

Samir Amin: Layer of the Foundations for Africa's Future

The Berlin Conference of 1885 divided up the African continent into nation states according to the political and economic interests of the militarily dominant European powers. Britain, France, Portugal and Belgium were the biggest takers. The colonial enterprise came to a formal end for most colonies during the 1950s and the 1960s. At this stage, it became incumbent on the new nations of Africa to chart new paths that would lead ultimately to economic development and to modern economic states that would be on technological par with the modern nations of Euro-America. But in order to achieve that status, Africa needed to produce the intellectual capital needed for the task.

It is at this historical juncture that

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Samir Amin (1931-2018) was ordained to play that historical role. More than any other African intellectual of the post-colonial era, Samir Amin lay the foundations for Africa's future. Amin received his doctorate in economics from the Sorbonne in 1957 and after that launched a career of an *intellectual engage'* both with his theoretical writings and institution-building activities. During the period of his intellectual development, Amin perceived that Marx's analysis of capitalism was the proper template from which to interpret world economic activity in general but also

to examine the particular economic place of postcolonial Africa in the world. Amin as Marxist was prolific with his publications in both French and English. He also published many articles in *Africa Development*, a key CODESRIA journal. His writings number some twenty four(24) books in English and forty one(41) in French, together with translations into other international languages. Amin was also a regular contributor to *Monthly Review*, an important Marxist journal published in the United States.

Amin's early intellectual orientation was founded on the idea that Marxism was the optimal explanatory tool for understanding the world's economic dynamics and the evident unequal economic exchanges between the ex-colonial



North and its ex-colonies in the South. It was in this context that he was a prominent member of the Dependency School of thought that put forward the idea that much of the underdeveloped world was dependent on the economic ministrations of the industrialised nations of the North. The industrialised North was deemed to be the economic and political 'Centre' which dominated the political and political operations of the 'Periphery'. Amin's peers in this regard were the equally prominent anti-capitalist political economists such as Andre Gunder Frank, Arghiri Emmanuel, Celso Furtado, Osvaldo Sunkel, Raul Prebisch, Hans Singer, Walter Rodney, et al. The founding member of this group was arguably Paul Baran with his influential *The Political Economy of Growth* (1957). It should be noted too that Amin's intellectual reach from a Marxist standpoint was sufficiently expan-

sive to include 'world's systems theory' founded by Fernand Braudel then developed further by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) who was also a dependency theorist.

Amin's most important texts are noteworthy and some deserve being mentioned. Consider *Unequal Development* (1976), *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (1977), *The Law of Value and Historical Materialism. Eurocentrism* (1988), *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974), and *Delinking* (1990). These texts were all structured on the Marxian principle that capitalism is an expansionist economic system which is always in search of new markets to obtain raw materials at cheap prices to fuel its the productive units. But given the asymmetric relationship between capital and labor, the periphery becomes increasingly impoverished. The ongoing flight of labor from the periphery

to the industrial centres of the North provides evidence of this asymmetry.

In order for such ideas to be shared and discussed within Africa's community of intellectuals, Amin was proactive in the founding of IDEP, Dakar, serving as its first director from 1970 to 1980. He was also instrumental in the launching of CODESRIA as Africa's foremost research centre. He was also the founder of the Third World Forum and ENDA. Clearly, Samir Amin's selfless contributions to Africa's postcolonial development both in his writings and his institution building makes him a special case of intellectual commitment to Africa. In sum, Samir Amin is to be understood as Africa's paradigmatic role model for Africa's intellectuals as they strive for Africa's progress and development in a highly competitive world.