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Contents

Abbreviations

GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TNC	transnational corporation
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction

The triumphant discourse and formulas of neoliberalism, which were so widely applied in the last two decades of the twentieth century, are no longer in such good shape. Support for them among broad majorities, even on the left, was boosted by the collapse of the Soviet myth that had seemed the only credible alternative for much of the century, as well as by the final extinction of the fires of Maoism. Yet that support has been eroded in the space of just a few years.

The new-style liberalism promised prosperity for all (or nearly all), peace following the end of the Cold War, and a new era of democracy. Many believed it. But those who understood that its recipes could only deepen the crisis of accumulation, and that this would in turn worsen social conditions for the great majority of nations and working classes, now find an ever larger and more attentive audience. Militarization of the world order, which has been upon us not since 11 September 2001 but since the Gulf War of 1991, has dissipated the promises of peace. Democracy is either marking time or in retreat; it is everywhere under threat.

The theses in this book are not mainly intended to explain the features belying the empty promises of neoliberalism; they have the wider aim of opening a debate on the future of the world capitalist system. Are the present phenomena merely 'temporary', as the diehard supporters of capitalism claim? Do they point, beyond a painful transition, to a new period of expansion and prosperity? Or are they, rather, signs of the obsolescence of a system that must be overcome if human civilization is to survive?

The following analyses are based upon a theory of capitalism and its global dimension, and, more generally, of the dynamics of social transformation. The four key theses are as follows:

1. Economic alienation is a central feature of capitalism, in contrast to previous societies and what might constitute a post-capitalist society. It refers to the fact that a means (economics in general, capitalist accumulation in particular) has become an end in itself, dominating the whole process of social life as an objective force external to it.

2. The polarization produced by the globalization of capitalism constantly widens the gap (in terms of material development) between the

centres and the peripheries of the world capitalist system. This too is a new phenomenon in the history of mankind, as the size of the gap has become in the last two centuries quite unlike anything seen in previous millennia. It is also a phenomenon that one can only wish to bring to an end, by gradually building a post-capitalist society that really is better for all the world's peoples.

3. Crucially, our conception of capitalism does not reduce it to a 'generalized market' but locates its very essence in powers beyond the market. Instead of analysing capitalism in terms of social relations and a politics in which these powers beyond the market find expression, the dominant reductionism in economics theorizes an imaginary system based upon 'market laws' that, if left to themselves, supposedly generate 'optimal equilibrium'. In actually existing capitalism, class struggle, politics, the state and the logic of capital accumulation are inseparable from one another. Capitalism, then, is by its very nature a regime whose successive states of disequilibrium are produced by social and political conflicts beyond the market. The concepts put forward in vulgar liberal theory – 'market deregulation', for example – have no reality. So-called 'deregulated' markets are, in fact, markets regulated by the powers of monopolies situated beyond the market.

4. What I call 'underdetermination' plays a central role in history. Every social system (including capitalism) is historical, in the sense that it has a beginning and an end, but the nature of the system that overcomes the contradictions of the system preceding it is not imposed by objective laws external to the choices of society. The contradictions peculiar to the system in decline (today, those of globalized capitalism and especially those associated with its characteristic form of polarization) can be overcome in different ways, since autonomous logics govern the different levels of social life (politics and power, cultural life, ideology, the system of social values in which legitimacy and the economic dimension are expressed). These autonomous logics may adapt to one another and thus in different ways give a certain cohesion to the system as a whole, so that the best and the worst are always possible. Humanity still has responsibility for its own future.

Readers who know my previous writings will probably find these basic theses familiar. Nevertheless, as they are presented here in a highly condensed form, I should say a word about recent work that develops them at greater length.

Capitalism has developed the productive forces at a pace and scale unparalleled in human history. At the same time, it has made much

wider than ever before the gap between the potential of development and the actuality of its use. The present level of scientific and technological knowledge could offer a solution to all the material problems of the whole of humanity. But the logic that transforms the means (law of profit, accumulation) into an end-in-itself has led to huge squandering of this potential and unequal access to its unprecedented benefits. Until the nineteenth century the gap between the development potential of existing knowledge and the development level actually achieved was not so great. This should not encourage us to feel nostalgic about the past, since capitalism was a necessary condition for today's level of development to be achieved. But now capitalism has had its day: the pursuit of its logic no longer produces anything but waste and inequality. In this sense, Marx's 'law of pauperization' resulting from capitalist accumulation has been ever more strikingly confirmed on a world scale over the past two centuries. We should not be surprised that, at the very moment when capitalism appears victorious on every front, the 'war on poverty' has become an inescapable obligation in the rhetoric of the dominant apparatuses.

This waste and this inequality are the other side of the coin: they make up the 'black book of capitalism', reminding us that it is only a parenthesis and not the end of history. Unless capitalism is overcome through a system that ends global polarization and economic alienation, it will surely lead humanity to self-destruction.

How was the goal of overcoming capitalism understood in the twentieth century? What lessons can we draw for the challenge now taking shape in the twenty-first century, the challenge that is the focus of this book?

The dominant view today is that, after 1917 in the USSR and after 1945 in much of the Third World and to some extent even in the developed heartlands, the twentieth century was a catastrophic period: systematic intervention by ruling political powers prevented capitalism from revealing its full benefits as a transhistorical expression of the requirements of human nature; history eventually ended such illusions and restored that complete submission to 'market laws' (a vulgar and inexact term for capitalism) that is thought, wrongly in part, to have been the norm in the nineteenth century; and this return marked a historical step forward. Chapter 1 will begin by identifying this fashionable view of history as the 'return of the *belle époque*'.

My argument is the exact opposite of what has been 'in the air' over the past period. My reading of the twentieth century is thus a first

attempt to meet the challenge of development (or, to be more precise, underdevelopment), which is the term usually employed to denote the growing contrast between centres and peripheries intrinsic to the global expansion of capitalism. The existing answers to this challenge range widely from the timid to the radical, and I would not wish to minimize their diversity. But I would venture to say that they all fit into a 'catching-up' perspective in which achievements at the centre are reproduced in the periphery. In this schema, the goals and strategies pursued in the twentieth century do involve a questioning of capitalism as essentially a system of economistic alienation.

We cannot, of course, ignore the fact that the radical experiments issuing from socialist revolutions in Russia and China sought to challenge capitalist social relations. Yet that aim was gradually diluted by the prior necessity of catching up that remained as the legacy of peripheral capitalism.

The page has turned on those more or less radical attempts to solve the problem of development. Once the historical limits of what they could achieve had been reached, they were unable to rise above themselves and move on further; their collapse thus permitted a temporary but devastating restoration of capitalist illusions. In reality, humanity today faces still greater problems than those that confronted it fifty or a hundred years ago. Its answers to the challenge will therefore have to be more radical in the twenty-first century than they were in the twentieth: that is, it will have to aim for a certain kind of development of the productive forces in the peripheries of the system, but combine this with ever greater energy and rigour in overcoming the general logic of capitalist management of society. What is more, this must be done in a world that has a number of novel aspects, whose nature and scale we shall try to clarify below. The twenty-first century cannot be a restored nineteenth and must advance beyond the twentieth. The question of development will occupy in the twenty-first century an even more central position than it did in the twentieth century.

The reader will certainly have realized that my own concept of development is not synonymous with 'catching up' but is intrinsically critical of capitalism. It involves the project of a very different society, whose twofold aim would be to free humanity from economistic alienation and to end the legacy of polarization on a world scale. The project can only be universal: it must become (gradually, of course) the project of the whole of humanity, of the nations at the centre as well as the periphery of the system under attack. Whereas 'catching up' could at a

pinch be conceived as a strategy that peripheral nations might implement by relying only upon their own will and resources, the twofold objective of development as it has been defined here requires the active and combined participation of peoples in every part of the world, especially as many, if not all, the problems facing humanity have an ever deeper global dimension.

One final point should be made in these preliminary remarks. Having devoted most of my efforts in recent years to certain of these problems, I shall avoid repeating myself here except when this is necessary to the coherence of the text. The reader is referred to five of my recent works in French: *L'ethnie à l'assaut des nations* (1994), *La gestion capitaliste de la crise* (1995), *Les défis de la mondialisation* (1996), *Critique de l'air du temps* (1997), *L'hégémonisme des Etats-Unis et l'effacement du projet européen* (2000), and to a previous Zed title in English: *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization* (1997), as well as *Spectres of Capitalism, A Critique of Current Intellectual Fashions*, published by Monthly Review Press, New York, 1998.

