of Europe’s peculiar evolution, but the expression of a general law of the evolution of all human society.

Pursuing the analysis in terms of mode of production versus world system, as Frank does, is thus not unfounded; on the contrary, these two directions of the analysis are complementary. Nevertheless, having been ambiguously formulated, Frank’s analysis in terms of his world system had to lead to a veritable skid, which consists of a reverse extrapolation of the conclusions of the analysis dealing with the capitalist world. The ultimate reason for the misunderstanding is that capitalism cannot be defined by the mere association of three orders of phenomena: private property, wage labor, and the extension of commercial exchanges. This empiricist method conceals the essential reality that capitalism exists only when the level of development of the productive forces involves the modern factory.

⁴ See my critique of Weber’s German parochialism in Amin (1996a) and Amin (1992).

It is, in fact, only with capitalism in its finished form, beginning with the Industrial Revolution, that two fundamentals of the modern world appear. The first is the massive urbanization of society, which leads to qualitative change, since, up until then, all human societies had remained essentially rural. Massive urbanization needed an agricultural revolution, mechanical and chemical, inconceivable without industry capable of providing its inputs. The second is the henceforth exponential character of the growth of production. The modern world-system is a capitalist world-system because it is based on capitalism as I have defined it. All past forms of social organization in all the regions that form part of the modern system are, in turn, subjected to the hegemonic logic of the capitalist system. And this subordinate status of previous original modes is a new phenomenon, unique to world capitalism.

3. Polarization is an immanent law of the worldwide expansion of capitalism. This phenomenon is also new in history.⁵ Actually existing capitalism, a world phenomenon, is not reducible to the mode of capitalist production and does not intend to become so. For the mode of capitalist production presupposes a three-dimensional integrated market (market of merchandise, capital, and labor) that defines the basis of its functioning. The integration, which was, in fact, constructed in the framework of the history of the formation of the core bourgeois states (Western and Central Europe, the United States and Canada, Japan, Australia) has never been extended to include world capitalism. The world market is exclusively two-dimensional in its expansion, integrating progressively the trade of products and the circulation of capital, to the exclusion of labor whose market remains compartmentalized.

I have maintained that this fact was in itself sufficient to engender an inevitable polarization. In fact, behind the propositions set forth, a poorly-expressed theoretical split lay hidden. For some, capitalism was in itself polarizing. But, in order to establish this, it was necessary to rise to the level of abstraction defined earlier, namely,

⁵ Amin (1997, ch. 1, "The Future of Global Polarization," 1–11). This is an analysis of the "five monopolies" which operate to the benefit of the Triad and tend to reproduce a deepened polarization, in spite of the industrialization of the peripheries. See also: the analysis of the relation between the active and the passive labor army, the debates on the semiperipheries, Amin (1996a: 79; 82–84); the debates on the phases of financialization of capital, in industrial capitalism and in the mercantilist transition, Amin (1996b: 238–44).

the truncated nature of the world market in relationship to the three-dimensional integration peculiar to the capitalist mode of production. For others, such a concrete historical argument fails to establish the general proposition that world capitalism is necessarily polarizing. This polarization was considered phenomenal and non-essential, produced by concrete history and not by the laws of the accumulation of capital.

My proposition defines abstractly world capitalism, just as those concerning the law of value define the capitalist mode of production. Of course, abstraction is not, any more here than elsewhere, a negation of the concrete, but, on the contrary, the expression of the diversity of the latter. The historical conditions that explain the formation of the bourgeois national state at one pole and its absence at the other illustrate the concrete diversity that characterizes what I have just called the peripheries.

The definition of the essential content of the two concepts of core and periphery is economic in nature. This is not a question of an arbitrary choice but is the expression of the dominance of economics in the capitalist mode, and of the direct subordination of politics and ideology to the constraints of the accumulation of capital. Consequently, core/periphery relationships are, first of all, economic in nature. On the contrary, if, during earlier periods, phenomena of polarization are also detectable, they have a different nature and a different dynamic because they operate within the framework of noncapitalist societies.

Polarization in its modern form appears with the division of the world into industrialized and nonindustrialized countries. It is, therefore, a relatively recent phenomenon which constitutes itself in the nineteenth century. This modern polarization is still only embryonic and potential at the time of the transition from mercantilism to industrial capitalism—from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The emergence of the concept of world capitalist polarization has its own history, of course. Naturally, the debate had opened with concrete and specific considerations, influenced by the period. These considerations stressed an industrial/nonindustrial contrast, since polarization actually expressed itself through it. Industrialization became thereupon the means of “development” whose historical objective was supposed to be the abolition of polarization (“underdevelopment”). Yet, the industrialization/non-industrialization contrast is not the eternal and definitive form of capitalist polarization.

Dominant from 1800 to 1945, it becomes blurred little by little after the Second World War with the industrialization of the peripheries, when the criteria of polarization shifts to new domains.

