The Racialized Global Capitalist Economy: Reading Samir Amin in the 2020s

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Abstract

Using Samir Amin’s theories of worldwide value and historical materialism, this article seeks to show that capitalism is inherently racist, at least since the TransAtlantic enslavement, and that its proponents are perpetuating racism by using it as a tool to deepen economic divides, and to destroy solidarity between workers. The global health crisis of Covid-19 demonstrates the expendability of frontline workers, a large proportion of whom are Black people and has exasperated the economic injustice propagated by the capitalist model. The racist and exploitative structure is global, with a Center extracting rent from the Periphery, where political power and “corruptionists” collude with global corporations. In low-intensity democracies such as the US, paid elections at best will lead to politicians making superficial discursive changes at Superstructure level, whereas the racist Base remains the same. Movements such as Black Lives Matter can be shaped and contained through manipulation of media. To change the Base, this article argues the need for “delinking” of the Periphery from the monopoly economy, and rehabilitation of Marxism through creation of a new global organization – a new Internationale of Workers, or a new Bandung. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in Spring 2022 adds a layer of complexity to the international situation (as it is opening for discourses that are strengthening the monopoly economy worldwide, e.g., in arms manufacturing), but may eventually lead to the demise of the autocratic-capitalist system in Russia, with international repercussions.
Keywords


Introduction

[T]he new ideology worships “winners” and has only unconditional contempt for the “losers.” The dominant rhetoric paints an illusory image of success, the better to ascribe the losers’ failures to their personal circumstances and in that way absolve the social system of its responsibility. Do we really have to point out that this ideology [...] is close to that of the Mafia? For the “winner” is scarcely ever wrong, though his methods, even when not technically illegal, border on illegality, and in any case has no regard for established moral values

AMIN 2013, 27

From Occupy Wall Street to the Arab Spring, and more recently in 2018–2022, Latin American and Hong Kong protests, the breadth and diversity of 21st century movements are astonishing. But while reviewing the trajectories of these movements, a mixed list of historic results can be perceived, and one remains with a suspicion that the Government’s oppression of the marginalized almost always continues in one form or another, and in the cases where leaders were toppled (e.g. in various countries during the Arab Spring), a vacuum of power left room for extremist groups to emerge. One is thus left with the lingering questions of whether it was worth it; and whether there is room for hope. Somehow, even if apparently successful, few of these movements seem to obtain the more profound changes initially sought. This, together with the increasing conservatism in the United States (e.g., Supreme Court decisions, the increasing censure of free talk such as regarding Critical Race Theory, censoring of children who speak about sexualities, etc.) is demonstrating a right-turn of people’s minds that is mirrored in many other countries.

However, some larger movements repelled colonial authorities in the 20th Century and led to national independence, and some revolutions succeeded. In Ukraine, a massive popular movement has since early 2022 rejected Putin’s invasion of the country and people are fighting for their very lives to conserve a democratic state. The support in Russia for the war is partially due to Putin’s revision of History, which has been likened to US efforts to censure Critical
Race Theory and other theories deemed “Anti-American” through “memory laws” dictating what is to be remembered, and how. In an almost-prophetic paper, “The War on History Is a War on Democracy”, Yale professor of totalitarianism, Timothy Snyder, argued in June 2021 that the “new laws restricting the discussion of race in American schools have dire precedents” in Europe, specifically using Russia and Ukraine as examples of how Putin sought – and is seeking – to rewrite Russia’s history. Snyder demonstrates how US politicians similarly impose a false and dishonest image of American history:

The memory laws arise in a moment of cultural panic when national politicians are suddenly railing against “revisionist” teachings. In Russia, the supposed revisionists are people who write critically about Stalin, or honestly about the Second World War. In the United States, the “revisionists” are people who write about race. In both cases, “revisionism” tends to mean the parts of history that challenge leaders’ sense of righteousness or make their supporters uncomfortable.

