Samir Amin the African, Global Giant, and Epitome of uBuntu in Tireless Pursuit of the ‘Highest Level of Human Civilization’

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Abstract

This article is the English version of a presentation delivered at the international symposium that was held on February 10–12, 2020, in Dakar (Senegal) in honor and memory of Professor Samir Amin. In what could be read as an autoethnography of more than four decades of observation and evolution the intellectual journey has been enriched from the status and experiences as students to adult academics with critical perspectives shaped the uBuntu-inspired life vision of Samir Amin. The journey of this global giant evolved with extraordinary consistency from childhood questioning social inequality to the global arena as the ultimate advocate of the marginalized everywhere. He inspired generations with his unsurpassed prolific knowledge production, his intellectual rigor and his humanity. The article also recognizes the role of his comrade and spouse, Isabelle Eynard Amin. Samir Amin’s unwavering commitment to the struggle to create a new world of equality and respect of our common humanity to achieve the highest level of human civilization. Beside the economy as the substructure articulated in Marxist analysis, formal education, as part of the superstructure, plays a more critical role than conceived by the classical Marxist and dependency theory as a critical tool for colonial and neo-colonial control. Indeed, formal education also contains the seed for possible social transformation.

Keywords

global – common humanity – knowledge – Marxist analysis – social transformation
Introduction

In 2018, I traveled from New York to Paris to attend the funeral of Professor Amin, including the painful viewing of the body at Hôpital Cochin and the burial at Père-Lachaise cemetery on September 1. For the occasion, I prepared a text titled “Hommage au Professeur Samir Amin: Un grand combattant pour les pays du Sud et les opprimés du monde entier”. My speech was among those which, given the time constraints with the massive attendance worthy of the illustrious Professor, could not be delivered that day.

At the 15th General Assembly of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) and its scientific conference entitled “Africa and the crisis of globalization” held in Dakar in December 2018, a session in tribute to Professor Amin took place. It was in this event that I was able to share an extract from the speech I had previously prepared.

Fourteen months later, an “International Symposium in Homage to Professor Samir Amin” took place in Dakar in February 2020. For that event, I submitted two abstracts that were accepted: “African Generations of Radical Global Thinkers: WEB Dubois, Samir Amin, and the Idea of Bandung in the Evolving Multipolar Context” and “Samir Amin, Epistemology and the Grounding for Organic Intellectual Pursuit”.

When the symposium started and was proceeding, given the rich and long debates after the first presentations, it became necessary to condense my two presentations into one. In addition, some participants had appealed to the speakers to not only focus on the intellectual and international trajectories of the Professor, even if they were exceptional. They wanted other dimensions to be included that reflected his humanity and deep connections to Africa. Taking this new development into account, I modified my presentation with a new title, “SAMIR AMIN: l’Africain et le Géant Universel au Cœur d’Enfant.” My presentation included Samir’s intellectual contributions, “titanic” struggles, human dimensions, and African roots. I referred to decades of intellectual, professional, and personal interactions. This paper is a revised and English version of my presentation.

At the outset, I would like to recall that Professor Amin, jokingly but also seriously, said that he became a communist at the age of six, when he experienced his first shock of social inequalities while watching a child look for crumbs in a trash can in Cairo. He asked his mother what the child was doing and why. After she explained to him what the situation was, he told his mother that something had to be done to eliminate the factors of inequality that created such dismal situations. This experience on African soil, in his native Egypt,
defined his lifelong commitment to contribute to, and to be at the forefront of, struggles to eliminate all forms of inequality.

It was in Egypt that Samir Amin became first involved in the fight for the realization of an ideal just world both locally and globally. It was this beginning that defined the constant and remarkable interface of aspects of his life, his prolific intellectual production, and his presence on all combat fronts, regardless of his position in different institutions, especially as director of the Third World Forum and president of the World Forum of Alternatives.

