

My Real Window to the non Arab Africa

Some words on Samir Amin

It was a great shock hearing about the passing of my friend late prof. Samir Amin.

It was more than 40 years when we met in Dakar, he was building IDEP- the Third World Forum and CODESRIA Since then, he was my real window to the non arab Africa.

We developed our deep cooperation until he came to settle partly in Cairo and join the progressive role of our joint project as Arab & African Research Center.

Once I wrote the next paragraphs on Samir Amin to introduce his profound thought to a pan African thought Panthion

just some lines here may express my understanding to a real great man and friend the late Prof. Samir Amin

Introduction

Samir Amin's thought stems from challenging the formulation of the world on the basis of various patterns of global capitalism's domination of the economic', the 'the social' and even 'the cultural', as a 'system / world'. Capitalism spared no effort to spread its nets throughout the world, and couldn't be but imperialist, expansionist and showing no mercy towards the peoples who tried to break free of it, or to become self-dependent.

This basic idea led Samir Amin to adopt the global phenomenon – that is, the world system – as a unit of analysis in his political economy approach. Hence,

Helmi Sharawy

Arab & African Research Center
Egypt

Africa has become, to him, part of this 'system', accepting it and consequently integrating into it, or trying to shape its movement independently to a certain degree, from the developments of global capitalism and its imperialist hegemony. And in doing so, it wasn't acting unilaterally, but rather in harmony with other similar developments in other areas of the world (Bandung / South bloc, etc.).....

Let us see what type of fighter was this man

Samir Amin (1931–2018) is:

- A young member of the leftist movement in Egypt in 1950s.
- A Student of Political Economy in the Sorbonne, and communist publishing his first volume on the accumulation on a world scale, subordination and delinkage.
- A roving expert at many countries in Africa, as well as the other three continents...
- Extending the analysis of the world order after WWII and Bandung, to the three, then four worlds, contemplating the crises of capitalist imperialism and its repercussions on the global situations and the formation of these worlds.

- Monitoring the movement that challenged the world capitalist system and the attempts of delinkage with it, especially after the rise of national liberation states, that tried for a while to 'catch up', then failed, only to rise and challenge again.
- Always classifying the third and fourth worlds states according to their ability of challenging world capitalism, and later, his views regarding the emergence of the Chinese experience, and recent the Russian experience in the frame of the attempts of supporting the South/South bloc in its efforts towards the delinkage
- Samir Amin affirms the role of Africa in the South / South process as much as he stresses on the role of developing the African and World democratic civil society institutions. He proved it by playing an important role in building a number of African cultural and advocative institutions on these basis (Pan Africanism movement), thus taking his experience from the local-national to the African and Arabic, as peripheries to the world system. This was an always-present topic in our discussions about the role of the revolutionary intellectuals in these transformations!

This huge legacy was summed up in his own words in four narratives that took the form of personal 'memoir's, in which he presented himself not only as a political economist, but also as a political activist.

Samir Amin has always seen himself through the lens of social sciences, as a professor of political economy, because he considers «economists» as merely experts of the capitalist system and its businessmen.

He didn't really like being classified as a 'thirdworldist', despite it was the case for a while in the context of analysing the 'system'. He also wasn't that welcoming to being described as "affiliated" to the theory of «dependencia» that prevailed when talking about global accumulation, as he saw that the world capitalism was trying to 'integrate' the south states into the 'system', not just preserving their dependencies to it.

First: the intellectual legacy

Samir Amin's journey wasn't an easy one, for despite his interest in the realities in his homeland, he took a worldly path since the 1960s. Being a member of the "Raia" (flag) communist party in Egypt, he experienced, in his 20's, the hardships the whole left movement in Egypt faced during its early clash with Nasser and the July 1952 regime, and had to leave for the Sorbonne, where he studied political economy (1954). He returned to Egypt after the Battle of Suez in 1956 to work in the Egyptian economic institution, and he published his study on «Monetary and financial directions in Egypt» (1957).

And for the second time, he had to face another – but deeper – crisis of the communists with Nasser 1959-1964, where hundreds of his comrades were arrested, so he left

for Paris again, where he published one of his most renowned earliest titles about "The Nasserit Egypt", in 1963, under a fake name "Hassan Ryad", for fear of the Egyptian security institution.

His interest in Egypt and writing about it never faded. Lately he published "Nasserism and Communism in Egypt" (in Arabic) in 2013 and three titles about the 2011 revolution in Egypt, and the containment and harnessing efforts exercised towards it.

This wasn't a complete bibliography of Samir Amin of course, as he published over 50 volumes in French, English, and also in Arabic, and other international languages.

Samir Amin viewed his Intellectual Identity (Intellectual Autobiography, 1993) – as follows: "I've always been- and still am- led by a worldly view, i.e. a universalist convinced that capitalism has created an objective reality that necessitates coherent responses on a global level. Peoples can't face the "capital universality" effectively, unless they build their own universality that transcends their local cultural horizons, as well as other horizons (the religious one for instance). However, I look at this universal choice through the lens of the fringes of the capitalist world, namely the Afro-Asiatic peoples of non-European culture. Not only because I belong to this world, but because this world is - objectively - the main victim of a de-facto capitalism, polarising by its nature, and being, as it is, the root of the different social tragedies, that constitute the greatest real challenge facing humanity. I wasn't either a "third

wordlist", as this term, in my opinion, could only be applied on a part of the western leftists, who thought, in Bandung phase (1955-1975) that the concept of «Third World peoples» could replace the concept of the proletariat. The limits of these forces in the Third World - which I have been aware of, despite my real sympathy with them – stem, in my opinion, from an incomplete analysis of the nature of the real challenge."

He then said: "My return to my home country (since the early 1990s) – (we elected him as chair of AARC) allowed me – through participation in social forums in Egypt, from 2002 on – to define acritical stances towards the wrong alternatives of both political Islam and democracy".

Consequently he identified three groups of power involved in political battles in Egypt and the wider region, namely: Those who call for a return to the national past (they are in essence the heirs of the corrupt bureaucracy of the populist national period); those who belong to political Islam; and those who try to manipulate the application of democracy so that fits the liberal administration of the economy.

The authority of either direction is unacceptable to a communist movement that cares about the interests of the popular classes and the entire nation. In fact, most of the elements of these three «trends» reflect the interests of the comprador classes allied to the de-facto imperialist system. This applies to most of the Arab and African regions.