

AN EXCERPT FROM:
AN ALTERNATIVE TO
LIBERAL GLOBALIZATION
AL-BADIL LIL-'AWALAMA AL-LIBRALIYYA

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*THE BANDUNG CONFERENCE AND THE
STRUGGLES OF THE FIRST WAVE OF
GLOBALIZATION*

In the Bandung Conference of 1955, the governments and peoples of Asia and Africa expressed their ambitions to reconstruct a global system based on the recognition of the rights of countries that had previously been under the yoke of colonialism. In that period, “the rights to development,” as applied to the frameworks for negotiating multipolarity,¹ constituted the basis of globalization. These rights would force the imperial powers to adapt to new realities.

The drive towards industrialization during the Bandung period did not result from the logic behind the spread of imperialism; rather, it was imposed by the victorious peoples of the Global South. There is no doubt that this progress had fed the illusion that “catching up” seemed within reach, while imperialism—forced to adapt to the peripheries’

1. Multipolarity is the distribution of geopolitical power among multiple countries, as opposed to the concentration of power in the hands of one country. All footnotes are the translators’.

rights to development—re-established itself through new forms of control.

The old discrepancy between imperialist countries and oppressed nations (synonymous to the discrepancy between industrialized and non-industrialized countries) gradually receded to clear the way for a new form of discrepancy based on centralized privileges tied to five new monopolies of imperialist countries: control over modern technologies, natural resources, the global financial system, means of communication, and weapons of mass destruction.

Bandung was the period of “African Renaissance.” In adopting this perspective, it is necessary to look towards the concept of “African Unity,” a call which initially arose in centers of the African diaspora in the Americas. While this call achieved one of its primary goals (the independence of countries on the continent), it did not achieve the goal of unification, as Thandika Mkandawire² has pointed out. It was not a coincidence that during this period the countries of Africa engaged in projects of renewal inspired by socialist values, and which were based on the struggle to liberate the peoples of the periphery from the reality of capitalism.

2. Mkandawire is an economist and public intellectual, as well as the current Chair of African Development and Professor at the London School of Economics.

We do not need to be reductive about these many efforts on the continent, as is now

common: over the period of thirty years, the heinous regime led by Mobutu³ in the Congo improved the rates of education by more than forty times what was achieved by Belgian colonialism in eighty years. Whether we accept or exclude these efforts, African countries took nation-building initiatives in the true meaning of the phrase. These were the available options (disregarding ethnic sectarianism) for the ruling classes in the interest of the nations' crystallization. However, forms of ethnic sectarianism arose after that due to the erosion of the Bandung models, and the subsequent loss of authorities' legitimacy. Some of those in power resorted to ethnicity in re-forming their control according to their particular interests. I refer here to my book "Ethnicity's Onslaught Against the Nations."⁴

Moving on from that which came after the Second World War, we now turn to describing the formation of today's challenges.

NEW AGE, NEW CHALLENGES

The discrepancy between center and periphery is no longer synonymous with the discrepancy between industrialized and non-industrialized countries. The polarization between the center and periphery still exists, but it is represented by the imperialist character of the spread of global capitalism. It gains new

3. Mobutu Sese Seko was the military dictator and President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1965 to 1997.

4. Amin, Samir. *L'ethnie à l'assaut des nations: Yougoslavie, Ethiopie*. Editions L'Harmattan, 2000.

ground by means of the above-mentioned “five new monopolies,” from which the imperialist countries derive benefit. Under the shadow of these conditions, the continuation of projects of accelerated development in “ascendant” peripheral countries (especially China and other countries in the Global South, which have achieved undisputed prosperity) cannot do away with the grip of imperialism. In fact, it leads to a new discrepancy between center and periphery, instead of doing away with it. We cannot conceive of imperialism as the sum of its previous stages of expansion, as we are now facing the “collective imperialism” of the “Triad” countries (the United States, Europe, Japan). Within this model, monopolistic economic unions, which derive their roots from the Triad countries, lessen mercantile conflicts of interest that previously blocked their paths. The collective character of this imperialism becomes apparent through the Triad’s use of shared tools to control the global system.