Certain ambiguities in the world-systems analysis concerning the precise definition of capitalism has led to a skid in the direction of a projection back in time of the characteristics of the modern world. The most extremist view (Frank, for example) goes so far as to claim that the very idea of specificities peculiar to the different modes of production is unfounded, that there is no difference between capitalism and so-called previous systems (in all systems, capitalist and other elements supposedly mingled in the same way), and that the societies of the planet have always been completely integrated in a single world system that dates back to the dawn of time. There they join the long tradition of those philosophies of history that are pre-occupied with establishing the eternity of the system and the futility of the efforts to change it. Others, less rash, content themselves with drawing comparisons between the core-periphery relationships at different ages of the evolution, or the cyclical character of the evolution of the systems, or the displacement of the hegemonic centers. No doubt by situating oneself on a high level of abstraction, one will always be able to perceive marked comparisons through the ages. The use of common terminology tends to reinforce the illusion of these analogies. I myself used the terms "cores" and "peripheries" in the analyses I proposed for the periods prior to capitalism. I, however, deemed it necessary to specify how the different content of these concepts applied to the varied social systems. I maintain that the amalgam of the periods proceeds from the impoverishment of the concepts.

The recent industrialization of the peripheries, though unequal, of course, calls for a reconsideration of polarization, to rid it of its outmoded historical language. Certainly polarization will continue to be produced by the three-dimensional nonintegration of the capitalist market, but it will be within the framework of the system of accumulation at the world level, operating in a world which is tending to become globally industrialized. I have tried to portray, through the analysis of what I call the "five monopolies," the emerging forms of core-periphery polarization.

Polarization produced by global expansion of capitalism in the last two centuries is phenomenal, incomparable to anything ever seen before in terms of unequal development. We are familiar,

through the works of Bairoch (and others), to whom Frank refers in fact, that on the eve of the industrial revolution, the productivity gap was modest for 80 to 90% of the global population. Had the ratio been 1 to 1.3 or above 1 to 2, or even 1 to 3 in favor of the dynamic regions of Europe over advanced Asia, the magnitude would have still been limited in the opinion of most scholars, including Frank and me. However, these gaps widened fantastically to the ratio of something like 1 to 60 and continue to widen—proof that 1800 is a turning-point in universal history; proof also that capitalism did not fully exist until after the industrial revolution. This phenomenon, new in history, does not seem to bother Frank in the least. Since there is nothing new under the sun, modern polarization attributed to manifestations of unequal development is old news. Past systems were not polarizing by nature; it was possible to “catch up.” On the contrary, it is no longer the case under capitalism. Frank’s blindness on this major issue in modern history will bring him to a fundamentally flawed analyses of the “miracle” of the NIEs. This blindness keeps him from grasping the real issue in the social conflict of today and tomorrow.

ISSUES CONCERNING THE TRANSITION TO CAPITALISM

1. The three centuries of mercantilism, the focus of Frank’s work, constitute the most complex period of universal history because the old tributary forms and the emerging new forms of capitalism are associated and operate in both complementary and conflicting manner (perhaps analogous to the ways in which those of capitalism and those of socialism have been functioning in contemporary society). Frank’s hypothesis simplifies the interpretation of this phase of history.

2. To get a clear idea of the nature of the issues and the conflict between the old and the new played out between 1500 and 1800, it is necessary to examine what human societies were like before this conflict and all its implications. I have tried to do this in two ways:

- (i) By defining, beyond the infinite varieties of local forms, what is common to all ancient societies: the dominance of the politico-ideological power and its expression through the cultures of religious alienation. The concept proposed to this

effect (cf. Amin, 1980), the tributary society, constitutes the tool for a true non-Eurocentric interpretation of universal history.

- (ii) By proposing a pattern of trade relations between regional partners of this “world system” (in fact reduced to the Old World—Asia, Europe, Africa) for the duration of 20 centuries which covers the period from the revolutions that created tributary societies (500 to 300 BC) to 1500. The scheme—a similar map to the one proposed by Frank for the period between 1500 to 1800—brings out the intensity of the trade among what I call the three tributary centers—Hellenistic, Hindu, and Confucian—and the peripheries (Europe, Africa, Japan, Southeast Asia) (Amin, 1991; also in Frank & Gills, 1993; see also Amin, 1996a: ch. 2, 69 ff.). Cores and peripheries of this system are not defined in economic terms—through a flashback of capitalism—but in terms of the political and cultural forms of the tributary society.

Is it possible then to describe this system as global? Not quite, since it is not at all parallel to the global character of capitalism. No, not for reasons having to do with the small number of commercial exchanges compared with contemporary trade (a simple quantitative argument), but for fundamental reasons related to the nature of the tributary social system. Based on the dominance of ideology, societies constituted the thriving cultural space and in this way experienced peaceful exchanges and conquest relations that existed between them. A world system would have implied, in their line of thinking, politico-religious unification, an objective that they were not, evidently, able to achieve. I prefer to call this kind of relation a system of interconnections between regional systems (corresponding to the cultural spaces in question). Capitalism created a world system of another kind, through the integration of its constituent societies, into a unique economic system, unifying but not homogenizing at this level. This unification by itself, in turn, provoked a cultural universalization without precedent. But this universalism remains truncated, because it is linked to a polarizing economic globalization.

The constitution of the large tributary regions does not lead to their unification in a single state system. On the contrary, the areas defined by the networks of organization of military and political

powers, of economic exchange, of religious and ideological diffusion, do not correspond generally. Their combination, more or less happy, defines different societies, some capable of lasting and blooming, indeed opening up and conquering, others locking themselves into deadly impasses. In this framework, the concept of cores and peripheries and that of hegemony may prove fecund, on condition, however, they are not defined—in comparison to the modern concepts—in terms of economic exploitation. In this framework, the network of exchanges and interactions may permit one to speak of regional systems, on condition also that one does not confuse the highly selective effects of these exchanges with the infinitely more structuring ones of the modern world-system, which, for that reason, is the only one that deserves this qualifier.