This article is structured around three main axes which reflect my relationships with him as a caring mentor, his vision of Pan-Africanism, his engagements with the countries of the Global South, his planetary commitment, epistemological questions, empirical research, the centrality of the voices of marginalized populations and masses everywhere, and the local and global dynamics in the search for transformative answers to the fundamental and quintessential question: “What to be done?” He was always engaged in intellectual debates and made relevant analyses on various subjects. Comments derived from his personal experiences offered critical and enriching intellectual perspectives at any time, even in his lighthearted moments.

The first part of the article is a reflection on the African origins and the evolution of our intellectual connections. The second part deals with our professional relations centered on a pan-African framework and a global consciousness. The third part discusses dimensions of the scientific approach of Professor Samir Amin, in his prolific intellectual production.

1 African Origins and Developments in the Intellectual Dimensions of My Connection to Professor Amin

I was in Abidjan when I heard of the passing of Professor Amin on August 12, 2018, and I was in utter disbelief. The shock was even greater because we often do not imagine that individuals who are dear to us and so kind to the world will one day transition to the other world. As if there is an exception made for them to escape the irreversible relentless clock imposed on the human condition. That day, I was in a car in, with a nephew who knew that whenever I was in Abidjan, I would always Professor Amin. The news struck me like lightning. En route from South Africa and passing through Abidjan for a few days before returning to New York, I had been planning to call Professor Amin to greet him as usual and inquire about him and his spouse, the fearless and kind Isabelle Eynard Amin.
After the announcement on the radio of the passing away of our Professor, I informed my husband, Professor Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo, and he too was greatly shocked. Professor Amin’s writings had influenced and contributed to my husband’s academic training and later as a researcher and professor. He had known Professor Amin personally and worked with him since the early 1980s, while he was at the start of his academic career at the University of Liberia and as a committed member of CODESRIA he also met collaborated with Professeur Amin. As PhD students at the University of Chicago, both of us avidly read Professor Amin’s works with interest. Especially as he was a student in political science, with aspects of his concentration on Latin America, Professor Amin’s works on dependency and world-system theorists (Cardoso & Faletto 1979; Gunder Frank 1966, 1978, 1979; Wallerstein 1976) was necessary and reading the works of Professor Amin took his intellectual engagement to another level, not simply because of the brilliant and prolific intellectual analyses of Professor Amin, but additionally because a lot of his works contributed to shedding light on the understanding of the historic exploitation of Africa as a world region as Walter Rodney (1970, 1974) captured. As students first and emerging scholars, my husband and I followed Professor Amin’s prolific production and often revisited aspects of his classics and discussed his latest publications. So, that day of August 12, 2018, my husband and I spontaneously shared the pain of the devastating news of losing our common mentor, friend, and a global icon whose intellectual insight and leadership in the struggle for social transformation are still needed.

On that same day of the announcement of the terrible news, Malak Zaalouk, an Egyptian professor at the American University in Cairo, a mutual friend of Professor Amin, contacted me. Devastated, we shared our pain and cried together from a distance; she was in Egypt and I was in Côte d’Ivoire, two spaces full of meanings on African soil for this planetary hero. After I returned to New York, I prepared to go to Paris for the funeral to pay homage to Professor Amin and to provide moral support to a special person, Isabelle, Professor Amin’s spouse.

After my first face-to-face interaction with Professor Amin, it had become a routine for me to call him on the phone, just to greet him and inquire about Isabelle. When I was passing through Dakar or Paris, I usually contacted him to touch base and discuss various subjects and seek his advice on various professional matters, as a mentor. I was already familiar with his writings before meeting him in person in the 1980s when I regularly travelled to Dakar to participate in activities organized by CODESRIA, AFARD-AAWORD (des femmes africaines pour la recherche et le développement/Association of African Women
for Research and Development), and BREDA (then the UNESCO regional office for Africa in Dakar), other international organizations and when I attended professional meetings at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

In the 1970s, while I was a student in France, I studied history and sociology and read with great interest books which, even if they were not required for the courses, allowed me to have a deeper understanding of Africa. More generally, first as a student in Côte d’Ivoire before going to France, and subsequently to Canada and the United States, Professor Amin’s thought, research, and commitments guided and sustained my intellectual growth. In the study of sociology in France, Marxist theory in economics was central. Therefore, reading Samir Amin to understand the basic concepts in analyzing the conditions of Africa was crucial to me.

