

# **IMPERIALISM: THE PERMANENT STAGE OF CAPITALISM**

**Herb Addo**



**The United Nations University**

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The United Nations University's Project on Goals, Processes, and Indicators of Development (GPID), 1978–1982, was initiated in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the prevailing concepts, theories, and strategies of development, which, three decades after the Second World War, had not fulfilled the expectations generated by them in the third world, and whose material achievements in the industrialized countries had come to be perceived by an increasing number of people as being fraught with ambiguity as well as being counter-developmental in their long-run tendencies. Taking up the development *problématique* on a global scale and maintaining that underdevelopment in the South and (over)development in the North were dialectically linked in the same global process of *maldevelopment*, the Project concerned itself with a fundamental rethinking of the concepts of development, articulating the goals that should and could be pursued, the trends and counter-trends characterizing contemporary development processes, and alternative indicator systems for assessing and monitoring the dynamics of development. The books that have come out of the Project cover a broad spectrum of topics, ranging from theoretical reconsiderations, such as the present volume, to empirical analyses of ongoing developmental trends and transformational possibilities.

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### **Dedication**

Never do those who have had exile thrust upon them refer to the forests that saved them as small; endearingly *little* perhaps, but never *small*.

To dear Lily and precious Kimo; to hospitable *little* Trinidad and Tobago.

## Acknowledgements

This book is a product of the Structural Interpretation of International Inequality Project (S3IP), launched in the mid-1970s in response to the existential disappointments which were then beginning to be experienced in the practice of development policies. I must acknowledge, however, that the full development of the S3IP occurred between 1978 and 1982 under the auspices of the United Nations University's research project on Goals, Processes, and Indicators of Development (UNU-GPID). The S3IP was fully incorporated into the Expansion-Exploitation/Autonomy-Liberation Processes Sub-project of the GPID.

All the chapters in this book have been greatly influenced by critical discussions within the GPID.

The original essay from which this book developed, "The Continuity of Imperialism Thesis," was presented at the GPID meeting held in Geneva, October 1978. The draft manuscript of this book was presented and discussed in its entirety at the GPID Expansion-Exploitation Sub-group meeting held at the Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung der Lebensbedingungen der wissenschaftlich-technischen Welt, Starnberg, Federal Republic of Germany, March 1979. At a similar meeting in Trinidad, January 1981, a revised and final version of the manuscript, including many additional chapters, was presented and debated at length. It was at this latter meeting in Trinidad that the decision was taken to limit the scope of this book and to follow it with a second volume, addressing, in much greater detail and in much broader contexts, the implications of some of the arguments presented here. Chapter eight is a faithful reproduction of the discussion and the exchanges that took place at the Port of Spain meeting.

This book, therefore, not only owes a great debt to the GPID, it must be considered one of its products.

I thank the United Nations University for making real co-operation on an international scale possible, through the agency of the GPID. It was, indeed, a novel experiment. To my mind, the experiment was successful. The participatory experience was exhilarating. It helped to educate me in many ways and to socialize me into a world-wide system of interconnected, even interdependent, thoughts.

I am greatly indebted to all my friends and collaborators, both within and outside the GPID network, who made this book possible. Especially, I am grateful to the many who took particular interest in the development of the arguments. I must single out for mention here Samir Amin, George Aseniero, Neville Duncan, Locksley Edmondson, Johan Galtung, Anslem Francis, Andre Gunder Frank, Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, Terence Hopkins, Basil Ince, Tony Judge, Otto Kreye, Ramesh Ramsaran, Ato Sekyi-Otu, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Ralston Walters.

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Needless to say, I alone am responsible for any errors of judgement, misconceptions, inaccuracies, and inadequacies in this book. However, I insist that responsibility for correcting these errors cannot be mine alone. In these matters, as Walter Rodney once put it, responsibility is collective. Martin Carter, the Guyanese poet, says it even better: "All ah we is involved."

St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago  
October 1985

H.A.

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## Prologue

The decades of the 1960s and the 1970s were pre-eminently a period which brought to the surface an acute sense of the urgent need to confront the great disorder that surrounded the actualization of the idea of development. A new level of consciousness was reached during this period, and it led to many international conferences and meetings, the various resolutions, calls, demands, and even action programmes that were intended to bring some progressive order and rational reasoning to bear on the management of human affairs as they pertained to the realization of the idea of development.

The active fronts of this rising consciousness were many; but each front experienced deep disappointment and frustration. By the mid-1970s, we had come to the crucial realization that the conception of development as the pragmatic and incremental bridging of the “North-South gap,” through diffusionist policies and imitative strategies, might not only be an unworkable proposition but possibly an undesirable one as well. This led to the pressing need to search for new intellectual bases from which to approach the dissolution or the negation of underdevelopment.

This, in turn, necessitated the need to provide the historical grounds from which to proceed to identify those processes, both subtle and overt, which sustain underdevelopment as well as the need to demonstrate how the very negation of these processes would amount to true development: associative humanizing cultures of production and appropriation to meet basic human needs for all equitably.