The reading of history shows, unlike the affirmations of extremists of the (Frankian) world system, the extraordinary durability of the equilibrium of the great poles of the ancient worlds (McNeill, 1963; Mann, 1986; see also Amin, 1966a: 98). Durability is not synonymous with static condition. All the ancient systems are, on the contrary, in permanent movement, through the impetus given by a basic identical contradiction that characterizes them. This contradiction contrasts the dominant logic of tributary power with the development requirements of productive forces, which is expressed in the tendency towards autonomization of commercial relations.

The remarkable works of Janet Abu-Lughod (1989), K. N. Chaudhuri (1985), John Fitzpatrick (1991), and G. Coedes (1948),⁶ among others, highlight this contradiction in the Islamic Orient, India, and China on all points analogous to that which operated in the European Middle Ages and during the centuries of the capitalist transition. The role of the mercantilist maritime and continental merchant cities of the “silk routes,” of France, Germany, Italy, the Islamic Orient, Central Asia, Malacca, the Sahara, the East African Coast, the Seas of China, and Japan is similar everywhere. There is mass production for exportation, but in the framework either of manufactures or the system of handicrafts and the putting-out of products that are not always only “prestige” items but sometimes everyday items, even if the products are reserved only for the affluent classes.

⁶ See also some examples of misprojection of theses of the world economy into periods prior to 1500 AD in Amin (1996a: 101–02).

One can thus speak here of merchant capitalism, as does Marx. The conflict between it, its aspirations to become autonomous in relation to the tributary power, and the maritime expansions it stimulates are not specific to European history. They are found in China, where the transfer of the economic center of gravity from the “feudal” north country to the “maritime” south was on its way to causing the Confucian Empire to break up into a constellation of states. Some of these states with a typically mercantile structure could have established in the China Sea or in the Pacific what mercantilism realized later in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The brakes put on by the Mings, like the Turco-Mongolian invasions in the Near East, may, for this reason, appear as accidents of history that gave Europe its chance. Capitalism could have been born here; it is not the product of a European exception to the rule, as suggested by Eurocentric ideology, but, on the contrary, it is the normal solution to the fundamental contradiction of all tributary systems. To recognize this fact in no way means, however, that capitalism was already present there, nor that the reason it will appear precisely in that peripheral region of the tributary world—Europe—does not call for a specific analysis of this fact, nor that, consequently, the European mercantilist period contributes nothing new.

3. All the advanced tributary systems (the Islamic Orient, India, China) were, at the dawn of Europe’s conquest of America, agitated by the same basic contradictions that could be surmounted only by the invention of capitalism. The fact remains, nonetheless, that the emergence of this response in Europe must be explained concretely, as the reasons the development of capitalism in Europe arrested the possible evolution in this same direction in other regions of the world, indeed involved them in regressive involutions (Amin, 1980: chs. 3, 4).

(i) The period 1500–1800 falls under the history of capitalism and not that of European feudalism, even if the capitalism in question was still mercantilist and would emerge in its complete form only with large-scale industry in the nineteenth century.

(ii) The European mercantilist transition, in contrast to what developed earlier elsewhere, is singular. This singularity lies in the fact that the absolutist state was not the continuation of the dispersed feudal tributary power of the previous era (which, for that reason, is a peripheral form of the tributary state), but its negation. Whereas, elsewhere (in the Islamic Orient, India, and China), the

tributary state assumed from the beginning its mature form (which I call central) and maintained it.

(iii) During the phase 1150–1300, European feudalism underwent an expansion subjected to its own internal logic, through the clearing of new lands. This expansion was exhausted during the following phase (1300–1450), marked by decreasing productivity; but the political system remained unchanged (feudal). These two phases are thus of a completely different nature from those of the subsequent phases of capitalist expansion and crisis. The peripheral character of the European tributary formation reveals a flexibility that may be contrasted with the relative rigidity of the advanced central tributary forms: the crisis of the feudal system was surmounted by the emergence of the absolutist state which, by means of the conquest of America, created a mercantilist world-economy in whose service it placed itself.

(iv) The concept according to which the absolutist state must be feudal in nature, because, by its very essence, the capitalist state must be liberal, is a deformation produced by bourgeois ideology which has, moreover, produced other confusions. For example, that Great Britain's advantage over its principal rival, France, would be said to have stemmed from its political system (the beginnings of liberalism in the eighteenth century) or from its ideology (Protestantism) or from technological superiority. In reality, this advantage is basically the result of Great Britain's privileged position in the system of exploitation of the American peripheries.

(v) The establishment of a new system of core-periphery relations between Atlantic Europe and America is not the repetition of the extension of trade in the earlier periods. America does not "trade" with Europe; it is molded to be integrated as a periphery economically exploited by mercantilist Europe. Among the authors of the world system school, J. M. Blaut (1989, 1991; Amin, 1990) emphasizes, correctly, the extraordinary importance of this exploitation, which found expression in, among others: a considerable flux of gold and silver, reinforcing the social position of the new merchant capitalists in European society and giving them a decisive advantage over their competitors (they could offer better prices worldwide); and secondly, in a huge volume of profits drawn from the American plantations. In 1600 the exports of sugar from Brazil represent twice the total exports of England.