Thus on the economic level there is the World Trade Organization (the Ministry of the Triad’s Colonies), the International Monetary Fund (the Treasury of the Colonial Agency), the World Bank (the Ministry of Propaganda), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the European Union (established to prevent Europe from leaving Liberalism behind). At the political level there is the G7, the United States Armed Forces, and the instruments subject to its control represented in NATO (the domestication of the United Nations completes this picture). The American hegemonic project seeks military control over the world by intervening in the affairs of others without respect to international law, and by claiming for itself the role to launch “preemptive

wars” wherever it wants. These elements unite in creating a ground for the crystallization of collective imperialism, granting American leaders the means necessary to compensate for their economic shortcomings.

STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE PERIPHERY

Today, the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America face an expanding imperialist project known as globalized “Neoliberalism,” which is no more than the development of “Apartheid at the global level.” Is it possible to challenge this new imperial system? What will the outcome of this challenge be? Does our picture of reality allow us room to imagine an urgent challenge against this system? Or rather, does reality give us a picture that confirms the impossibility of resistance in the foreseeable future?

The defeated countries of the Global South have accepted—to a large degree—the conditions of dependent compradorism. While people are powerless and struggle daily to survive, tending usually to accept their fate, the worst part is the nourishment of new fantasies that help the ruling classes wash away their past (political Islam is the most dramatic example). From another angle, we see the rise of resistance movements and struggles against capitalism and imperialism, the increasingly progressive and radical character of many of these movements, the successes achieved by new leftist governments in Latin America and Nepal (whatever the limits of those victories may be), and the critical stances that many governments in the Global South assume within the World Trade Organization. All of this evidence indicates that another better world is

possible. The aggressive strategy necessary for rebuilding a popular front in the Global South requires the radicalization of social resistance in the face of the imperialist attack of capitalism.

The ruling classes of some countries in the Global South have chosen a clear strategy that refuses subordination to the dominant forces of the world order: effective interventions that aim to accelerate development in their countries.

China became more willing than others to utilize this developmental strategy and achieved indisputably remarkable results through: the solidarity brought about by Maoist nation-building, the choice to maintain control over its national currency and capital flows, and by refusing capitalist challenges to land collectivization (the main revolutionary gain for peasants).⁵ Is it possible to reproduce this experience in other places? What are its limitations? This brings me to the following conclusion on the alleged contradictions of this developmental strategy: it is pure delusion to envision that national capitalist projects can establish themselves as they did historically in the central countries.⁶ The internal contradictions of capitalism have prevented capital, labor forces, and the agricultural population to reach a consensus that would guarantee the

5. It is important to note that Amin's presentation of land collectivization excludes failures related to this Maoist policy, including wide-scale famine.

6. Here Amin is referring to the European countries which first emerged as capitalist powers, and is relying on dependency theory terminology.

stability of the capitalist system, the system which—for the same reason—is able to orient itself toward the Right (and then confronts an increase in mass social movements) or turn toward the Left in the building of “market socialism” as a stage in the long transition to socialism. However, similar strategies conceived by the ruling classes of the “ascendant” countries continue to be precarious. Neither Brazil nor India are able to effectively resist the pressures of collective imperialism or reactionary local classes, and this is because the two countries have not known radical revolutions as occurred in China.

At the same time, the countries of the Global South—at least some of them—now possess the means to reduce their dependence on imperialist countries’ monopolies over technology. In other words, the countries of the Global South are now capable of developing themselves without falling into the trap of dependency: they have the technological capability to utilize their own resources. They can also force the North to adapt to the least harmful method of consumption after recovering ownership of their natural resources. In this way, the forces of the Global South have the option to leave financial globalization behind. This is how they have already begun to challenge the North’s monopoly over weapons of mass destruction, which the United States had planned to maintain. These countries can now also develop, between each other, an exchange of commodities, services, capital, and technology—something that was not envisioned in 1955 when all the countries of the Global South were disadvantaged in terms of industrialization and the ownership of technology. Today, however, disengagement is increasingly on the agenda of possibilities, more than in any previous era. Are the countries of the Global South able

to achieve it? Who will actually do it? The ruling bourgeois classes? I wholly doubt that. Will it occur when the working classes seize power? Most probably, disengagement will begin through transitional systems of a national or popular nature.