My master’s thesis in sociology, which I defended in 1975, was entitled plantation economy and socio-economic changes in Baoulé land (Économie de plantation et changements socio-économiques en pays Baoulé). At that time, Professor Amin’s 1967 book, Le développement du capitalisme en Côte d’Ivoire (The development of capitalism in Côte d’Ivoire) and several others of his seminal books had been published. Professor Amin’s field research in Côte d’Ivoire, specifically in the region in Côte d’Ivoire where I come from, called the cocoa belt (boucle du cacao, today the old cocoa belt) became a point of common interest. I had read his book before I met him and it inspired me as the topic, case study and thorough analysis presented an immense interest to me on a scientific/intellectual and personal level and the social dynamics and region addressed in the book were familiar to me.

When I first met Professor Amin and introduced myself, we instantly had a rapport which was mutual primarily because of that intellectual and personal connection to my ancestral home, its people and socio-geographic landscape. After our first encounter, he enjoyed recalling and sharing fond memories of his experiences conducting fieldwork, his relationships with the farmers and populations and localities he had visited in rural areas, towns and cities in general, his appreciation for the intelligence of the peasants. He was intrigued at their acute ability to contextualize their situations, interests, constraints, and challenges related to the world system, which impacted their plantations and their families. I was always delighted and grateful to listen to and learn from his

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1 I studied at Université d’Abidjan as a first-year student in the common program for students who aimed to major in applied social sciences, geography or history; Université Lyon II (now Université Lumière) in the disciplines of history and sociology up to the master’s level in each; Université Laval with the beginning of the Ph. D. in Education; and the University of Chicago for the Ph.D. in comparative education (sociology and economics).
exceptional, analytical, holistic worldview and its local significance. I appreciated his humanism, respect for everyone, and his great humility.

One of the experiences he shared with me and for which I regret not having further inquired was what he predicted in the realm of why and how the effects of dependence could impede growth towards development in Côte d’Ivoire, Africa and any dependent country of the periphery entangled in the global capitalist system. In the 1960s and 1970s, Côte d’Ivoire registered annual growth rates that were higher than most countries, not only in Africa, but in the world. It was the time of the “Ivorian Miracle” which was the subject of publications in which, following the model of five stages of economic development (traditional society, preconditions to take-off, take-off, drive to maturity, and age of high mass consumption) articulated by Rostow (1960), Côte d’Ivoire was considered ready for the third stage on its way to eventually final stage. Such a scenario was suggested in “La Côte d’Ivoire vers le Take-off économi-que” (Roques 1966). With an incisive analysis, Professor Amin (1967: 7) wrote:

Two figures sum up the extent of the “Ivorian miracle”: from 1950 to 1960: the growth rate of Côte d’Ivoire's gross domestic product – in constant prices – was around 7 to 8 % per year, according to our estimates; from 1960 to 1965, of the order of 11 to 12%. These are exceptionally high rates, not only in Africa, but worldwide. In a continent which, on the whole, is considered to be “off to a bad start”, is Côte d’Ivoire an exception?

With a similar trend, in 1971 for example, Côte d’Ivoire was second only to Japan with an annual growth rate of +10.9. Basically, during the 1970s, Côte d’Ivoire experienced an average annual growth rate of +10.5 compared with +6.5 for all developing countries, +5.2 for the United States, +4.9 for the countries of the European Community and only +2.9 for Great Britain (Marchés Tropicaux et Méditéranéens 1971: 3123).