(vi) The two cycles, of expansion (1450–1600) then of readjustment (1600–1750), of the mercantilist world-economy, have their own nature, different in essence from that of the later cycles of full-fledged capitalism.

(vii) In the birth of European capitalism, two factors (the flexibility of the feudal peripheral tributary mode, the construction of a mercantilist world-economy and the molding of the Americas into this framework) are thus indissolubly linked. I have contrasted this analysis, which I have described as “unequal development” (the qualitative forward leap emerges from the peripheries of the earlier system) with the culturalist arguments about the “European miracle,” dominant throughout the Eurocentric deformation of Western ideology (recourse to the mythical Greek ancestor, Christianophilia, racism).

(viii) The capitalist character of the mercantilist transition expresses itself in the ideological rupture that accompanies the formation of the absolutist state: abandonment of the metaphysical hegemony.

3. The examination of the transition period from 1500 to 1800 that I propose is very different from that of Frank. I view this period as characterized by a major new conflict. On the one hand, there is the power which will install the modern system, that is to say a hierarchized economic system, centered on Europe (expanded to the United States and later Japan, which constitute the contemporary “Triad”) imposing on the rest of the world (the majority) the status of peripheral victims of a wholesale and unprecedented polarization. At the other pole are forces that resist the dismantling of the old systems in all their ramifications (but end up losing the war) that is to say, at the level of the local organization, as well as at the corresponding levels of regional and international systems.

The differences between the old and new systems, which Frank does not recognize, are vast. In the old system, the majority of the population of the globe was concentrated at the core: in the new, the core is the minority. In the old system, the three centers enjoyed considerable autonomy, unrelated to the high level of interdependence among the modern Triad. Without recalling once again the polarization proper to capitalism, the old system allowed room to catch up. The proof is that peripheral Europe was able to catch up in a very short time. The modern system makes it impossible to make up for lost ground within the framework of its logic of production.

I therefore consider the period 1500–1800 as that of conflict between the two systems. The map which Frank proposes in his work illustrates the complementary conflict combination of the corresponding network of the new project of capitalism centered on Europe (and later the Triad) and networks inherited from the past (which constitute the subsystems in East Asia and the Indian Ocean). The old subsystems were progressively losing their autonomy, either to be destroyed or subdued by the new capitalist network.

I say progressively because Asia, in many ways, remained more advanced than Europe before the latter began its conquest of the world. On this score, I have no bones to pick with the arguments raised by Frank. On the contrary, they were those I have been advancing for a long time. But I do not interpret them, as does Frank, that “nothing has changed.” If Asia lost this war and if Europe won, this calls for reflection and explanation. The explanation Frank advances on this subject is poor: Europe benefited from the Asian crisis. Which crisis? And why did Asia not overcome (the crisis) by its own means? With regard to China, the work of Jean Chesneaux and Marianne Bastid (1969) propose the best analysis of the crisis in question:

The relationship between population and economic activity, relationship which was favourable up to the middle of the eighteenth century, was overturned toward 1780–1800. It was a change in which the combination of population and economic growth gave way to crisis, and the depletion of resources in relation to the needs of a population which continued to expand rapidly (1969: 43).

One is forced to agree with Chesneaux and Bastid that none of the succeeding Chinese systems, neither those of the Empire nor that of the Kuomintang republic were able to overcome this crisis, and China had to wait for the Communist revolution to witness the beginning of its resolution. I do not think it would be possible to explain the resistance of Chinese society to the qualitative transformation of its organization (which was required to overcome the crisis) without considering the extraordinary rigidity of an advanced full-fledged tributary system, the case in China. I compare this rigidity of central societies to the flexibility of the peripheral modes, and come up with the hypotheses of unequal development in history of a fundamentally non-Eurocentric nature. In this sense, China was

not more “traditionalist” than Europe in the past as Frank would have it; it has become so. Europe, being peripheral, suddenly became more flexible, more open to change. To have noted this does not amount to Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism exists when one explains this flexibility by immanent virtues unique to Europe; it is not the case when one explains it through general laws functioning in all human societies.

In this sense, also, it sounds excessive to say that during the mercantile period nothing new was invented. No doubt, Europe did not invent much which was not known elsewhere before the nineteenth century, in the domain of technology and the organization of trade. But Europe was able to invent new things in other domains, such as the organization of power and relations to economic life. Europe was therefore, the first to invent capitalism—which, I said, could well have originated elsewhere. This is not nothing. Having deliberately removed from his research concerns everything that has to do with politics and ideology, social relations, and social issues, everything that is outside economics, Frank refuses to see the magnitude of the changes in question.