Appendices

I. The challenges of modernity

Modernity is the outcome of a break in human history that began in Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but is by no means complete, either in its birthplaces or anywhere else. The multiple facets of modernity form a whole that, though consistent with the reproductive requirements of the capitalist mode of production, would also allow progression beyond it.

Modernity was based upon the demand for the emancipation of human beings, starting with their liberation from the straitjacket of previous forms of social determination. This meant giving up the prevailing forms of power legitimization – in families, in the communities where the modes of life and production were organized, and in the state – which had until then rested upon a generally religious metaphysic. It therefore involved radical secularization, the separation of state and religion, as the prerequisite for modern forms of politics. This did not require the abolition of religious faith, but it did exclude the subordination of reason to any dogmatic interpretation of religion. Any reconciliation of reason and faith was left to unhindered individual reflection; religion was to be a strictly private matter, and no credibility was given to any form of it imposed by the state or by social convention.

The fact that modernity and capitalism grew up together was no accident. The social relations peculiar to the new capitalist system of production involved free enterprise, free access to markets and an inalienable ('sacred') right to private property. Once economic life had shaken off the kind of political controls typical of pre-modern regimes, it established itself as an autonomous area of social life with its own distinctive laws. For the traditional determination of wealth by power, capitalism substituted a reverse causality that made wealth the source of power. But modernity as it has existed up to today – that is, modernity confined to the framework of capitalism – remains ambivalent on this question of the relationship between power and wealth. For it is grounded upon the separateness of two areas of social life: the economy has a logic of its own governing capital accumulation (private property, free enterprise, competition), while state power is exercised through the institutionalization of political democracy (civil rights, a multi-party system, and so on). This arbitrary separation vitiates the emancipatory potential of modernity.

The modernity deployed within the constraints of capitalism is therefore contradictory: it creates unfulfilled hopes by promising much more than it can deliver.

Modernity inaugurated a progress of society (summed up in the term emancipation) that is of potentially huge proportions; even the limited advances of political democracy are testimony to that. Modernity legitimized action by the dominated, exploited and oppressed classes, gradually enabling them to wrest from the rule of capital a series of democratic rights that have never spontaneously flowed from capitalist expansion and accumulation. The resulting capacity for political transformation permitted the development of class struggle, so that an equivalence was established between the two terms – politics and class struggle – which gave them both their full force. At the same time, however, modernity invented and developed the means of cutting back the potential of emancipatory democracy.

The capitalism that grew up together with modernity brought development of the productive forces at a rhythm never before seen in history. The potential contained in this development would allow the major material problems of humanity to be solved, but the logic governing capitalist accumulation forbids any such resolution – indeed, it constantly polarizes wealth on a scale previously unknown in the history of the world.

Humanity today thus faces the contradictions of that modernity, the only one we know so far, which began with the capitalist stage of history. These contradictions express the three destructive dimensions of capitalism and therefore of its accompanying form of modernity.

Capitalism and its modernity are destructive of human beings, reducing them to the status of the commodity labour-power. The economistic alienation through which this reduction is expressed empties democracy of its emancipatory potential. When democracy exists at all under these conditions – which means, in practice, in the centres of the system, the only areas to benefit from the development of the productive forces – it suffers degradation and loss of meaning. Genuine politics, expressing the capacity of the inventive imagination, is replaced by the hollow consensus of low-intensity democracy, a media spectacle constructed and manipulated by the capital dominant within the economic system.

With its short-term rationality of economic calculation, capitalist modernity is destructive of the natural foundations both of social

reproduction and of life itself, as we see from the grave problems affecting the environment and the stream of minor disasters (mad cows being a perfect case in point).

The global polarization induced by capital accumulation means that the majority of human beings on earth – those living in the peripheries of the system – have no prospect of satisfying the needs that modernity has promoted, and hence of enjoying even the degraded democracy practised in the heartlands of the system. For most of humanity, capitalism is a hateful system, and the modernity accompanying it a tragic farce.

The contradictions inherent in the capitalist phase of modernity cancelled the rational Utopian project formulated at the time of its birth – a project, in fact, through which only the rationality of the reproduction of capital was able to find expression. The framework in which the dominant capital had to develop was constantly reshaped by conflict between its own requirements and the demands which victims of the system managed to impose at various times and places. Instead of the 'pure capitalism' of the economics textbooks, a more pragmatic capitalism adapted to market regulation imposed by the prevailing social relations and to international conflicts that challenged the existing hierarchies within the world system. In this sense, too, whereas the ideology of modernity that grew up with capitalism claimed to make a 'clean break with the past' by replacing it exclusively with the Utopia of capitalist rationality, capitalism actually had to make do with what it found in the real world. Modernity thus became a patchwork quilt that contrasted sharply with the cohesion of its theoretical foundations.

The peoples of today's world therefore have to face the twin challenge of actually existing capitalism and actually existing modernity. The attitudes and postures through which the various political and ideological currents find expression should be evaluated according to how they respond explicitly or implicitly to this challenge.

The dominant ideology simply tries to ignore it. Anglo-American liberal ideologues, however sophisticated their language, express this ignorance in a naive manner. Their well-fed chatter reduces modernity to the only human value they know: freedom of the individual. What they overlook is that, in the context of capitalism, this freedom allows the strongest to impose their law on everyone else; that it is an illusory freedom for the great mass of people (the liberal idea that everyone can become a Rockefeller is like the old refrain that each soldier carries a marshal's baton in his backpack); and that it clashes with the yearning for equality which is the foundation of democracy.

All those who uphold the system share this same basic ideology that capitalism is an unsurpassable horizon, the 'end of history'. Extremists among them do not hesitate to picture society as a jungle filled with 'individuals', or to sacrifice the possibility of the state's pacifying intervention to management principles in which the public authorities are no more than an instrument serving the 'winners' – a Mafia-like conception of the dictatorship of capital. Others would like to give this dictatorship a human face by mixing the principle of individual freedom with pragmatic considerations of social justice, community identity and the 'recognition of difference'. Postmodernism is another way of denying the challenge: it suggests that we all 'accept' or 'adjust to' contemporary reality, that we 'run' things simply in the light of what is possible in the very short term.

For the great majority of people in the world, this modernity is simply detestable, hypocritical, based on cynical double standards. Therefore, they violently reject it, and the violence of their rejection is perfectly legitimate. Actually existing capitalism and the modernity that goes with it have nothing to offer them.

Yet rejection is a negative act. A positive alternative is also required. If reflection is inadequate and gives rise to misguided projects, the result can be to nullify the effectiveness of revolt, yielding a new submission to the demands of capitalism and modernity that the revolt claimed to reject. The principal illusion here feeds on nostalgia for a pre-modern past, which has its defenders in both the centres and the peripheries of the system. In the centres, it may pass for inconsequential reverie, an expression of conservatism enabling people with full stomachs to take the sting out of emancipatory demands, so that modernity becomes a patchwork quilt combining manipulated vestiges of the past with demands thrown up in the present. In the peripheries, the backward-looking posture derives from a violent, justified revolt; it remains at the level of neurotic impotence, however, because it is based on simple ignorance of the nature of the challenge of modernity.

Of the languages in which nostalgia may be expressed, the most common are those of religious fundamentalism (which actually masks a conventional conservative option) and ethnic affirmation of virtues transcending class and other dimensions of social reality; the common denominator is thus a transhistorical culturalist vision in which religion or ethnicity defines some intangible identity. Although these postures lack a scientific basis, they are quite capable of mobilizing large numbers of people who have been marginalized and dispossessed by capitalist

modernity. This very fact makes them effective instruments of manipulation, when they are inserted into strategies of *de facto* submission to the joint dictatorship of globalizing capitalist forces and their local transmission belts. Political Islam is a good example of this in peripheral capitalism (see Appendix VI). In Latin America and Africa, the proliferation of obscurantist sects – supported by apparatuses in the United States as a barrier to liberation theology – exploits the confusion of excluded layers and manipulates their revolt against the conservative official Church.