In his book titled Ivory Coast, the challenge of success: report of a mission sent to the Ivory Coast by the World Bank, Bastian A. Tuinder (1978: 3) wrote: “Few countries, developed or developing, can match the economic growth record of Côte d’Ivoire.”

Despite this indisputable performance as measured by growth rates, in the conclusion of his book, Professor Amin sounded the alarm of trouble to come and stated that serious threats were inevitable “without the socio-economic structures put in place allowing an automatic transition to the next stage, that of self-centered and self-sustaining dynamism” (Amin 1967: 281).

Returning to the funeral in September 2018, it was quite remarkable that the next day after the burial ceremony, I visited Isabelle, who had been hospitalized.
Without a concerted planning, several friends of the Amin couple including, Chérif Salif Sy, Bernard Founou and other people also from Africa, or China and South America, arrived in Isabelle’s room almost at the same time. This unplanned meeting comprised of people from various origins, was a clear illustration of the global dimension of the Professor and Isabelle.

A few months after the funeral, while in Europe, I visited Isabelle again in Paris at their home. When I arrived, she insisted that I sit on Professor Amin’s chair. She was very composed and we talked about everyday events, and as always, about Africa and the subjects Professor Amin would have enjoyed engaging. Lily (the adopted daughter of the Amins) and another African woman who was assisting Isabelle were also present during my visit that day, in January 2019.

In July 2017 which is the time when I last saw Professor Amin in that same chair during a visit, as usual, I had brought them small gifts from Abidjan: A West African indigo blue cotton shirt for him, and a brown embroidered dress for Isabelle who was very pleased. He took the shirt out of the wrapping and as if he was trying it on, he enthusiastically stated to his wife: “Isabelle, look, look!” I saw, as on other occasions, his childlike side as he was ecstatic expressing his joy for what I thought was a modest present. He was not obsessed with accumulation of material wealth and he lived a modest life.

That day, we had a pleasant and unforgettable time. The three of us laughed a lot, sharing stories about our experiences in different contexts, living and working in our continent of Africa and interacting with African people in our social context.

Professional Relations: Pan-Africanism and Global Consciousness

During one of my visits to Dakar, Professor Amin and I discussed the evolution of the economy in Côte d’Ivoire after the era of the “miracle.” In the 1980s and part of the 1990s, the impact of the economic crisis on African countries was exacerbated by the conditionalities attached to the structural adjustment programs (SAP) imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The policy requirements attached to the loans hit all African countries hard, impacting especially social programs which adversely affected the entire populations with acute effects on women and children. This situation prevailed with the same severity in the countries that had opted for capitalism (of which Côte d’Ivoire of Félix Houphouët-Boigny was the model) as well as in a country like Tanzania under the leadership of President Julius Nyerere who opted for African socialism. President Nyerere’s refusal to adhere to those
conditionalities compelled him to resign in 1985, as he viewed those policies as cruel and an antithesis to social progress.

Professor Amin shared with me that in the case of Côte d’Ivoire, given the “miracle” of the 1960s-1970, the authorities were shocked to realize that the country was under the same dire conditions as many others. Desperate for a solution, they invited him for his expertise to first explain how, two decades earlier, he had accurately predicted the economic crisis underway. As they were scrambling for answers, they viewed the eminent Professor as able to propose some solutions. Would there be any pathways to activate a “self-centered and self-sustaining dynamism” as he was indicating in his assessment in the 1960s (Amin 1967: 281)? I regret that the story about this important matter was not concluded when we moved on to another subject. I had promised myself to ask him the question on another occasion. Unfortunately, it did not happen.

For more than three decades, Professor Amin and I were in contact. In addition to the scientific insights, I also appreciated when he was nostalgic about his experiences in Côte d’Ivoire and his interactions with the inhabitants both in the rural and urban areas. These populations, even those in urban areas who returned to their villages for regular visits, were characterized by the reproduction of ancestral traditions and the profound changes induced by colonization, the capitalist system and its impact on the economy and other social institutions.