I would add that it is necessary to take another look at most of the things he writes about Asia. In my analysis concerning past systems (from 500 BC to 1500 AD), I thought it useful to lay emphasis on the particularities proper to the evolution of each of the three major central areas. China experienced practically continuous development from its beginning to the middle of the eighteenth century, which gave it a stable advance over all other societies and a force which explains why it managed to escape colonization, even after its defeat during the second half of the nineteenth century. The quasi-regular growth of its population and its expansion to the south of the Yangtze (the figures which Frank gave on this subject are the same as mine) bear testimony to this dynamism (which is contrary to the Eurocentric debate on an Asian “stagnation” that was said to be unparalleled for two millennia). One then begins to appreciate the admiration shown China by the Europeans (which I highlighted; cf. Etienne, 1988). The development of India (here also my figures are not different from Frank’s), was more chaotic and ran into crisis much earlier. This probably explains the ease with which India was conquered by Dupleix, and then the British. The case of the Middle East center was much more doubtful. Frank, like me, observes that the population of the region has remained practically stagnant for

nearly two millennia, up to the nineteenth century. The techniques of production in agriculture and crafts equally recorded very little evolution. One can therefore speak of stagnation rather than of continuous development. And if the region appeared “brilliant” in comparison to peripheral Europe up to the fourteenth century, it is simply inherited from its more prestigious past. Up to the first century of our era, the region had been the most advanced on the planet, even ahead of China and India. But neither the Byzantine Empire nor the Arab Caliphate, neither the Ottoman nor the Persian empires, achieved serious progress beyond what had been attained much earlier.

THE FUTURE: END OF THE CYCLE OR NEW INVENTION?

1. Frank has therefore given up the effort to locate and explain in universal history those qualitative changes which make successive phases different from one another, whether at local levels or at that of the global system. Instead he substitutes a monotonous cyclical vision of an eternal beginning based on a kind of far-fetched popular philosophy.

The last two centuries have been those of Euro-American hegemony. Today, Asia is “climbing”; why would the region not revert tomorrow to what it was in the past, the center of the world? One has lost count of the journalistic articles and books that have come up with this type of “prediction” without conducting a thorough analysis of the real challenges facing contemporary society. And like many people, the media which have made a name in this genre, have never asked the question of the future of capitalism—which for them is evidence of eternity (“the end of history”). Asia would simply replace Europe within the context of this eternal logic. Frank’s thesis says nothing more, alas.

Furthermore since, according to Frank, the system has always been global and identical, the last cycle which is on its way out is not different from the preceding ones, perhaps dating back before 1800 or even 1500. Besides, all these cycles were of necessity global, because herein lies the only real quality of the system, according to Frank. I must say none of the arguments Frank and others—who rather too easily adopted the idea of the “long cycle” (many of them are among the authors of global economy and related issues)—have

convinced me of the evidence of these "cycles." One of their arguments, strong in appearance, is the Black Plague, which hit Asia and Europe and affected the population dynamics in a slightly general way. I would say that this incident has no relationship with our subject. The spread of the Black Plague only goes to prove that the earth is round, that human beings are animals, all of whom are prone to the same diseases, that the links between the regions of the world ensure such a transmission. This fact does not prove in any way that the links between the regions of the world are of the same nature in the past as they are at present.

In contrast with the eternal vision of the eternal commencement of the cyclic world (even if it were inscribed in a general movement of productive forces), the method that I recommend is founded on the distinction between the eventual cycles (without prior prejudice to their existence) in the modern capitalist system (after 1800), in its inception phase (from 1500 to 1800), and during the previous tributary era (before 1500). No social or even natural phenomenon develops in a regular, continuous, and indefinite manner. The same is true, perforce of capitalist expansion, whose phases of rapid growth are necessarily followed by difficult moments of readjustment. These phases give the reader of the historical series describing the phenomenon the impression of a long wave evolution. Nonetheless, to recognize the succession of phases is not necessarily to admit a cyclical theory. For, if words have meaning, one can speak of a cycle only if these are definite mechanisms that monotonously reproduce its movement. It is necessary that the articulation of the different dimensions of reality (economic flux, technological innovations, social and political conflicts, etc.) function in an identical manner from one cycle to the other. Adherence to the principle according to which capitalism must be analyzed as a world system in no way implies the principle that capitalist expansion would be subjected to a law of cyclical development.

The analysis of the economic dimension proper finds, in capitalism, its specific justification stemming from the fact that the system is controlled in its totality directly by the laws of its economic development. But it is important to define precisely the nature of the economic laws in question, the duration (short or long) of their deployment. One then obtains a better grasp of the relativity of the autonomy of economics; that is to say, the limits imposed upon it by the integration between the deployment of its laws, on the one hand,

and the reactions they provoke in the social milieu in which they operate, on the other.

One can without great difficulty construct an autogenous economic model of a monotonous cycle by bringing into play the two known mechanisms of the “multiplier” and of the “accelerator.” One can improve the model by grafting onto it a cycle of the responses of credit and of the relative variations of real wages and the rate of profit. One can expose this model in the framework of a closed or open national economy, or in that of the world-economy. All these economic exercises are conceived in the rigorous abstract framework of the capitalist mode of production, a necessary and sufficient condition of their validity. It is interesting to note that the results obtained by this means describe accurately the actual framework of the short cycle (seven years on the average) that marks out, in fact, the long century, 1815–1945. After the Second World War, a more pronounced degree of control of the economy seems to have been imposed, through mechanisms such as the more active intervention of the state, credit control, income distribution, and public expenditures.