Snyder, 2021

It is in the light of these events that I seek to review elements of the 2013 Black Lives Matter movement that gained increasing international visibility in 2020, following numerous assassinations of African Americans by the police and civilians, in the midst of the Coronavirus global health crisis. How can BLM lead to structural change, amidst a corrupt political world that seeks to preserve the racist state, going as far as censoring the term Critical Race Theory, just like Putin seeks to dismiss Ukraine’s very existence as a country?

To answer this question, I analyze contemporary news events, especially those of Spring and Summer 2020 through a materialist lens, akin of the Marxist interpretation of the late Professor Samir Amin (1931–2018). In particular, Amin’s Modern Imperialism, Monopoly Finance Capital, and Marx’s Law of Value (2018) will be reviewed, as it is an exemplary and clear text which can be used as a framework to understand the present world economy, and in particular the global health crisis caused by Covid-19, and the concurrent worldwide demonstrations related to Black Lives Matter. Since the latter has the US as its originating point – and because Covid-19 hit the US (and its economy) in a particular race-determined way, I will use US examples, but will also draw in Samir Amin’s theory on the need of action by economically poor countries – the “delinking” of the Periphery from an economic system that I contend is deeply racist.

Samir Amin was an Egyptian-French economist well known for his analysis of imperialism and monopoly capitalism. As Amin’s friend and mentee N’Dri
Thérèse Assié-Lumumba described him,\(^1\) he was balancing his work with academic institutions, the United Nations, NGOs and local communities, and his life was spent between administrative and management work, teaching and research, and political struggle. In addition to his intellectual work as Director of the UN African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, he created CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa), became director of the Third World Forum in Dakar in 1980 and President of the World Social Forum which was created in 2001. In this paper, I use as analytical tools a number of his key concepts as developed in his later writings.\(^2\)

In particular, the social polarization and economic theories used by the “America First” administrative policy to respond to the global health crisis are telling, as they reveal the dehumanizing effects of late-stage capitalism. Further, I seek to explain how the world-wide demonstrations following the May 25, 2020 killing of George Floyd by a white police officer have similarities with the response to the Covid-19 health crisis, insomuch as both demonstrate the extremes of the polarized world, in economic terms as well as in racial ones (these extremes are often overlapping). Demonstrations starting in late May 2020 are opposing a racist social and economic system, that I label – drawing on Samir Amin’s quote above – a Racist Mafia Economy. Whereas the social aspects of racism are often discussed, I will focus on economic racism in this paper. I do not argue that the capitalist economy is solely responsible for racism or that a socialist or Marxist economic system somehow will solve racism.

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\(^2\) I seek to use Samir Amin’s immense theoretical legacy as a template for my own analysis: it does not mean that I agree with all of his analysis. In particular, I believe his discussion of Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge in the 1980s was based on personal knowledge of Khieu Samphan and other future Cambodian leaders during his university years in Paris, and his subsequent criticism of the Pol Pot regime is too weak insomuch as he did not clearly acknowledge the human rights abuses of the Khmer Rouge. See for example his 1986 article, “The Struggle for National Independence and Socialism in Kampuchea.” This article, on its own right, is important for its analysis about the liberation of socialist states from Soviet imperialism, but I do not agree with its explanations of the atrocities of Khmer Rouge.
Racism is an inherent problem in all political systems and in all economic classes.

I argue that the current capitalist economic system – and economic opportunities – are inherently racist and contributing to furthering white supremacy. This is not a new theory: Cedric J. Robinson in his landmark *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), coined the term “racial capitalism,” demonstrating the necessities of racism as an inherent part of capitalism (see also Leong 2013). As noted by Jodi Melamed (2015, 77) the term “Racial capitalism” requires its users to recognize that capitalism is racial capitalism. Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups – capitalists with the means of production/workers without the means of subsistence, creditors/debtors, conquerors of land made property/the dispossessed and removed. These antinomies of accumulation require loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value, and racism enshrines the inequalities that capitalism requires.