Professor Amin was always a conscientious mentor and asked for updates on ongoing matters. Thus, during that July 2017 visit he encouraged me to finalize without delay the publication of this special issue of Bandung: Journal of the Global South that was scheduled as one the publications following the March 2015 59th Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education (CIES) which, as the incoming president, I organized with the theme: “Ubuntu! Imagining a Humanist Education Globally.”

Professor Amin was a keynote speaker and he delivered a very powerful presentation via teleconference. The theme of his address was: “The Question of Education, Science, and Technology in the Contemporary Time: On the Theory of Cognitive Capitalism.” He captivated more than 3,300 participants from over 100. Finally, though too late for him to see, we are pleased that this special issue Bandung: Journal of the Global South, of which he, Professor Martial Dembélé, Dr. Joan Oviawe and I are guest co-editors, is published.

During my July 2017 visit to their home in Paris, I briefed him on the state of CEPARRED (Centre PanAfrican d’Études et de Recherches en Relations Internationales et en Éducation pour le Développement/PanAfrican Studies and Research Center in International Relations and Education for Development) of which he was a member of the Board of Directors. After a promising start,
the activities of this structure were slowed down because of the socio-political disruptions in Côte d’Ivoire that lasted for many years. He encouraged me to resume the activities of the center more systematically.

As a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa since 2016, on different occasions, including during the July 2017 visit, on behalf of Professor Michael Cross, then Director of the Ali Mazrui Center for Higher Education Studies, I discussed with Professor Amin, an invitation to be the keynote speaker at a scheduled conference entitled “Geo-Politics of Knowledge on Higher Education.”

Professor Cross and I had planned to meet with Professor Amin in Paris in summer of 2017 to start a series of in-depth interviews for research that I had initiated at Cornell University on “Generations of African Scholars and Institutions of Higher Learning” and which the University of Johannesburg had made a commitment to support. Eventually we decided that interviews for this research would be held during Professor Amin’s stay in South Africa in October 2018 for the “Geo-Politics of Knowledge on Higher Education” conference. It was also expected that on the occasion of the conference he would visit areas like soweto or, especially, Alexandra in the shadow of the skyscrapers of Johannesburg but where the effects of the Apartheid are still very much palpable in everyday life. Professor Amin was very pleased with the anticipated trip to South Africa. But he added, with a look of affection towards Isabelle, that it would have to be a specific date when he would have found someone to stay with her while he would be away. Sadly, the October 2018 trip to South Africa did not take place with Professor Amin passing on August 12, 2018.

I would like to pay tribute to Isabelle as she is an exceptional woman and always accompanied, helped and supported Professor Amin. The expression of their mutual love since they met as students has been inspiring. Professor Amin owes her a lot and we all owe her a lot too! I thank Isabelle for the work she has done autonomously in conscientizing a large part of humanity and for her fight for humanity alongside Professor for decades.

Together, they have done a monumental work for humanity. They were tireless in defending the oppressed and advocating for social progress. I did not realize that day of July 2017 would be the last day I would ever see them together. I will always cherish the last precious memories.

With his humility, brilliance, and his enterprising, inexhaustible and innovative spirit, Professor Amin has left many institutional legacies. Indeed, he created or lent his extraordinary influence in creating several viable institutions primarily CODESRIA, Third World Forum, ENDA Third World (Environmental Development Action in the Third World), and the World Forum for Alternatives of which he remained the President. In our last meeting, he strongly. Despite
his extraordinarily tight schedule he always availed himself to listen, read a
document with thorough feedback and give advice, always gracefully.

3 Epistemology and Relevance of Knowledge Building for the Future

In his writings, Professor Amin always emphasized that the dependence of
oppressed peoples and their countries is the result of the brutal and unilateral
process of their forced integration or incorporation into an economy domi-
nated by an international economic system defined by authoritarian centers
at the world level. And that total or partial integration was dictated by the
capitalist system whose interest was economic exploitation and profit accu-
mulation. Professor Amin’s refined understanding of the world system and his
critical perspectives on dependency relationships was in part informed by his
empirical research.