Reflection upon the more profound tendencies of the capitalist economic system is the object of controversies. Theories concerning the “long cycles” (so-called Kondratieff cycles) are situated on this plane.⁷ Here, I share with a few others, a minority thesis, which is totally ignored by conventional economics, by the analysis of the world-system school (who, all, it seems to me, admit the long cycle), and by the dominant Marxist currents. The thesis I am defending is founded on the idea that the capitalist mode of production expresses an inherent social contradiction, which has led in turn to a permanent tendency of the system to produce more that can be consumed: pressure on wages tends to generate a volume of profits, saved and earmarked for investment by the competition, which is always relatively too big in comparison with the investments necessary to meet the final demand. The threat of relative stagnation is, from that angle, the chronic illness of capitalism. It is not the crisis that must be explained by specific reasons but, rather, the peculiar

⁷ See my comments on long waves in Amin (1996a: 88–91). I certainly do not mind calling them “Kondratieff waves,” or A-phases of expansion and B-phases of crisis and adjustment in capitalist production. Beyond semantics, I discuss the nature of those cycles.

expansion that is the product of circumstances specific to each of its phases (Amin, 1996a; Foster, 1986). I contend that this contradiction is inherent to the capitalist mode of production in the full sense of the word; that is to say, once again realized through modern industry. I am certainly not proposing to project this specific law back in time, either to ancient times, or even to the transition of mercantilist capitalism (1500–1800). There is no tendency toward overproduction, in any society, prior to modern capitalism.

In the framework of this fundamental theory of the capitalist mode of production, the discussion of the apparent cycles takes a turn quite different from that produced by the world-system school. Each of the growth phases (successively 1790–1814, 1848–72, 1893–1914, 1945–68), do not only have their own unique character, but also are set in motion by mechanisms which are not cyclical, in the sense that they are different in nature from one phase to the other. I refer the reader to what I wrote previously on this subject. I would add that the backward projection, before 1800 and all the more so before 1500, of a cycle implies even more disastrous amalgams and a vulgar reduction of the concept of relations between the economic base and the political and ideological superstructure.

The succession of hegemonies is generally associated with the reading of long cycles of universal history (Amin, 1996a: 91–94). The least one can say is that the rivalry of political formations is a reality just as permanent in history as the social conflicts inside these formations. The truth of this statement is such that, in contrast to Marx's affirmation, according to which history was above all the history of the class struggle, some have proclaimed that history was above all the struggle of nations. Is it possible to build a bridge between these two apparently mutually exclusive affirmations?

Historians have always come up against the difficulties of this task. According to some, the history of capitalism—from 1500 onwards, perhaps from 1350—should be reread as that of a succession of hegemonies exercised by a particular power over the capitalist world-economy. In a general way, the thesis of the world system tipped the scales too much in the direction its automatic option demanded; that is, the determination of the parts, the states, by the whole, the world-economy. I prefer—like Szentes (1985)—to place the emphasis on the dialectic of contradiction between the internal (national) and the external (world system) forces. This attitude leads one immediately to qualify strongly the proposed responses to the

question of hegemonies. First of all, of course, the would-be hegemony in the capitalist world-economy was not a world hegemony. The world was not reduced from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century to Europe and its American appendix. Saying Venice or the United Provinces were "hegemonic" means nothing on the actual scale of the time. But even on the European capitalist world-economy scale, I do not see how one can call Venice or the United Provinces hegemonic. Remarkable financial and commercial centers, for sure; but indeed constrained to reckon with the rural feudal world that hemmed them in on all sides and with the political balances that it involved throughout the conflicts of the great monarchies. The treaty of Westphalia, in 1648, did not consecrate a Dutch hegemony, but a European equilibrium that annulled it. I contest even that one may speak of a British hegemony in the eighteenth century. Great Britain conquered advantageous positions on the seas at the time, to the detriment of its French rival. But it was neither capable yet of affirming a distinct power in the affairs of the European continent, nor even of really dominating the potential overseas peripheries. Its hegemony would not be acquired until quite late, after China and the Ottoman Empire were "opened" (beginning in 1840), and after the revolt of the Sepoys in India was put down (1857). The industrial advancement and the financial monopoly of Great Britain, real at the time, led to no true hegemony. Indeed, to make industrial production the key world economic activity required rather a European equilibrium, and therefore that Great Britain did not dominate. In reality, the situation was such that scarcely had the hegemony of Great Britain been constituted (from 1850 to 1860) then it was challenged by the rise of its competitors, Germany and the United States, even though London maintained a privileged financial position.

Hegemony, far from constituting the rule in the history of world capitalist expansion, is rather the exception, of short and fragile duration. The law of the system is, rather, that of durable rivalry. Have things changed since? Or are they on the way to changing really? In certain aspects, the hegemony of the United States after 1945 is, in fact, actually of a new character. The United States has, for the first time in the history of humanity, military means of intervention (be it by destruction or by genocide) of planetary dimensions. Limited from 1945 to 1990 by the military bipolarity shared with the former Soviet Union, the United States has perhaps be-

come, what before it none had been, except Hitler in his imagination: the (military) master of the world. . . . But for how long?

2. Back to the issue of the rise of contemporary Asia, I would say it is far from assuming the magnitude visualized by popular literature. In this debate I placed emphasis on what I called the "five monopolies" which in the foreseeable future would reinforce the powers of the Triad in its overall relations with the modern peripheries, including those on the road to rapid development (in Asia and elsewhere). These monopolies reinforce the Triad's world hegemony through technological initiative, control of financial flows, access to the natural resources of the planet, communications and media, and weapons of mass destruction.

These five monopolies, taken as a whole, define the framework within which the law of globalized value operates. The law of value is the condensed expression of all these conditions, and not the expression of objective, pure, economic rationality. The conditioning of all of these processes annuls the impact of industrialization in the peripheries, devalues the latter's productive work, and overestimates the supposed value added from the activities of the new monopolies from which the cores profit. What results is a new hierarchy, more unequal than ever before, in the distribution of income on a world scale, subordinating the industries of the peripheries and reducing them to the role of subcontracting. This is the new foundation of polarization, presaging its future forms.