On the other hand, to take up the challenge of modernity means to address the contradictions of capitalist-inaugurated modernity and to develop a future-oriented project for society that is capable of overcoming them. Such a position, then, would have to focus not on differences inherited from the past but on those that the invention of the future generates through its own movement (see Appendix VII).

The conservative and reactionary forces which dominate the contemporary scene, both globally and at the level of particular societies, are making great efforts to roll back the unfinished project of modernity. To this end, they seek to foster responses which, though essentially incoherent, can be effective in the short term by combining the reproduction of past appearances with the present requirements of the destructive accumulation of capital.

II. Imaginary capitalism and actually existing capitalism

The dominant forces are dominant because they succeed in imposing their language on their victims. Thus, the 'experts' of mainstream economics have sown the belief that their analyses and conclusions are valid because they are scientific: that is, objective, neutral and inexorable. But that is not true. The so-called 'pure' economics on which they base their analyses does not deal with the real world, but operates with an imaginary system that does not even come close to it. Actually existing capitalism is something quite different.

This imaginary economics runs different concepts together, conflating progress with capitalist expansion and the market with capitalism. If the social movements are to develop effective strategies, they must free themselves from such confusions.

The confusion of two concepts – the reality (capitalist expansion) and an end that is desirable (clearly defined progress) – lies behind many of the setbacks encountered by critics of present-day policies. Dominant discourses systematically make the amalgam, by describing as 'development' either the actual outcome or one they consider plausible. Logically,

however, the expansion of capital does not presuppose any outcome that could be described as 'development' – for example, full employment, or a predefined level of inequality (or equality) of income distribution. The driving force, rather, is the firm's quest for profit, which, according to circumstances, may result in either growth or stagnation, expanding or shrinking employment, lesser or greater equality of incomes.

Here, a confusion between 'market economy' and 'capitalist economy' is at the root of a dangerous weakening of criticisms of present policies. The 'market' – which, by its nature, refers to competition – is not the same as 'capitalism', whose content is defined precisely by the limits to competition that monopolistic (or oligopolistic) private property entails. 'Market' and 'capitalism' are two distinct concepts. In fact, as Braudel convincingly showed, real-world capitalism is the opposite of the imaginary market.

Furthermore, capitalism does not actually function through systematic competition on the part of those who hold the monopoly of property – that is, competition among them and against others – but requires the intervention of a collective authority representing capital as a whole. The state, then, cannot be separated from capitalism. The policies of capital, and hence of the state in so far as it represents capital, are driven by distinctive logics in different periods. This explains why the expansion of capital results at certain moments in the growth of employment, and at others in its decline. The driving forces in each case are not some abstract 'laws of the market' as such, but the profitability requirements of capital in a particular set of historical conditions.

There are no 'laws of capitalist expansion' that assert themselves with a quasi-supernatural force. There is no historical determinism prior to history. Tendencies inherent in the logic of capital always clash with the resistance of forces in society that do not accept their effects; real history is the result of this clash between the logic of capitalist expansion and the logic of resistance to it. In this sense, the state is rarely just the state of capital; it is also the product of the conflict between capital and society.

Thus, if we take the case of post-war industrialization in the periphery (1945–80), we can see that it was not the 'natural' result of capitalist expansion but the product of conditions created by the national liberation victories to which global capital had to adjust. Similarly, the declining effectiveness of the national state under the impact of capitalist globalization is not an irreversible force shaping the future; on the contrary, national reactions to globalization can impose unexpected trajectories, for better or worse according to the circumstances. Or take the ecological

concerns that, though clashing with the intrinsically short-term logic of capital, may yet leave a major imprint on adjustment tendencies within capitalism. These are but a few of the many examples we might mention.

An effective response to the challenges can be found only if it is realized that there are no infallible laws of 'pure' economics guiding the course of history. Rather, it is social reactions to the tendencies expressed in those laws that give history its shape, and define in turn the social relations within whose framework those laws operate. 'Anti-systemic forces', which reject in a coherent, organized and effective manner any total submission to the requirements of those laws (in fact, the simple law of profit inherent in capitalism as a system), shape the real course of history just as much as does the 'pure' logic of capitalist accumulation. They govern the possibilities and forms of expansion, by organizing the framework within which it is deployed.

The method advocated here excludes any ready-made prescriptions for the shaping of the future, for the future is produced by changes in the social and political relationship of forces, and such changes are brought about by struggles whose outcome is not known in advance. Nevertheless, thinking about the future can help to crystallize coherent and feasible projects through which society may be able to overcome the false solutions that threaten to block its advance.

A humanist response to the challenge posed by capitalist globalization is not 'Utopian'. On the contrary, it is the only realistic project, in the sense that the first steps towards it would soon rally powerful social forces in all parts of the world that could actually bring it about. If there is a Utopia, in the banal and negative sense of the term, it is the idea of running the system simply through market regulation.

III. The destructive dimensions of capitalist accumulation

Capitalism is neither the end of history nor even the unsurpassable horizon of the future. It is more a historical parenthesis – one that opened around the year 1500 and urgently needs to be closed. As it subordinated all aspects of social life to the logic of accumulation – or 'the markets', as vulgar theory has it – capitalism permitted a qualitative leap forward not only materially but also politically and culturally, achieving rates of growth quite unlike any seen before in human history. It also created the means whereby the major problems facing all nations in the world could be solved, but at the same time its governing logic made it impossible for the potential to be used for that purpose.

This fundamental contradiction gave to capitalism destructive dimensions that have now grown so extensive that they constitute a real threat to the future of humanity; the resulting crisis is thus a veritable crisis of civilization. All these destructive dimensions, which have been abundantly described at various times, centre on the key element of 'market expansion' or 'marketization' (in the language of vulgar economics), commodification or commodity alienation in more scientific terms. It is expansion that knows no limits, and that benefits only the dominant (oligopolistic) capital.

The programme of capitalism involves a growing commodification of all aspects of existence: of human inventive and artistic capacities, of health and education, of the riches offered by nature, culture and politics. This produces a threefold destruction of the individual, nature and whole peoples. The areas in which the present threat of destruction is most manifest cannot be separated from one another; they are all interconnected by the same logic of accumulation.

Bovine spongiform encephalitis (BSE) or 'mad cow disease' is one tragi-comic example of the devastation that can arise when food production is guided entirely by 'profitability' and 'market deregulation'.

Commodification and privatization of health is a sure invitation to organize a 'human organs market', which, as we know from the case of Brazil, leads to the killing of children to satisfy demand. Even in their own terms, such health systems are inefficient: the United States, for example, spends 14 per cent of GDP on (private) health care, with results inferior to those achieved on half that expenditure in Europe's largely public services. Yet the profits of the drugs and insurance oligopolies in the United States are far higher than those in Europe.

Commodification and privatization of education is a royal road towards greater social inequality and a society of general apartheid. Although there certainly needs to be a fresh look at education, the path of privatization will not bring any answers to the problems.

Commodification and privatization of pension funds is a means of absurdly fanning generational conflict between people at work (tomorrow's pensioners) and people in retirement (yesterday's workers).

Commodification and privatization of scientific research – false privatization, if one considers that government military expenditure creates profits only for the ologopolies – is a certain guarantee that research will be guided not by social needs (the elimination of Aids in Africa, for example) but by short-term profit, and that biotechnical research will serve to strengthen oligopolistic control over the farmers' agribusiness

(the source of BSE). It also ensures the abandonment of basic precautions and ethical concerns.

The commodification and privatization of intellectual, industrial, cultural and artistic property guarantees the maximization of oligopolistic profits by robbing popular layers (especially the peasantry) of the know-how for which they have never before had to pay, and selling it 'back' to them as a possession of the oligopolies. This boost to the false subculture of homogenization represents a further obstacle to the diversity and wealth of cultural and artistic creation.

Commodification and privatization of natural resources guarantees waste to the disadvantage of future generations.

Commodification and privatization of the environment through trade in 'licences to pollute' guarantee the total sterility of ecological critique and serve to deepen inequalities on a world scale.

Commodification and privatization of water guarantees a worsening of inequality in access to this vital resource, and will programme the destruction of whole swathes of irrigated agriculture in the Third World.