As an example, the Covid-19 health crisis has affected Black people disproportionately, because of the race-segregated employment structure and because of discrimination against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in general in the health system. Racism is not operating in isolation, but as an inherent part of an economic Mafia structure.

Still, the “winners” referred to in Samir Amin’s quote above, do not encompass all white people. The demagogy of the “winners” in the US is unique, as it manages to recruit low-educated poor white people, and segregate the various lifestyles of the races.

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3 See for example AMP Research Lab report of June 24, 2020 at www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race: “Collectively, Black Americans represent 12.4% of the population in the U.S., but they have suffered 23.8% of known Covid-19 deaths – i.e., they are dying at roughly twice their population share.” Likewise, The New York Times published an article on July 5, 2020, “The Fullest Look Yet at the Racial Inequity of the Coronavirus,” which provided an overview of Coronavirus cases per 10,000 people (White, 23; Black, 62; and Latino, 73). In 2022, the statistics have been adjusted, in all probability because of the politization of vaccination. Still, the AMP Research Lab, tracking the Coronavirus impact on race, indicates that “Indigenous, Latino, Pacific Islander, and Black Americans all have significantly higher COVID-19 mortality rates than either White or Asian Americans once the data are adjusted to account for age distribution differences among racial and ethnic groups. Nationally, every group except for White Americans has a higher mortality rate after accounting for age, and Latino Americans see the greatest increase between crude and age-adjusted rates” www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race.
elements of the proletariat in creating racial, cultural and religious divisions that ultimately benefit the rich in maintaining an economic status quo. Other countries are using the same economic-racist populist strategies, demonizing a part of the population to keep control over a low-educated (sometimes, white) class that will ultimately vote against their own economic and social interest.⁴ Samir Amin underlines that this system is related to the people's alienation, “the backbone of the ruling class’s ideology, becoming (as Gramsci said) the ruling ideology in society, and by that fact an active factor indispensable to the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production” (Amin 2018, 114).

In earlier papers and a book (e.g., Nordtveit 2010, 2012, 2016), I have used a framework inspired by the post-Marxist tradition, in particular Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s 1985 *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. They advocate leaving room for human agency, since for them no hegemonic class predetermines history: “undecidables permeate the field which had previously been seen as governed by structural determination” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. xi). However, the field of undecidables is not without tensions and context. Aletta Norval (2004, 146) characterized undecidability as “a terrain, not of general openness and contestability, but of a regulated tension and of a suspension in the ’between’.”

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 is immoral, a term used by Amin to describe late-stage capitalism. However, the subsequent anti-racist changes at the Superstructure, I argue, do not have much influence on the (racist) hegemony of the Base (substructure). The hegemonic balances remain the same as prior to the demonstrations. Decisions taken – and change – in terrains of undecidables permeating the world are most frequently related to superficial amendments of the Superstructure. Drawing on Jacques Derrida, Norval (2004, 154) demonstrates that the theory of undecidables encompasses a necessity of reflection and ethics in decision, i.e., responsibility:

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⁴ History is full of examples of this type of demagogism, demonstrating the effectiveness of mobilizing the mass population against a perceived enemy (for example, Adolf Hitler is the archetypal example of a populist leader). At the present time Narendra Modi is a political figure who has been using a populist language, seeking support from the Gujarati population against the Indian “center.” He has sought to alienate other Indian leaders who are depicted as “foreigners” – in a language much similar to the current American discourse (see for example, Jaffrelot 2016). The racist language is mixed with religious bigotry, Islamophobia and centrality of Hinduism, and seem close to American “values” promoted by US political leaders such as Donald Trump. Vladimir Putin is another such demagogue.
...the experience of the undecidable, as an encounter with constitutive difference, marks the subject as a subject of response-ability, and thus of accountability. In taking decisions in an undecidable terrain, the subject always already is marked in such a way that constitutive difference cannot simply be denied, and that a relation to an other is constituted which leaves the subject accountable. The subject is called upon to account for the decision.