The crisis which has hit East and Southeast Asia confirms how important these monopolies had become. The dominant transnational capital may succeed through its intervention during the crisis, in organizing the countries of Southeast Asia. In spite of appearances, they have in no way outgrown the stage of peripheral industrial economies ("Ersatz-capitalism"). The scenario is completely different with regard to Korea, the exception among contemporary Third World countries, and the only one among them which has succeeded in constructing the core model of a new capitalist economy. It is no surprise that the ongoing financial crisis should be an opportunity for the diplomacy of Washington and its Japanese and European allies to try to dismantle Korea's potential. The financial crisis facing Korea is minor, in the sense that France and Great Britain, for example, have encountered about ten of these crises in the postwar decades without prompting the powers in Washington to propose what they are trying to impose on Korea today. It is

minor in the sense that Korea's current external deficit, measured in relation to GDP for example, and in terms of length of time, is smaller than those of the United States. However, what does one find? The IMF simply attributes the existence of the crisis to monopolies in Korea (as if the big American, Japanese, and European companies were not part of it all!) and proposes that they be dismantled and the most juicy pieces allocated to American monopolies! One would therefore expect that the IMF would, in order to resolve the American problem, make a similar proposal for the sell-off of Boeing (which is a monopoly as far as I know), for example, to Airbus, its European rival (which is also a monopoly). Mr. Camdessus, despite his French nationality, would be recalled by order of President Clinton in the next hour if he dared make such a preposterous proposal! Should one therefore be surprised if the Korean press does not hesitate in talking about the new Korean war, with fingers pointing at Washington as the aggressor? This war, in my opinion, is bound to be drawn-out. There will be ups and downs, no doubt, but it is not certain that the United States and its allies will emerge victorious.

Behind Korea is China, whose evolution will certainly weigh even more heavily on the future of the world-system. I have suggested elsewhere several possible scenarios concerning this evolution, which largely depend on those internal factors which Frank deliberately chooses to ignore (Amin, 1996a: ch. 7, 225 ff.; Amin 1998: 133-44).

The impending long war has already begun on the terrain of financial globalization which has been rejected by China, India, and probably Korea, carrying along with them other countries in South Asia and perhaps elsewhere in Latin America. If this first battle is won, it will be possible to go beyond the attempt by the G7, to limit the damage by instituting regulatory global mechanisms, that would enable the ruling transnational capital to remain the master of the game. Henceforth, other battles will be waged in their turn, in what I have described as the long transition to world socialism. The future remains open and will not allow itself to be locked up in the mechanical mold of the cycle imagined by Frank.

3. The real stakes in the fight to come cannot be reduced to the positions that the Triad and others (the NIEs of Asia and Latin America) will occupy in the capitalist system of tomorrow. The polarization inherent to world capitalism, deliberately ignored by the would-be liberal ideology, renders these ideological propositions

meaningless. Integration into the world-system creates, in fact, an insurmountable contradiction in the framework of the logic of the expansion of capital. It makes illusory every attempt of the peripheries, whose peoples represent at least three-fourths of humanity, to "catch up," that is to say, to assure its peoples a standard of living comparable to those of the privileged minority of the core.

Liberal ideology would have meaning only if it dared to proclaim the total abolition of borders, to open them to migrations of workers as it calls for opening them to trade and to the flow of capital. Then, actually, the ideology would be consistent, and proposing by means of capitalism to achieve the homogenization of social conditions on a worldwide scale. This opening is not on the agenda. The defenders of liberal ideology will say that opening the borders to trade and to the flow of capital is second best. Under these limited conditions it is the cause of unacceptable polarization. One might as well say that death is second best after life! Liberal ideology is thus pure trickery, for the real second best must be defined on the basis of the criterion of its capacity to reduce polarization. In this spirit, logic holds that if migratory flows must be controlled, the opening to trade and to the flow of capital must be as well. That is why "delinking" defines an essential condition for a gradual reduction of polarization.

The thesis, according to which no society can escape the permanent challenge of the worldwide expansion of capitalism (and therefore that "development" is nothing more than development within this system), that there is no autonomous development possible outside of it, is mere recognition of the actual fact but immediately surrenders the possibility that it is possible to change the world. It is necessary to distinguish capitalist expansion and development and not confuse the two concepts, even if in everyday usage the confusion is, alas, frequent. Capitalist expansion is, by nature, polarizing. Development must be, by definition, of a different nature so as to overcome this polarization. The concept of development is in essence a critical concept.

The ideology of development that dominated the scene after the Second World War did not make this distinction clearly. For some, the national Third World bourgeoisie, the objective of development was to catch up by means of appropriate state policies while remaining in the world-system. For others, the so-called socialist states, this same objective (to catch up) which implies some obvious similarities, was mixed with shreds of the contradictory objective of building

“another society.” Furthermore, the uncontrollable exponential growth produced by the logic of the capitalist mode of production is, as ecologists have rediscovered, suicidal. Capitalism, at once as mode of production and world-system, is thus simultaneously globally suicidal and criminal with respect to the peoples.