Commodification and privatization in general make of competition an absolute principle; a false competition limited to the oligopolies. This is an absolute guarantee of immeasurable waste: exorbitant marketing costs; 'economic' sterilization of seeds to keep the peasantry dependent on the oligopolies, as pawns of agribusiness; organization of artificial scarcity through secret deals among the oligopolies to regulate competition, destruction of biodiversity, and so on.

Polarization on a world scale, which is inherent in the global expansion of capitalism, is the most dramatic dimension of destruction associated with the history of the last five centuries: just think of the hundred million Native Americans and the same number of Africans exterminated to put the system 'in place'. But unbridled accumulation was not only 'primitive'; its constantly renewed forms have included colonization and wars (from conquest down to independence), coercive selling of opium to the Chinese, forced labour, apartheid and the new pillage centred on debt. The book of actually existing capitalism is truly black. Today we have reached a stage of polarization at which most of the world's population is 'superfluous' to the needs of capital. A demographic revolution means that Asia and Africa have been catching up on their lag at the time of European expansion, rural worlds have disintegrated under the impact of 'the market', and new forms of industrialization have been incapable of absorbing the exodus of the village poor. With the help of all these

factors, capitalism is taking us towards a 'shantytown planet' within the next 20 years, when 25 megalopolises will each pack in 7 to 25 million people reduced to abject poverty without any prospects for the future. Is this anything other than the destruction of whole peoples? How, then, can we not believe Susan George when she says in her Lugano Report that the horsemen of the Apocalypse are cynically planning the destruction of capital's 'useless mouths', through famine, endemic diseases and Aids, and 'tribal wars'. But in that case who is really superfluous? The billions of human beings for whom capitalism has nothing to offer? Or capitalism itself?

The market economy, to use the vulgar textbook term, is also necessarily market society. To accept the former and reject the latter may fit in with some 'third way' Sunday speeches by the likes of Clinton, Blair, Schröder or Jospin. But it lacks all credibility, when we know that the market economy they celebrate has allowed the oligopolies to double their profits over the past decade. Basic arithmetic tells us that, if profits rise faster than national product, the result can only be rising inequality – which is indeed the aim of liberal policies. The pious speeches about 'poverty' are just dust in the eyes of the gullible.

Market society, then, an inexorable result of market economy (that is capitalism), cannot be other than it is. Market society nullifies citizenship and replaces it with a manipulable mass of consumers – passive spectators. The 'alternation' of government teams to continue the same policy (wholly subordinate to the requirements of capitalist profit) does away with any real alternative (any conscious choice between different policies). Self-styled political theorists take it upon themselves to analyse electoral 'choices' with the same instruments that mainstream economists use to analyse consumer choices or that others use to pick out the winner in a competition.

We must be logical about this: if the law of the market is made the only criterion of rationality, it fully legitimizes the part of the economy that is hypocritically called criminal. The demand for hard drugs creates its own supply, which the Mafia controls by regulating the market in accordance with the rules taught in business schools. Such regulation is opaque, as is the regulation practised by the oligopolies. (The term 'deregulation' is used only because they cannot call it by its real name.) And why should we not describe as criminals those financial speculators who are fully aware of the damage that their operations inflict on society? Tax havens serve both alike, and with the same efficiency.

Their citizenship negated, the mass of ordinary people are invited

to fill the void by withdrawing into their 'community'. This is an invitation to obscurantism, ethnic or religious fanaticism, racist hatred and, in the end, 'ethnic cleansing'. In the most dramatic situations, in the Third World, it is an invitation to permanent 'tribal warfare'. Self-styled theoreticians try to legitimize such practices by pointing to the conflict inherent in cultural diversity, while nice people think they can answer them with nice appeals for a 'dialogue of cultures'. What neither understand – or pretend not to understand – is that the logic of capitalism and its markets lies behind what they denounce or think they are merely pointing out.

It is high time that these destructive dimensions of obsolescent capitalism were properly assessed. The time has come to say loud and clear that a different system must be invented, one in which human beings individually (their health, education and inventiveness), peoples collectively, and nature and its resources are not treated as commodities. The terms of the choice are no different today from those Rosa Luxemburg formulated in 1918: socialism or barbarism!

IV. The development paradigm

Development is an ideological concept that requires some definition of the societal project for which it is deployed. Fearing that the project is the merest Utopianism, 'realists' see 'feasible development' in terms of intelligent adjustment to the spontaneous tendencies of the capitalist system and reduce the very concept to one of market expansion on the basis of the social relations peculiar to capitalism. Obviously this rules out any goal of qualitative transformation going beyond the basic logic of the system.

Since, however, globalized capitalism produces polarization by its very nature, making futile any hope that its peripheries might one day catch up with the centres, development faces a challenge both at the level of the productive forces ('catching up' at least some of the ground) and in terms of 'doing something else' (moving outside the strict logic of capitalism).

The problem of the development paradigm involves a number of elements: the concept of self-reliant development, identification of a social content (bourgeois, statist, national-popular) consistent with its objectives as well as historically possible, a set of means towards that end, including 'delinking' from the dominant logic of global capitalism, and the long-term project of a world society incorporating earlier advances and transformations (socialism, or however one prefers to call such an

overall project). The paradigm is therefore critical of the world as it is today, in all its dimensions, and mobilizes the inventive imagination characteristic of creative Utopianism.

Actually existing global capitalism produces polarization by its very nature. Capitalism, considered abstractly as a mode of production, is based on an integrated market with three dimensions (social products market, capital market, labour market). Considered as an actually existing global system, however, capitalism is based on global expansion of the market in only its first two dimensions; the formation of a genuinely global labour market is excluded by the frontiers between states that persist in spite of economic globalization and restrict its scope. For this reason, actually existing capitalism necessarily produces polarization on a world scale, so that uneven development becomes the most violent contradiction of modern times and cannot be overcome within the logic of capitalism. This means that we have to think in terms of a protracted transition to world socialism. For, although capitalism has created the bases for an economy and society spanning the whole planet, it is incapable of carrying globalization through to its logical conclusion. Socialism, as a qualitatively higher stage of humanity, can only be universal. But its construction will involve a lengthy historical transition, requiring a strategy of contradictory negation of capitalist globalization.

An analysis of globalized capitalism must distinguish between the law of value and its specific form as a global law of value. World capitalism is not governed by the law of value *tout court* (which grounds the capitalist mode of production conceived at the highest level of abstraction); it is governed by the globalized law of value (the form of the law of value stemming from the two-dimensional world market). The law of value *tout court* would imply that the remuneration of labour was everywhere the same for the same level of productivity. The globalized law of value yields uneven remuneration of labour for the same level of productivity, whereas the prices of goods and the remuneration of capital tend to level out on a world scale. Polarization is the outcome of this. The strategy of a long transition to world socialism therefore implies delinking the system of criteria of economic rationality from the system of criteria derived from submission to the globalized law of value.

Translated into the terms of political and social strategy, this general principle means that the long transition is an obligatory, inescapable period involving the construction of a national-popular society and the associated construction of a self-reliant national economy. Every aspect of this is contradictory: it combines criteria, institutions and procedures of a

capitalist nature with social aspirations and reforms that conflict with the logic of world capitalism; it combines a certain openness to the outside (as controlled as possible) with demands for progressive social changes that conflict with the dominant capitalist interests. The ruling classes, by their historical nature, fit their visions and aspirations into the perspective of actually existing capitalism, and willy-nilly keep their strategies within the constraints of the global expansion of capitalism. This is why they cannot really imagine delinking. For the popular classes, however, delinking becomes a necessity as soon as they try to use political power to transform their conditions and to free themselves from the inhuman consequences of the polarizing global expansion of capitalism.

The option of self-reliant development cannot be ignored. Self-reliant ('autocentred' or 'endogenous') development, driven mainly by the dynamic of internal social relations and reinforced by ancillary external relations, historically characterized the capital accumulation process in the capitalist centres and has shaped the resulting forms of economic development there. In the peripheries, by contrast, the capital accumulation process mainly derives from the evolution of the centres; it is grafted on to that evolution and is in some sense dependent upon it.