After his doctoral thesis, among his first works produced during the first
decade which marked the beginning of an extraordinarily prolific and rele-
vant intellectual production, we can cite: *Trois expériences africaines de dévelop-
oppement: le Mali, la Guinée et le Ghana* (1965), his two volumes on *l’Économie
1968* (1970 with C. Coquery-Vidrovitch), *L’Afrique de l’Ouest bloquée* (1971) and
many publications in 1973: *Le développement inégal: Essai sur les formations
sociales du capitalisme périphérique, L’échange inégal et la loi de la valeur,
Neocolonialism in West Africa*. These works had a special meaning to many
scholars because his research was not only theoretical, but he was an active
participant and interacted closely with peasants and other social groups. These
books were a consolidation of his thinking on the economy, inequalities, and
internal and global contradictions.

For me, and like many others of the young students of the time, who were
trying to understand the persistent colonial relations in so-called independent
countries, Professor Amin’s research including the scientific and meticulous
collection and analysis of primary data was a guiding framework. The field
research that Professor Amin meticulously conducted for decades on socie-
ties in Africa and elsewhere, constitutes an indicator of his deep knowledge
of peoples which fueled his work as a theorist. Other qualities and visions
of his humanism were reinforced by the human relationships he developed
during the time he spent with people in their respective social settings in his
fieldwork. The list of publications is exceptionally long, which makes him a
special monument of the dialectic between thought and action in the history of humankind.

He has carried out studies of great methodological value in different disciplines. In addition to his training and works in political science, statistics, and economics, which bear the seal of methodological rigor, he also excelled in the areas of social history and sociology, to name a few.

As Visiting Professor in the sociology department at Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, New York), in 1989/1990, I was among the faculty members who taught the “Introduction to Sociological Thought” course. In addition to the classic authors such as Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, etc., who were usually taught in that institution that was created in 1861, I introduced for the first time in my syllabus, W. E. B. DuBois, Samir Amin, and Rosa Luxemburg.

During the XVIIth World Congress of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies-Conseil Mondial des Associations d’Éducation Comparée (WCCES-CMAEC) held in Cancún in Mexico, in May 2019, as the outgoing and re-elected president of WCCES-CMAEC, I delivered a keynote address entitled “Temporality, Human Geography, and Comparative Education: A Sankofa Perspective.” In this presentation, I referred to an argument put forward by Rosa Luxemburg that is still relevant today, a century later, in the current process of globalization. In her analysis of the “theory of the collapse of capitalism” (Yannacopoulos 1981), she reiterated that capitalism being essentially expansionist, in order for “the productive capitalist center” to continue its growth, it necessarily necessitates “third persons,” corresponding to what was later referred to as the “Third World” or in dependency theory as “the periphery.”

This periphery provides the raw materials necessary for industrial production in the center and at the same time constitutes an important consumer market for basic finished products. The Third World as the supplier of raw materials and consumer of finished products has been articulated by many classics like Marx, Lenin, Nkrumah, and Samir Amin himself, to name a few of these prominent capitalist accumulation theorists.

According to the logic of certain aspects of Rosa Luxemburg’s theory, since capitalism depends essentially on the periphery and on new markets to survive, expand, and prosper, it therefore contains the seed of its own destruction. Greed is ingrained in its fabric and continues its practice of permanent conquest of the entire planet. This is precisely the seed of its possible self-destruction, considering the impossibility of an infinite expansion of such a system on a planetary scale.

Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin, in his perspective on Rosa Luxemburg’s theory, refers to this concept as a “mathematical limit of development” and an
“economic impossibility” of capitalism. Thus, by thriving on imperialist expansions and ignoring the consideration of the fundamentals of our basic and common humanity that demands treatment with dignity, even with its militaristic might, capitalism will reach its limits.