The construction of such bases is by no means easy, but, like the proverbial journey of a thousand miles, it must begin with a first step: the clarification of the many concepts, the interrelatedness of which explains the development *problématique*. These conceptual clarifications must be informed by a sense of history. They must be informed by the rising consciousness brought about by new evaluations of what we have in the

world and what we have come to appreciate differently about the dynamics of world-history in evolution.

Towards this awesome goal, Immanuel Wallerstein has succinctly pointed to the reasons why the first step should be conceptual clarification. He wrote that:

The important thing for living men, and for scholars and scientists as their collective intellectual expression, is to situate the options available in the contemporary situation in terms of the patterns we can discern in the historical past. In this task, conceptual clarification is the most constant need, and as life goes on and new experiences occur, we learn, if we are wise, to reject and reformulate the partial truths of our predecessors, and to unmask the ideological obscurantism of the self-interested upholders of encrusted privilege.<sup>1</sup>

In this book, I use the term “Eurocentricity” to describe the prevailing “ideological obscurantism.” It is meant to describe the heavy dominance, that is, the “encrusted privilege,” of European culture in the evolution of the modern world-system, both in the realms of fact and ideas. By Europe, I am referring to the European culture as it exists in Europe proper and as it predominates in Europe of the Diaspora — the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. I use the term Europe rather than Western Europe or any other comparable term because I want to stress the cultural dominance in the modern world-system and its implied economic, political, and other forms of domination.

It matters very little whether there is agreement on the exact year in which the modern world-system emerged, so long as there is agreement that it occurred some time in the late fifteenth century. I am partial to Eric Williams’ view that the “year” 1415–1492, marked by Vasco Da Gama’s and Christopher Columbus’ exploration triumphs,<sup>2</sup> is as good as any year in the fifteenth century for dating the origin of the modern world-system. Thus, for contextual clarity, I use the expressions “in the fifteenth century” or “in the late fifteenth century.” Also, I refer to the historical duration since that time as *world-history* in order to distinguish this most relevant period from the unspecific and the imprecise term *history of the world*.

I employ my understanding of the world-system methodology to argue that, in order to understand the development *problématique*, thinking on

the matter must be de-Eurocentrized for it to have any meaning at all. This is to say that it is only in terms of the historical evolution and the continuing dynamics of the world-system as a *whole*, from its very inception to the present, that the development-underdevelopment dialectic can be grasped fully.

Consequently, it is only through a full confrontation with the logic and dynamics of the world-system that authentic and realistic alternative aims, perspectives, and strategies can begin to be conceived. Hence, the description of this book and its intended sequel as “A World-System Critique of Eurocentric Conceptions in Political Economy.”

The main thrust of the critique is that the three main perspectives in political economy, the liberal, radical, and Marxist, apparent differences notwithstanding, have in common some fundamental Eurocentric properties that blind us to other (real) meanings of our world-history. The Eurocentric world-view does not encourage other “valid” interpretations of world-history, and yet, because of its dominance, it is impossible to attempt other interpretations without discussing Eurocentricity.

Our perspective is intended for us to begin to suspect that perhaps there is nothing innocent about Eurocentric epistemology/methodology: that perhaps liberalism is not the gentlemanly ideology it pretends to be and that Marxism may not be the height of creative thinking, as its adherents claim it to be.

I should state that this book does not claim to do more than suggest that if we examined our basic concepts and categories in political economy, we would find that they are as Eurocentric as they can only be expected to be, given the Eurocentric dominance in our given world.

Having in mind the promise of a detailed and broader discussion in its sequel, this book pretends to do no more than illustrate the highly probable validity of the Eurocentric charge with its treatment of imperialism. To the point, I regard the views in this book as composing an elaborate working hypothesis, helpful in elucidating certain obscurities in the links between the specificities of capitalist expansion, domination, and exploitation as they pertain to the theory of (under)development. The hope is that this book can help in uncovering certain theoretically unconnected insights. I approach the views in this book in the spirit that they are all open to correction and that they are to be discarded if and

whenever they do not facilitate the progress of the theory of development.

Finally, I should say that the nature of the subject makes it impossible to completely avoid the semblance of polemics. I only hope that I have kept polemics to the minimum and, for that matter, in their appropriate place. Presentational clarity demanded that in parts of the book I be deliberate, dry, and even uninteresting; and if I have not been fluent all the way through, it is for the reason that repetition is not totally avoidable.

## Notes

1. Immanuel Wallerstein, "Dependence in an Inter-dependent World: The Limited Possibilities of Transformation within the Capitalist World Economy," in Heraldo Muñoz, ed., *From Dependency to Development: Strategies to Overcome Underdevelopment and Inequality* (Westview Press, Boulder, Col., 1981; reprinted from *African Studies Review* 18, no. 1 [1974]: 1–26), p. 268.
2. Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492–1969* (Andre Deutsch, London, 1978), pp. 13–17.