Self-reliant development therefore presupposes what we may call the five essential conditions of accumulation:

- *Local control over the reproduction of labour power.* In an initial phase, this requires the state to ensure that agriculture develops sufficiently to generate a surplus at prices that meet the profitability conditions of capital, and, in a second phase, that the mass production of wage goods keeps up with the expansion of capital and the total wage bill.
- *Local control over the centralization of surplus.* This requires not only the formal existence of national financial institutions but their relative autonomy from flows of transnational capital, so that the country in question is assured of the capacity to steer investment of the surplus.
- *Local control over the market largely reserved for national production*, even in the absence of high tariffs or other forms of protection, and *a capacity to compete on the world market, at least selectively.*
- *Local control over natural resources.* This requires that, whatever the formal ownership, the national state has the capacity either to exploit resources or to keep them in reserve. Oil-producing countries do not have such control unless they are actually free to 'switch off the tap' (which would mean that they preferred to keep their oil under the ground rather than hold financial assets that could at any moment be taken from them).
- *Local control over technologies.* This requires that the technology in question, whether locally invented or imported, can be quickly reproduced without the indefinite import of essential inputs (equipment, know-how, and so on).

The concept of self-reliant development, as opposed to dependent development resulting from unilateral adjustment to tendencies that govern the deployment of capitalism on a world scale, cannot be reduced to the antinomy between import-substitutionism and export-led growth. The latter two concepts come from the textbooks, which ignore the fact that economic strategies are always implemented by the hegemonic social blocs in which the interests dominant in society at a given time find expression. Furthermore, even for vulgar economics, all strategies implemented in the real world combine import substitution with an export orientation, in proportions that vary with the conjuncture.

The model of self-reliant development is based upon a close and important interdependence between output growth of production goods and output growth of articles of mass consumption. Self-reliant economies are not self-enclosed; on the contrary, they are aggressively open, in the sense that their export potential helps to shape the world system as a whole. The correlation we have just defined corresponds to a social relationship whose main terms are constituted by the two fundamental blocs in the system: the national bourgeoisie and the world of labour. By contrast, the dynamic of peripheral capitalism – the antithesis of self-reliant central capitalism by definition – is based on a different fundamental correlation: between export capacity and minority consumption of imports or goods produced locally by import substitution. This defines the comprador (as opposed to national) character of the bourgeoisies of the periphery.

A critical reading of historical attempts to achieve popular or socialist self-reliant development. Over the last three-quarters of a century, the question of self-reliant development and delinking was posed in practice by all the great popular revolutions against actually existing capitalism: the Russian and Chinese revolutions, as well as national liberation movements in the Third World. The answers that each gave on this question were closely related to all other aspects of the development of the productive forces, national liberation, social progress and democratization; critical assess-

ment of these experiences is constantly necessary to draw the appropriate lessons from their successes and failures. At the same time, and because capitalism continually changes, evolves and adapts to the challenges posed by popular revolts, the terms of the questions are themselves subject to constant evolution. Self-reliant development and delinking can thus never become ready-made formulas valid for all situations and moments; they have to be considered afresh in the light of the lessons of history and the evolution of capitalist globalization.

The long wave of national liberation that swept the Third World after the Second World War ended in the establishment of new regimes, mainly based on national bourgeoisies, which in varying degrees exercised control over the movement. A veritable ideology of development came into being, as these bourgeoisies generated modernization strategies with the aim of securing 'independence within global interdependence' – not, that is, delinking in the real sense of the principle, but only active adaptation to the global system in ways that well expressed the national-bourgeois character of the development projects in question. History would show the Utopianism of this course, which ran out of steam after a number of apparent successes between 1955 and 1975. Opening-up policies, together with privatization and structural adjustment to the constraints of capitalist globalization, then imposed a kind of re-compradorization of the economies and societies of the periphery.

By contrast, the so-called experiences of actually existing socialism in the USSR and China achieved delinking, in the sense we have given to the term, and established a set of criteria for economic choices independent of those imposed by the logic of global capitalist expansion. These options, and others accompanying them, reflected the genuinely socialist intentions of the political and social forces at the origin of the revolutions in question. However, when the societies of the USSR and China faced a choice between 'catching up at any price' through development of the productive forces (which dictated organizational systems along the lines of those in the capitalist centres) and the objective of 'building a different (socialist) society', they gradually placed the accent on the former and drained the latter of any real content. This evolution, itself the product of a social dynamic, went together with the gradual formation of a new bourgeoisie. History has shown the Utopian character of that ostensibly socialist project, which in reality involved the construction of a state capitalism without capitalists in which the new bourgeoisie aspired to a 'normal' status comparable to that of the bourgeoisie in the capitalist world. At the same time, and quite logically, the new bourgeoisie put

an end to delinking. This did not solve the problem of the historical backwardness of those countries; on the contrary, their reversion to a normal capitalism integrated into the world system directly led to their 're-peripherization'.

The erosion and eventual failure of 'developmentalist' projects in the Third World and 'actually existing socialism', combined with the deepening of capitalist globalization in the West's dominant centres, left the field wide open for mainstream discourse to claim that there was no alternative to capitalist globalization.

This constitutes a reactionary kind of Utopia. For, by submitting to the requirements of two-dimensional world market expansion, it becomes impossible to go beyond polarizing globalization. Self-reliant development and delinking therefore remain the essential response to the challenge of the new stage of polarizing capitalist globalization.

The new stage of capitalist expansion does not make the options of self-reliance and delinking less essential. Does the globalization that seems to be establishing itself through the redeployment of capitalism replace the opposition between self-reliant and peripheral development with a new form of globalized development? Does the rallying of a great majority of ruling classes to the project of neoliberal globalization indicate that there is no longer 'national capital' (and hence national bourgeoisies), and that the principal, most dynamic dimension of capital is already transnational or 'globalized'?

A lot of controversy surrounds these two questions, in an already abundant literature. But first it must be said that, even if the answer is 'yes' in both cases, the transnational capital at issue remains a monopoly of the Triad from which the countries of the East and South are excluded, and that in the latter there are only comprador bourgeoisies acting as transmission belts for transnational capital. That is indeed the picture today, in many if not all the countries of the East and South. But again it has to be asked whether it reflects a lasting change. If it does, then the 'new world' is only a new stage of an older imperialist expansion, still more violently polarizing than what has gone before. Will that be acceptable to, and accepted by, the dominated classes which endure massive impoverishment as well as sections of the ruling classes (or social and political forces with ambitions to become part of the ruling classes)?

In the new phase of capitalist globalization that we have entered, polarization manifests itself in new forms and through new mechanisms. From the Industrial Revolution until the middle of the last century, it manifested itself in the contrast between industrial and non-industrial

countries. But industrialization of the peripheries, though highly uneven, has shifted the focus of the contrast or opposition to the issue of control over technology, finances, natural resources, communications and weapons. Does this mean – as the new expression of modernization theory would argue – that it is necessary to give up any idea of building a self-reliant economy, and to concentrate instead on the creation of highly efficient sectors capable of directly competing on the world market? To make such a choice would be to perpetuate the contrast between modernized segments (which soak up local resources) and unusable reserves that are left to rot. Any development worthy of the name would call for deep and extensive transformation, so that agriculture was able to clear a path for itself and a dense network of minor industries and towns could give indispensable support to the general progress of society. Of course, the step-by-step choices made within this general perspective would depend upon the outcome of social struggles: they would require the success of popular-democratic national alliances capable of breaking the mould of compradorization.

In the actual implementation of phased policies, it would also be necessary to develop concepts of social effectiveness in substitution for the capitalist concept of narrow market 'competitiveness'.

At the same time, we must not lose sight of the long-term universalist perspective. Preparatory steps would have to include a certain opening to the outside (selective imports), although this would have to be as tightly controlled as possible to ensure that it served, rather than hindered, the general progress of society. The need here would be for large regional groupings, especially in the peripheries but also elsewhere (as in Europe), and in this connection for priority targets to pave the way for modernization on a world scale that was gradually freed from the narrow criteria of capitalism. This would require, in turn, that the process went beyond narrowly economic arrangements and began to construct large political communities, as the building blocks of a polycentric world. Of course, delinking and self-reliant development on this scale would involve the negotiation of a web of relations among the major regions, in connection with commercial exchanges (including the terms of trade), the control and use of natural resources, financial issues and political-military security. It would thus entail reconstruction of the international political system, so that it liberated itself from hegemonism and embarked on the path of polycentrism.