The world has been launched into a new phase of history which Frank’s method does not even allow one to suspect. A long phase of transition from world capitalism to world socialism, similar to the long transition from 1500 to 1800, is characterized by the action of both complementary and contradictory forces, some continuing to act in the logic of the reproduction of social relations proper to capitalism, and some imposing another social logic still to be invented (Amin, 1996b: 244–58; Amin, 1996a: 309 ff.).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING EUROCENTRISM

1. Eurocentrism is a form of what I would generally call culturalism. By this I mean that there are transhistoric invariables among “cultures” proper to various peoples. In the particular case of Eurocentrism, there are various versions of this affirmation, attributing “the European genius” either to the Greek ancestor (European civilization had carried with it, according to the Greeks, a Promethean sense and/or the concept of democracy), or “the genius of Christianity” of the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition, or the more popular genes of the “race.” In all cases, I found mythologies manufactured in modern times to legitimize European domination of the world capitalist system. Ancient Greeks had nothing to do with the Europe of that time—it was a periphery in the system of the era. Greece interacted with Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, one of the constituent elements of the Middle Eastern center. Hellenism, Christianity, and Islam were the successive forms of this tributary construction. As for Christianity, it was first a philosophy reflecting the real alienation of the tributary system before being constrained by the external capitalist transformation to adjust to the new demands of modern society. I would equally add that the link Judaism-Islam is certainly stronger than that which has characterized Judeo-Christian continuity. Eurocentrism is thus in effect an ideology that enables its defenders to conclude that “modernity” (or/and capitalism) could only

have been born in Europe, which subsequently offered it to other peoples ("the civilizing mission").

The mode of today is culturalism. There are, in fact, other declarations of a similar nature, which emanate as reactions to Eurocentrism. Islamists, Hinduists, adherents of Africanity or Asian specificity, indigenists of all kinds are found everywhere and equally assume that there are in their "cultures" transhistorical invariables which are superior to those of the glorified Eurocentric West. "Yes, we are fundamentally different from one another," they say. This is why I call these culturalisms reverse Eurocentrisms. Besides, each and every one agrees to submit to the same rigors of capitalism. The manipulation of culturalisms is therefore not difficult to set in motion, should the need arise.

2. I have categorically rejected the culturalist argument. The cultures, including the religions, can transform themselves, can adjust to, or can resist the demands of the times, then perish and disappear from the scene. I have always sought to develop conceptual systems which make it possible to understand that history is universal, that it is not constituted by juxtaposed segments which are irreducible one to the other. Concrete specificity—which continues to exist (each society and each given time in history has its specificities)—explains the universality of "laws" (if they are referred to as such) which regulate social life. This is the reason why I criticized the so-called Asiatic mode of production already in 1957. It is this concern for universalism that has led me to propose the family of communal modes of production, and that of the tributary family, as constituent elements common to all precapitalist societies, and therefrom, the infinite variety of both those forms.

Because the same contradictions are characteristic of all tributary societies, the latter could not overcome them except by inventing capitalism; and this invention was on the current agenda in the entire tributary world, not only in Europe. But Europe had been faster than others and for a long time more advanced. Why? It is in response to this question that I introduced the concepts of the (full-fledged) central tributary mode and the (incomplete) peripheral tributary mode. Feudalism is, in this analysis, a peripheral mode, derived from offshoots of communal systems of the barbarians of the Roman tributary system. This peripheral character manifested itself through the splitting of the power system which characterized feudalism, distinct from its marked centralization in the complete

mode. On the other hand, the “backwardness” in the European tributary formation explains the specification of absolute monarchy which was constituted only in the modern epoch, in concomitance with mercantilism. In other words, being peripheral, the European tributary model (feudalism) proved more flexible, favoring the same acceleration of historical evolution. This reading of comparative history has nothing to do with either Greek ancestors or with Christianity (be it the one reserved for Protestantism as in Weber), but is based on exclusively universal concepts. It explains the particular through the general. It is fundamentally nonculturalist, non-Eurocentric.

3. Capitalism is not a more advanced technological level, nor a mode of production strictly defined. It is, like every other society, a whole in which the facets are multiple. Capitalism has therefore produced a culture, its culture, just as the tributary system produced its own. That I use the singular here—the tributary system, the tributary culture—is meant to emphasize that, beyond the variety of their forms of expression, these cultures share basic identical characteristics, which I have described as tributary alienation. In the same way, the culture of capitalism is defined by its own form of alienation, mercantilist alienation. “Moneytheism” has replaced Monotheism. The “market” rules like the ancient God. I am therefore talking about the capitalist culture and refuse to be drawn into the pervasive vulgar definition of “Western culture,” joint product of Eurocentric affirmation for some (the winners of the system) and thereafter reverse Eurocentrism (the losers).

If this is the case, if there is a problem, it is because capitalist expansion has always been, and remains, polarizing. As a result, the universal culture that it proposes is also truncated. There is no conflict of cultures. Behind its eventual appearance hovers the real conflict, that of societies. In this perspective, modernity cannot be rejected in the illusory prospect of a return to the past. On the contrary, it is necessary to pursue development, put an end to its truncated character. But for this, it is necessary to go beyond capitalism. In other words, to seriously fight Eurocentrism, which has kept company with the polarizing character of capitalist expansion, one should admit that the transformation of history is possible, that the invention of the new is necessary, something that Frank does not want to imagine. Failing that, modern societies will continue to become entangled in obscure battles which lead nowhere other than the self-destruction of humanity.

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