## ***Part One***

### **The Problem**



## Chapter One

### Introduction

This book turns on the strong conviction that a newly synthesized formulation of the concept imperialism is urgently needed to understand the persistence of underdevelopment or the development of peripheral capitalism; and that this can be done most conveniently outside the strict confines of Eurocentricity.

The underlying belief is that in showing how this concept can be understood outside Eurocentric sympathies, we can gain a much better understanding of the structural relationals and the sustaining processes that explain the world not only to Europe but to the whole world. The conviction is that the refinement of this concept leads not only to other concept refinements but shows how such refinements can combine to betray hidden relationships which can be of great importance in understanding how our present world, as a whole, came to be what it is and what constitutes its transformational potential. Indeed, if concepts are really refined to reflect the world reality problem, the global *problématique*, properly, they can lead to refined analyses of historical developments in terms of their *goals*, *processes*, and *indicators*.

If, therefore, we attempt here to show how the concept imperialism should be understood in order to explain the *entire* world to the entire world, it is because of the initial insistence that the non-European parts of the world have always been participants in the unfolding of world-history, from its very inception, and not just helpless objects, who do no more than look on as history passes them by.

The book begins with a discussion of the methodological contrast between Eurocentric properties and world-system postulates. The discussion is cast in the contending mode that the world-system approach allows for the full recognition of the participation of third world societies in the unfolding of world-history both as object and subject. That is, this way of looking at world-history allows for the recognition of the inputs

of third world societies into the causes why the historical past has produced the historical present, with respect to the prominent feature of the development-underdevelopment dialectic.

These two recognitions allow for a crucial admission: that periphery sources contribute to the persistence of imperialism. Third world societies are, therefore, not necessarily and potentially as impotent in providing appropriate inputs into the transformational requirements of the world-system as Eurocentric epistemology and conventional wisdom would have us believe.

From this methodological mode we construct a critical scheme, the foundations of which derive from insight drawn from a particular reading of the logic of the world-system methodology. The scheme allows for the critical appreciation of Eurocentric renditions of imperialism according to the *imprecise* and the *over-precise* endowments of historical concepts in Eurocentric historiography; and it is made up of a composite historic logic, which argues that the logic of the world-system in evolution embraces the dialectically interrelating logics of all its subparts. Each part of the world-system, then, is to be understood first and foremost as the product of world-history: a product of all that it has encountered, both as an object and as a subject, in the unfolding of world-history.

The critical scheme is applied to the liberal, radical, and Marxist conceptions of imperialism in three succeeding chapters. This is done for two main reasons. First, to show that all these conceptions are Eurocentric at their epistemological base. Second, to show that, sheared of their Eurocentric character, these three conceptions of imperialism can contribute, even if negatively, to the new formulation that we are after.

In chapter three, I argue that the liberal conception of imperialism, because of its imprecision, is *transhistoric* and *transepochal*. It is too fluid in nature and, therefore, for my purposes, too elastic to be historico-analytically useful.

The radical conception of imperialism is treated in chapter four. I present it as a rigid conception which violates the strict sensitivity needed to respect the historic specificity of world-history in its totality.

The Marxist conception of imperialism is no less rigid. In chapter five, I argue that this conception of imperialism, because of its over-precise



nature, is too blunt to be analytically useful in the study of world-history from the peripheral perspective.

Chapters three, four, and five have a common structure. All these chapters begin with a close textual analysis of the main works that serve as the intellectual sources for the different conceptions of imperialism. I then proceed to criticize these conceptions from the point of view of the critical scheme. These sources, however, are not too clear in all cases.

I use Schumpeter's works as the intellectual source for the liberal conception of imperialism because of his immense influence on liberal thinking on the subject, which, many will agree, is due to Schumpeter's ability to write elegantly while communicating complex ideas in very clear and simple ways.

Many radicals consider Hobson's works on the subject early this century as the starting point, even though the sources of his ideas on the subject can be traced back to other writings.<sup>1</sup> Hobson's claim to fame rests on his journalistic Manichaeic excesses in seeing imperialism principally in terms of negative social and economic calculations, and on the false appearances that he was sympathetic to the imperialized races.

The Marxist intellectual source is attributed to Lenin's work, even though other Marxists had expressed themselves earlier on the subject. It is Lenin's dominating and magnetic revolutionary personality as well as the forceful clarity of his writing which account for his works on the subject being universally accepted as the Marxist intellectual source of origin.

In chapter six, entitled "The Thesis," I undertake to show how, according to my understanding of the subject, we may proceed to view imperialism in its historically precise conception, if we are to avoid Eurocentric pitfalls. It is in this chapter that I present *the continuity of imperialism thesis* in its structural form and in its phase-relationship with capitalism.

The *thesis* is that the imperialism we associate with capitalism is *sui generis*; and that it has been an abiding attribute of capitalism since its nascence in Europe in the late fifteenth century. The argument is that it is only the forms of imperialism that have changed with the development of world capitalism; but that its historical vocation of facilitating the leakage of capital from the periphery to the centre of the world-system has remained intact.