The terms 'self-reliant development' and 'delinking' should be looked at again in the light of the perspectives outlined above.

V. Culturalism, ethnicism and the question of cultural resistance

Culturalism is a way of thinking based upon the notion that each 'culture' has a number of invariable, transhistorical specificities. Although these invariables find expression in various fields of social existence, such as religious beliefs or national traits, they operate in the same way that genes do in racist ideology and have the same power to transmit themselves across time.

Culturalism refuses to take seriously the evolution and change which clearly mark all aspects of social and cultural life, including aspects with a sacred quality. In its religious expressions, culturalism presents itself as 'fundamentalism' – actually more akin to stubborn (reactionary) prejudice than to good theological tradition. Certain 'postmodern' tendencies – those that, in the name of relativism, treat all 'beliefs' as irreducible truths on an equal level with one another – fuel the penchant for culturalism; while political or social currents such as American communitarianism, which give 'community identities' precedence over other dimensions of identity (class membership, ideological conviction, and so on), have their basis in culturalist thinking and reinforce its impact on the groups concerned.

The specificities in question are rarely spelled out, and when they are they usually prove to be paltry in the extreme. Ethnic culturalism may thus break up larger identities constructed in the course of history, aggressively splitting the 'nation' into ethnic groups, tribes into clans, and so on.

The recent emergence of powerful social movements based on religious or ethnic culturalism has its roots in the erosion of nationalist, class or 'developmental' legitimization of political rule. The irruption of ethnicism cannot be traced back to spontaneous demands on the part of communities on the ground, to their assertion of some 'irrepressible and primordial' identity against other communities. In reality, ethnicism has largely been constructed from the top down, by segments of ruling classes at bay who were seeking a new legitimacy for their rule. As the African proverb says, a fish starts to rot at the head. The social disasters resulting from neoliberal policies created the conditions in which ethnicism could play its decisive role in breaking up the USSR and Yugoslavia, unleashing war in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia), triggering massacres in Rwanda, and producing so-called tribal wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The mediocrity of many of the established regimes, the democratic deficit that made them incapable of handling

diversity (whose reality as such is not in question), also played their part in such aberrations, which hit not only the most fragile regions of the world system but the very heart of Europe (Northern Ireland, the Basque country, Corsica, Northern Italy, and so on).

All these negative and often criminal expressions of culturalism were perfect material for manipulation. And manipulated they were, by the dominant forces in the system.

The phenomenon of cultural resistance is quite different. Capitalist globalization does not homogenize the world but, on the contrary, organizes it on the basis of ever stronger and more pronounced hierarchies. The peoples which are its victims are thereby deprived of active and equal participation in the shaping of the world.

By encouraging culturalist responses, globalization strategies make as much use as they can of diversity inherited from the past. At the same time, however, capitalist globalization imposes on the dominated some of the 'specificities' that characterize its dominant centres. It is a question not only of the English language or fast food, but also, for example, of the presidentialist political system that the United States exported to Latin America and is now exporting to Europe itself.

Any resistance on the part of the victims can therefore only be multidimensional, involving cultural resistance (if only implicitly) and an idea of diversity in the invention of the future (see Appendix VII).

French-speaking areas provide a good example of this positive cultural resistance, which it would be wrong to scorn. It already has to its credit various kinds of support for the cinema in French-speaking and other parts of the world, while the US movie oligopolies have vociferously denounced it as an illegitimate curb on their superprofits. Such resistance will remain limited in scope and liable to attack, however, so long as political leaders in the French-speaking countries treat culture as a special case and accept that the laws of the market should hold sway in every other area. The resistance should take place in many dimensions – in culture, to be sure, but also in politics and the running of the economy.

VI. Political Islam

The fatal mistake is to think that the emergence of Islamic political movements with a mass following is an inevitable result of the irruption of culturally and politically backward peoples on to the arena, who are incapable of understanding any language other than that of their almost atavistic obscurantism. Unfortunately, this mistake is widely disseminated in the simplifications of the mass media, and taken up in the pseudo-scientific discourse of Eurocentrism and 'orientalism'. It involves a prejudice that only the West could invent modernity, whereas the Muslim peoples have remained shut up within an immutable tradition that makes them incapable of grasping the scale of what needs to be changed.

Just like others around the world, the Muslim peoples and Islam have a particular history that includes various interpretations of the relationship between reason and faith, as well as a shifting pattern of mutual adaptation between society and religion. But the reality of that history is denied, not only by Eurocentric discourse, but also by contemporary movements that claim to speak in the name of Islam. They share the culturalist prejudice that the specific trajectory of their peoples and religion belongs to them as an intangible and transhistorical fact of nature incommensurable with any other. To the Eurocentrism of Westerners, contemporary political Islam opposes only an inverted Eurocentrism.

The emergence of movements laying claim to Islam is the expression of a violent revolt against the destructive effects of actually existing capitalism, and against the deceptions of the truncated modernity that goes together with it (see Appendix I). It is the expression of a perfectly legitimate revolt against a system that has nothing to offer the peoples in question.

The Islamic discourse presented as an alternative to capitalist modernity (and, without any distinction, to the experiments with modernity of historical socialism) is a political and in no way theological discourse. Often enough, the 'fundamentalist' label corresponds to no content of the discourse; only a number of Muslim intellectuals actually speak in such terms, and then more with Western public opinion in mind than because it comes to them spontaneously.

In this case, the Islam on offer is the enemy of any theology of liberation: political Islam calls for submission, not emancipation. The only reading that went in the direction of emancipation was that of the Sudanese Mahmoud Taha, and he was condemned to death and executed by the regime in Khartoum. No party belonging to the broad Islamic movement, whether 'radical' or 'moderate', has identified itself with Taha; nor has he been defended by any of the intellectuals who speak of an 'Islamic renaissance' or who merely wish for 'dialogue' with Islamic movements.

The heralds of an Islamic renaissance are not interested in theology, and they never refer to the major texts concerning it. What they understand by 'Islam' seems to be no more than a conventional social

version reduced to formal respect for all ritual practices; it is a community to which one belongs by heritage, like an ethnic group, not by deep personal conviction. All that matters is the assertion of a 'collective identity'. Hence the term 'political Islam', which is used in the Arab countries to describe such movements, is certainly more accurate than 'Islamic fundamentalism'.

Modern political Islam was invented by orientalists in the service of British rule in India, and was then taken up as such by the Pakistani Abul Ala Al-Mawdudi. The aim was to 'prove' that Muslim believers are not allowed to live in a non-Muslim country, because Islam does not recognize any possible separation between the state and religion. What the orientalists failed to mention was that the thirteenth-century English would also have been unable to conceive of their living outside Christendom!

Mawdudi argued that, since power emanates from God and God alone (*wilaya al faqih*), citizens have no right to legislate and the state's only task is to apply the law handed down for all time (the *sharia*). Joseph de Maistre wrote similar things when he accused the French Revolution of the crime of dreaming up modern democracy and individual emancipation.

In its dismissal of the concept of emancipatory modernity, political Islam rejects the very principle of democracy – the right of a society to build its own future through the freedom to legislate for itself. The principle of *shura*, which political Islam claims to be the Islamic form of democracy, is no such thing, as it forbids innovation (*ibda*) and at most accepts some degree of interpretation of tradition (*ijtihad*). In fact, *shura* is only one of the many kinds of consultation that one encounters in all pre-modern, pre-democratic societies. It is true that interpretation has sometimes been the vehicle for real change, imposed by new historical exigencies. But its very principle – rejection of any right to break with the past – is a barrier to the modern struggle for social transformation and democracy. Hence the alleged parallel between Islamic parties (whether radical or moderate, since both adhere to the same 'anti-modernist' principles in the name of Islamic specificity) and the Christian Democratic parties of modern Europe has no validity, although the US media and diplomatic institutions constantly play it up in order to legitimize the support they might feel called upon to give to 'Islamicist' regimes. Christian Democracy is part of modernity: it accepts the fundamental concept of creative democracy as well as the essence of secularization. Political Islam rejects modernity. Or, this is what it proclaims, without having the capacity to understand what it means.