The arguments of an almost natural evolution and an inevitable mutation of the capitalist system towards its destruction, provoke legitimate criticism. How to reconcile the analysis of the natural end of capitalism and the orthodox Marxist conception of class struggle and the proletarian overthrow of the capitalist system remains to be seen.

The questions to ponder includes how to collectively build humanistic foundation as a moral compass for society and an economic system based on egalitarianism, community redistribution, centered on the humans as social beings connected with their social environment and the ecosystem which is made of nature.

I wanted to know Professor Amin’s point of view on Rosa Luxemburg’s notion of mathematical limitation of capitalism. I took the opportunity, during the Q&A period, when he gave the aforementioned keynote address “The Question of Education, Science and Technology in the Contemporary Time: On the Theory of Cognitive Capitalism” at the CIES 2015 conference to ask the question, regarding the aspect of the evolution of the capitalist system according to Rosa Luxembourg. Professor Amin answered unequivocally that despite the contradictions of the capitalist system and the possibilities of implosion that he had analyzed in his book entitled The implosion of contemporary capitalism: fall of capitalism, spring of peoples (Amin 2012), the solution ought to be sought by organized struggle with a sense of direction and structure as the most promising path for change.

In the answer to the question of “What to be done”? Samir Amin and W. E. B. DuBois are on the same wavelength, both in their writings, struggles and connection to the hope contained in the spirit of Bandung, which was a search for global leadership and a moral path for the progress of humanity.

DuBois, born in 1868 in the United States, was the first African American to receive a doctorate from Harvard University. He spent his life advocating for a just world. A prolific intellectual, pan-Africanist, and globalist, he was the President of the 5th Pan-African Congress held in Manchester (United Kingdom) in 1945 and Kwame Nkrumah was the Secretary. Towards the end of his life, DuBois adopted the nationality of Ghana where he and his wife and partner, Shirley Graham DuBois, a brilliant woman, are laid to rest for eternity in the DuBois Center in Accra (Ghana).

W.E.B. DuBois (1868–1963) and Samir Amin (1931–2018), whose life lines spanned three centuries, from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the
20th century for one and from the first half of the 20th century to the second decade of the 21st century for the second, remain radical thinkers and organic intellectuals who fought, literally until their last breath, working tirelessly towards the creation of a new world which would finally reach, according to the thought of Samir Amin, “the highest level of human civilization” of which the Bandung conference of April 1955 would have laid the groundwork.

Preceded by several meetings during which people of African descent and Asians reflected on the need, and made resolutions, to change their abject conditions in a world dominated by Europe and its world extensions with a history of conquest and domination, the Bandung conference was historic as it aimed to promote justice, equality, and human rights and dignity in all spheres of society globally. Dubois, who was 87 years old at the time of the Bandung conference, was not authorized by the American government to attend, following the confiscation of his passport. However, he was able to send a message in his absence which was read and applauded. In his message he urged the participants to secure their freedom and to rule the world on humanist foundations. His life actually embodied what has been called, in the annals of history, as the “spirit of Bandung” (Assié-Lumumba 2015; Lumumba-Kasongo 2015).

Samir Amin was a 24-year-old doctoral student when the Bandung conference was held. He attended the historic conference which left a lasting impression on him and affirmed his conviction of the possibilities and the imperatives of using human free will to continue the struggles for the liberation of Africans, Asians, and all the oppressed peoples in the world. He was convinced that with a united and determined front with moral grounds, such unity could break the yoke of the colonial and imperialist forces for the interest of the entire humanity.

These two giants are radical thinkers in the history of global Africa and have been exceptionally prolific intellectuals engaged in social transformation. They always remained steadfast in their activism all their lives and registered their intellectual research and struggles on a global scale, with an unabashed communist ideology.