The “agrarian question” is at the heart of remaining problems to be solved, constituting the bulk of the “national question.” The capitalist structure of minority private ownership of land, to the exclusion of other people, is a structure entirely borrowed from Europe. Yet it only became possible because of the European agricultural population’s large migration to urban centers. Contemporary capitalism makes it impossible for peripheral countries, which contain half of the world’s population, to solve the “peasant problem” in the same way. In fact, in order to succeed in achieving their development goals in the same way, these countries would need the equivalent of four Americas to which their populations could emigrate. The alternative is a peasant system built on collective access to land. In reality, the possibility for progress on this basis is much greater than the capitalist system. If it were possible to divide the production growth of modern farmers, whose numbers are few, among the millions of excluded that have become “useless,” we would realize that the growth rate from this vantage is more modest than we believe. The peasant system is considered a form of development “with a socialist character,” according to the Chinese and Vietnamese framing. It represents the largest, and only, assurance of solidarity in nation building.

TRANSLATORS' NOTE: Born in British-occupied Egypt in 1931, Samir Amin was a leading Marxist theorist until his death in August 2018. Perhaps best known for his coining of the term "Eurocentrism," Amin dedicated his career to developing a form of Marxist dependency theory that re-interpreted the crisis of capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a struggle between "center" and "periphery." The stirrings of real and long-lasting socialist revolution, he argued, could only begin in the "peripheries," which he also referred to as the countries of the "Global South." However, the task of revolution would falter and fail if co-opted by the national bourgeoisies, who would be quick to acquiesce to purchasing monopolized resources from highly industrialized nations, thus falling into traps of dependency. The way out of it, Amin asserted throughout his life, required abandoning all fantasies of "accelerated

development" and championing popular movements that pushed for "disengagement" from the central powers—the challenges of this move were many, and Amin was never idealistic about its success.

Amin's final book, "200 Years Since the Birth of Karl Marx" (Dar al-Farabi, 2018), takes a long view towards Marxist theory and its applicability in the Global South. The book's early chapters consider the development of capitalism in Europe and the importance of Marx's critique, particularly *The Communist Manifesto*, for the continent. In his chapter "The Crisis of Capitalism and Crises in Capitalism," Amin posits three possible futures: will capitalism's flexibility allow it to overcome its obstacles? Will its internal contradictions lead it to a final, system-ending catastrophe? Or "will a wave of revolutions and innovative transformations rise and shape a new stage of globalization?"

In the above excerpt taken from the chapter "An Alternative to Liberal Globalization," Amin discusses the sustained challenges mounted in the peripheries against both imperialist and capitalist forces throughout the twentieth century, and the lessons they hold for contemporary movements. For Amin, the Bandung Conference of 1955 was one of the most important examples of these challenges, and it continues to serve as a compass for the necessary reconstruction of the Internationalist Left. The conference gathered Asian and African leaders from 29 newly independent countries, who together represented around half of the world's population at the time, to discuss strategies for economic, political, and cultural independence. Working together, these countries resisted the reigning global order and Cold War alignment politics. Over the period of half a century, the very same countries which participated in the tri-

umph of Bandung were gradually subjected to the demands of our current neoliberal powers. However, Amin insists that any future confrontation to capitalism will need to look towards the aspirations and strategies of earlier generations. In putting forward this generative proposal, he nevertheless periodically relies on romanticized representations of historic land collectivization policies and the power of peasant politics. While he leaves open the question of whether new struggles against capitalism will succeed, his lifelong confidence in the power of collective action in the periphery reminds us of what can be learned from Marxist traditions of the Global South.

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