The Islam on offer certainly does not deserve to be called 'modern'. Arguments to the contrary, such as those put forward by the friends of dialogue, are platitudinous in the extreme: for example, that the propagandists of political Islam use cassette recorders, or that they come from 'educated' groups such as engineers. Besides, the discourse of such movements often betrays no contact with anything other than Wahhabi Islam, which rejects the whole legacy of interaction between historical Islam and Greek philosophy and is content to regurgitate the dull writings of the most reactionary of medieval theologians – Ibn Taymiya. Although some trumpet this as a 'return to the sources' (or even to the Islam of the age of the Prophet), it is actually a return to ideas that had their day two hundred years ago, those of a society already arrested in its development for several centuries.

Contrary to a sadly widespread misconception, today's political Islam is not a reaction to the alleged abuses of secularism. For no Muslim society of modern times – except in the former Soviet Union – has ever been genuinely secular, still less stricken by the bold innovations of an aggressively 'atheistic' regime. The semi-modern state of Kemalist Turkey, Nasserite Egypt or Ba'athist Syria and Iraq was content to tame people of religion (as others had before it) by foisting upon them a discourse that legitimized its own political options. The elements of a secular idea existed only in a number of critical intellectual circles. It had little purchase on the state power, whose nationalist projects sometimes involved a retreat on this score – a disturbing trend, already begun in the time of Nasser, which marked a break with the policies of the Wafd since 1919. Perhaps the explanation is simply that, in rejecting democracy, the regimes in question were led to seek a replacement for it in a 'homogenized community', the dangers of which have now spread to the declining democracy of the West itself (see Appendix VII).

Political Islam proposes to round things off by combining a nakedly conservative theocratic order with a Mamluk-style political regime. The reference is to a military ruling caste that, until two centuries ago, placed itself above the law (by claiming to know nothing other than the *sharia*), monopolized the benefits of economic activity, and agreed in the name of 'realism' to occupy a subaltern position within the capitalist globalization of the time. It is a historical analogy that immediately springs to the mind of any observer of the region's debased post-nationalist regimes and their twin brothers, the new 'Islamic' forces already in power or bidding to replace them.

In this fundamental respect, there is scarcely any difference between

the supposedly 'radical' currents of political Islam and those that would prefer to present a 'moderate' face. The projects of the two are essentially the same.

The case of Iran is no exception to the rule, despite the initial confusion when the rise of an Islamicist movement coincided with the struggle against the Shah's socially reactionary and politically pro-American dictatorship. Early on, the excesses of the theocratic regime were offset by its anti-imperialist positions, which gave it internal legitimacy as well as a powerful resonance beyond the frontiers of Iran. But gradually it revealed that it was incapable of meeting the challenge of innovative economic and social development. The 'turban dictatorship' of the clergy that replaced the 'helmeted dictatorship' of the generals and technocrats – to use terms often employed in Iran itself – ended in a stunning dilapidation of the country's economic apparatuses. Iran – which used to pride itself on being a 'second Korea' – is today among the countries of the 'Fourth World'. The insensitivity of regime hardliners to the problems facing the popular classes is at the root of the emergence of self-styled reformers. But, although their project might soften the rigours of theocratic dictatorship, it will not depart from the constitutional principle of *wilaya al faqih* underlying the monopoly of power by a regime that has come to renounce its anti-imperialist postures and to rejoin the banal comprador world of peripheral capitalism. The system of political Islam has reached a dead-end in Iran. The political and social struggles on which the Iranian people has now openly embarked will sooner or later lead them to reject the whole idea of *wilaya al faqih*, which places the clergy's collegial rule above all the institutions of political and civil society. That is the condition for its success.

In the end, political Islam is nothing more than an adaptation to the subaltern status of comprador capitalism. Its supposedly 'moderate' variants are thus probably the main danger facing the peoples in question, since the violence of the 'radicals' serves only to destabilize the state and to pave the way for a new comprador regime. The far-sighted support that US and other Triad diplomats give to this solution is perfectly consistent with their aim of imposing the globalized liberal order in the service of dominant capital.

The two discourses of globalized liberal capitalism and political Islam do not conflict with each other but are perfectly complementary. The American-style 'communitarian' ideologies which are so much part of the Zeitgeist seek to obliterate social consciousness and social struggles, entirely replacing them with 'collective identities'. This plays straight

into the hands of capital's strategy for domination, because it transfers struggles from the realm of real social contradictions to the absolute, transhistorical realm of the supposedly cultural imagination. Political Islam is, precisely, a form of 'communitarianism'.

The foreign-policy establishments of the G-7 powers, particularly the United States, know what they are doing when they choose to back political Islam. They did it in Afghanistan, hailing its Islamicists as freedom fighters against what they called communist dictatorship (in reality, a modernizing national-populist project of enlightened despotism, which had the audacity to open schools to girls). And they continue to do it today, from Egypt to Algeria. They know that the rule of political Islam has the great virtue of rendering popular classes powerless, and hence of ensuring that their compradorization can proceed without difficulty.

With its characteristic cynicism, Washington knows how to profit twice over. For it can happily exploit the aberrations of its sponsored regimes – aberrations built into their programme from the start – whenever it is useful for imperialism to intervene with as much brutality as it takes. The 'savagery' attributed to popular forces, who are actually the first victims of political Islam, serves as a pretext to spread 'Islamophobia' and thus to gain wider acceptance for the 'global apartheid' that is the logical and necessary result of an ever more polarizing process of capitalist expansion.

The only political Islamic movements that the G-7 powers condemn without reservation are those which, because of the objective local situation, form part of an anti-imperialist struggle: Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine. That is no accident.

VII. Inherited diversity and future-oriented diversity

All human societies have a history in the course of which they have undergone either gradual minor changes within the logic of an existing system, or major qualitative changes of the system itself. Protagonists in the second type of change – which we may call revolution – have always declared their resolve to take over nothing from the past: the Enlightenment proposed to destroy the *ancien régime* root and branch; the Paris Commune and the socialist revolutions wanted to make 'a clean break with the past'; Maoism set out to write a new history for China 'on a blank sheet of paper'.

In reality, however, it has never been possible to wipe out the past completely. Some of its components have always been incorporated or transformed in the service of a different logic; others have survived as

means of resisting and slowing down change. The specific combination of new and old in each historical trajectory under consideration is the first source of (partly inherited) diversity. Here, a good aspect on which to focus is the way in which secularism is conceived and practised in societies that have entered capitalist modernity. Taking France as a reference, we can say that the more radical the bourgeois revolution, the more radical the degree of secularism; when capitalist transformation proceeded by way of compromises between the new bourgeoisie and the old ruling classes (as it did almost everywhere else in Europe), secularization did not exclude the survival of some religious dimension in public behaviour. Some national Churches (in the Protestant countries) were actually moulded in the new capitalist system, and have survived as such even if they have lost the coercive power they used to enjoy before modernity. Thus the separation between state and religion, which defines the concept of secularization, is asserted with varying degrees of formality. Let us note in passing that modernity involves the separation of state and religion, not negation of the latter. 'State atheism' (only ever really attempted in the Soviet Union) functions somewhat like a state religion: it violates the basic principle of modernity, that philosophical, religious, political, ideological and scientific opinions are a matter for the free judgement of individuals.

On the other hand, insistence on the need to recognize and respect inherited diversity – which is a feature of the dominant discourse today – most often serves to legitimize policies for the strengthening of conservative regimes (as we have seen in the European debate on secularism). What is the purpose of a reference to Christian values in a declaration of rights? Why not also refer to the role of Europe's non-religious tradition in the rise of modern humanism?

Many other areas of social reality are marked by diversity, and the variety of languages and religions indicates that its roots often lie in the remote past. Diversity has survived even when its constituent elements have changed in the course of history.

Does the existence of several nations or cultures within a modern state – that is, a state made up of citizens with an equal right to build their future – pose a problem for the practice of democracy? Does it represent a challenge? Quite different approaches are taken to this question.