To pursue the intellectual work and struggle to which Samir Amin devoted his life, I contend that it is necessary to review at least one aspect of the classical Marxist analysis which stipulates the immutable primacy of infrastructure, namely the economy, over the superstructure of which social institutions, such as education. Marx did not witness colonization in Africa to engage how and why the colonizing powers had conceived the most effective instrument for perpetuating the colonial system, even after their formal departure, through the education system. By reducing human endeavor, life journey and aspiration to only basic economic imperatives, the classical Marxist analysis did not
recognize the primordial and recurring role of the control of the mind and the ability to neutralize the critical mind through the instrument of education imposed by and/or inherited from colonization. European colonial powers effectively conceptualized and planned the reproduction process of the capitalist system for the long term by creating education systems which would continue to neutralize the thinking capability of the majority of the population of the former colonies. Within the colonial education system and its post-colonial reproduction, even new generations which did not experience the direct destructive effects of colonization, are haunted by the metaphysical and practical effects of an educational system inspired by the colonial project of capitalism. Therefore, it is necessary to break this vicious cycle for the future by setting up an African-inspired education system based on universal humanist values acknowledging one shared humanity.

“The highest level of human civilization” to which Professor Amin aspired can certainly be achieved, at least in large part, by the acquisition and dissemination of new shared values. The process can be materialized through education based on the uBuntu paradigm with a deliberate pedagogy of a humanist change. Especially with the awakening and learning the hard way due to the shock of the Coronavirus/COVID-19, it is imperative to design a new education on a global scale, which would include the former colonizers and the countries of the center, those who precisely take advantage of the current system put in place in the context of formal colonial exploitation and its contemporary neo-colonial version. Their inclusion in the hitherto intrenched instinct of exploitation, as well as an invitation to adhere to the new humanist and universal values for a global convergence towards “the highest level of human civilization” for well-being of all. Our collective sake is at stake. The uBuntu paradigm which presumes awareness of our interdependence and our common humanity, and which requires mutual compassion, sense of sharing, while avoiding the inclination to dominate others at the family, national, regional, and global levels is in alignment with the ideologies of the planetary titan Samir Amin.

Conclusion

Samir Amin, the economist, the statistician, the social scientist, broke down the academic disciplinary walls, the geographical and socio-economic walls between countries of the Third World/Global South/the periphery, and countries of the center, and created bridges between peoples of the world. His
critique of colonization and the capitalist system will continue to inspire other imaginations in search of freedom towards a common humanity.

But beyond his immense work, the eminent Professor leaves as a legacy to his contemporaries and to future generations his persistent conviction that we are the engines of our own history, not helpless victims of an externally driven system of domination. His professional rigor, his respect for human dignity, and his commitment to the oppressed and marginalized peoples teach us the fundamental ethics needed for participatory collaboration while conducting research.

Professor Samir Amin left this world but he is still present among us and will remain ever present for future generations to whom we will transmit, and who in turn will transmit, his teachings which advocate for promoting and maintaining equality between peoples and nations and the right to dignity for each and every one and a de facto equality-based autonomy and agency as he so eloquently articulated in his book (Amin 1985) *La déconnexion* (De-Linking: Towards a Polycentric World).

I would like to recall the end of my speech prepared for September 1, 2018, to express my profound gratitude, for having been among the multitude who were bestowed the friendship and guidance of this exceptional mind. To scholars, it is encouraging to know that the spirit of Professor Samir Amin is still alive. I will end by quoting the poem of the Senegalese diplomat and writer/poet Birago Diop: “the Dead are not Dead.” Yes, Samir Amin is not dead! He is here, he will always be here. His mind is felt in the winds stretching from the vast Sahara which regulates the tempo of the heartbeat of the child from the land of eternal Egypt where he started his extraordinary journey. Yes, we have the responsibility to transmit his generous and prolific knowledge to future generations entrusted to us so that they in turn will continue the work to build, nurture and defend a just world that represents the “highest level of human civilization.”

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