Those who fiercely support national and cultural homogeneity, seeing it as the only way to define the common identity necessary for the exercise of civil rights, do not hesitate to propose either the 'forced assimilation' of recalcitrant groups (often minorities) or, if they are democrats, the

physical separation of ethnic groups and the partition of the state. Meanwhile, as second best, they will accept only the 'toleration' of diversity – the inverted commas being there to remind us that we tolerate only what we do not love ('you've got to tolerate your mother-in-law'). This leads to the American idea of a multicultural society, although in fact it is always a *hierarchical* multiplicity within the national system. The essential point is an inherited communal identity that cannot be the object of personal choice. The assertion of a 'right to difference' comes at the price of denying equal status to its complementary opposite: the right to similarity and equal treatment, and, more generally, the inalienable right of individuals to choose not to be defined by their membership of an inherited community.

Emancipatory modernity is based on a quite different concept of democracy, one that involves both strict equality of rights and duties (including the creation of conditions for this to be a reality) and respect for differences. Respect is a stronger term than tolerance. It implies that state policies create the conditions for equality in spite of diversity – for example, by opening schools that teach in various languages. Here 'in spite of diversity' means only that there is no attempt to freeze it; history is left to do its work, possibly through assimilation that is no longer forced. The policy goal is that diversity does not end in the juxtaposition of closed, and therefore mutually hostile, communities.

It scarcely needs to be recalled that various socialist currents, whether influenced by Austro-Marxism or Bolshevism, have advocated this kind of tactful approach; nor that modern classes (working classes and significant bourgeois fractions) have tended to favour large states in which the existence of several nations is a source of wealth, not of impoverishing oppression. Supporters of 'homogeneous communities', on the other hand, have tended to come from older classes and traditional peasantries.

This helps us appreciate the regression, the veritable betrayal of emancipatory modernity, which is involved in the currently fashionable insistence on 'communities'. Such discourse goes together with a degradation of democracy and a denial of the multiple dimensions of identity (not only nationality, but also social class, gender, ideological and perhaps religious affiliation, and so on). The Zeitgeist no longer recognizes citizens who are at once individual and multidimensional; it substitutes 'people' ('consumers' for economists, TV viewers for politicians), who can thus be manipulated both as amorphous individuals and as subjects of inherited and imposed communities.

Inherited diversity poses a problem, because it is there. But if one

becomes obsessed with it, one loses sight of other, more interesting forms of diversity that the invention of the future necessarily throws up. These are incomparably more interesting because they derive from the very concept of emancipatory democracy and the unfinished modernity that goes together with it.

There is a need for policies to ensure that the freedom of individuals does not detract from their equality and that the two values can advance hand in hand: to say this is to say that history is not over, that systemic change is necessary, and that we have to struggle for it to lead towards real emancipation. How could anyone argue, then, that theirs is the only path or formula corresponding to this need?

The creative Utopias that may afford a real perspective for the crystallization of struggles have always found their legitimacy in a number of different value systems – from various kinds of secular humanism to others with a religious inspiration (theologies of liberation). The systems of social analysis that are their necessary complement also draw their inspiration from a variety of scientific social theories. Strategies to achieve real progress in the agreed direction cannot be the monopoly of any one organization.

Given the incomplete nature of our knowledge, these types of diversity in the invention of the future are not only inevitable but positively welcome for anyone who does not rest on a dogmatic and empty certainty.

VIII. Capitalism and the agrarian question

All societies prior to capitalism were peasant societies, and the various logics governing their agriculture were all alien to the one that defines capitalism (maximization of capitalist profit). Historical capitalism took shape in large-scale commerce and then in the new forms of industry, before eventually launching into the transformation of agriculture. In the present day, half of humanity still lives in the agrarian world of the peasantry, but its production is divided between two sectors quite different in their economic and social natures.

Capitalist agriculture, governed by the principle of the profitability of capital, is located almost exclusively in North America, Europe, the Southern Cone of Latin America, and Australia. It employs no more than a few dozen million farmers (no longer 'peasants'), whose large landholdings and almost exclusive access to mechanization mean that they can achieve output between 10,000 and 20,000 quintals of cereal-equivalent per worker/year.

Peasant agriculture encompasses nearly a half of humanity – three billion human beings. It is in turn divided between those who have benefited from the Green Revolution (fertilizer, pesticide and seed selection, though still little mechanization) and achieve 100 to 500 quintals per worker, and those who continue to operate with older methods and remain stuck around 10 quintals per head of the active population.

The productivity gap between the best-equipped agriculture and the poorest peasant agriculture has shot up from 10:1 before 1940 to 2,000: 1 today. In other words, the rate of productivity growth in agriculture has largely exceeded that in other areas of the economy, bringing with it a fall in real prices from 5 to 1.

In these conditions, to accept the principle of competition for agricultural and food products (as the WTO demands) is to accept that billions of 'uncompetitive' producers will be eliminated in the brief historical space of a few dozen years. What will become of these billions who, though already mostly the poorest of the poor, have in the past been able to feed themselves well or badly? (Badly in a third of cases – three-quarters of the world's undernourished living in a rural context.) No reasonably competitive development of industry that is likely to take place in the next fifty years, even in the fabulous scenario of 7 per cent annual growth for three-quarters of humanity, could absorb as much as a third of these human reserves. This means that capitalism is by its nature incapable of solving the peasant question, and that all it offers is the prospect of a shantytown planet with five billion 'excess' inhabitants. The optimistic doctrine of 'creative destruction', which is supposed to be an intrinsic feature of capitalism, clearly falls down here. It was accepted by historical socialism, as can see from Karl Kautsky's *The Agrarian Question* (first published in German in 1898), the bible of the Second International and even of Leninism, though not of Maoism. But, although modern urban development and mass emigration to the Americas soaked up Europe's peasant reserve, capitalism today does not permit a similar evolution in the peripheries of its world system. This is one of the main factors in the polarization that characterizes the system (see Appendix IV).

So, what is to be done? It is necessary to accept that peasant agriculture will continue to exist in the twenty-first century that is our foreseeable future – not for romantic reasons, but simply because a solution to the problem will require going beyond the logic of capitalism, in a long transition to world socialism stretching over a century or more. Policies must therefore be devised to regulate relations between 'the market' and peasant agriculture. Specifically adapted to national and regional levels,

these relations must protect each country's output by delinking internal prices from world market prices, so that it has the food security it needs to neutralize the imperialist use of food as a weapon; and they must enable the slow but sure growth of productivity in peasant agriculture that will make it possible to control the transfer of population from countryside to towns. At the level of what is known as the world market, regulation should probably take place through interregional agreements – for instance, between Europe on the one hand, and Africa, the Arab countries, China and India on the other. This would correspond to what is required for development that integrates rather than excludes. Marcel Mazoyer has developed at greater length this analysis, which I have been able only to touch upon here (see Mazoyer and Roudart 1997). Of course, the combined development of peasant agriculture and modern industry should be part of a perspective in which free rein is given to the social imagination, for it is hard indeed to conceive how the model of waste peculiar to capitalism could be extended to a world population around ten billion.

Select bibliography

Other writings by the author

To keep the main text as tight as possible, I have placed some supporting arguments in appendices (referred to in this section) and refer the reader to some of my recent writings on the main themes in this book.

Theme 1: Capitalism, basic critical concepts

Samir Amin, *Critique de l'air du temps*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997: i) The concept of underdetermination in history (pp. 47–61); ii) Critique of 'pure economics' (pp. 125–36); iii) Critique of the dominant ideology of the political economy of capitalism (pp. 27–46) and of postmodernism (pp. 87–113).

Specters of Capitalism: a Critique of Current International Fashions, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998.

Appendix II: Imaginary capitalism and actually existing capitalism.

Theme 2: The world capitalist system and polarization

Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World, London: Zed Books, 1990.

Maldevelopment: Anatomy of a Global Failure, London: Zed Books, 1990.

Les défis de la mondialisation, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996: i) Re-compradorization of the Arab world (pp. 249–60); ii) Origins of the African catastrophe (pp. 261–78); iii) China (pp. 225–36) and Russia (pp. 237–48) facing the challenges of globalization.

Le monde arabe, état des lieux, état des luttes (L'Harmattan, forthcoming).

Capitalism in the Age of Globalization, London: Zed Books, 1997, esp. Chapter 1.

Appendix IV: The development paradigm (the self-reliant option and delinking have still to be addressed in a perspective of popular development).

Theme 3: Economic aspects of the present crisis and its management

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