In other words, decisions are not taken without context; they are thus not fully “free.” I leave open to belief that decisions in undecidable terrain might change the course of the Base and Superstructure despite the context of a hegemonic class striving to predetermine history (e.g., suggested by Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History”). As the worldwide health (and economic) crisis related to Covid-19, and the international Black Lives Matter movement constitute moments of undecidables, they include context and accountability that over time could lead to decision changing the structure of the Base.

This paper is divided into three sections; in the first I discuss the International Racist Mafia Economy. Then, in the second I examine the social control in what Samir Amin labeled “low-intensity democracies,” which survive by a strategy of divide-and-conquer (such as the United States, or Russia). In the third section I propose a way of healing through delinking, education, and rehabilitation of a Marxist ideal.

The International Racist Mafia Economy

I argue that a predetermined historic arrangement is organizing social relationships from micro to macro levels in a racist order – starting with the smallest communities inscribed into the Racist Mafia Economy. This economy is not a healthy, vibrant capitalist economy like the one described by the disciples of the “free market,” from Adam Smith and Friedrich August von Hayek to his followers at the Chicago School of Economics. The economy of late capitalism is sick: the Base is not structured according to competing capitalist enterprises, corresponding to a neoclassical understanding of microeconomics, i.e., with easy access to the market, and negligent transaction costs. On the contrary, the capitalist system “is inseparable from imperialist exploitation of its dominated peripheries by its dominant centers. Under monopoly capitalism this exploitation takes the form of monopoly rents (in ordinary language, the superprofits of multinational corporations) that are by and large imperialist rents” (Amin 2018, 20). At the superprofit macro level, the international structures
are dominated by what Samir Amin labelled the “Triad,” i.e., companies and Governments of the US, Western and Central Europe, and Japan. I would add China and Russia to this Triad (thus making it a Pentad – or a Polyad if we allow inclusion of the many would-be “Triaders”). This rent-extracting system, at both Micro and Macro levels is inherently racist, classist and gender-biased, as it seeks the accumulation and conservation of political and economic power in a small – mostly male⁵ and mostly white⁶ – elite.

In a schematic way, present-day capitalism can be depicted as a nebulous structure in which the Economic Nexus (“Polyad”) at a macro level is extracting from the disenfranchised Periphery and Center. The Center is allied with the “corruptionist,” who can be defined as a supporter of the international hegemonic structure, and who is “a highly compensated intermediary, profiting from an actual political rent that is the essential source of his accumulated wealth” and “adheres to no system of national or moral values whatsoever” (Amin 2018, 20). As shown in figure 1 below, at the Periphery of the economic Nexus is the disenfranchised Center and further away, the disenfranchised Periphery.

The term “corruptionist” is perhaps a good label for the highly compensated intermediary, but it could lead to some confusion. All levels of the system are populated by small “islands” of corruptionists (including media)⁷ since they are structurally supporting the Base of the economy, while at times trying to change elements of the Superstructure, based on their ideologic allegiances.

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⁵ I do not seek to make an apology for the white female. The literature amply demonstrates that the “tears of white women” are tools of oppression at their own right: “(white) feminism ideologically grounds itself in a gendered victimology that masks its participation and functionality in white supremacy. By erasing women of color, positioning women as victims of white male hegemony, and failing to hold white women accountable for the production and reproduction of white supremacy, (white) feminism manifests its allegiance to whiteness and in doing so commits ‘discursive violence’” (Moon and Holling 2020, 2; see also Accapadi, 2007).

⁶ In non-white societies, this celebration of “whiteness” might be translated into skin color tones. Lighter skin tones denote “betterment” in the racist understanding of the world. A host of references on skin-lightening can be found to prove the point, e.g., see Ndlova et al. on African and Indian women in South Africa: “skin-lightening products are [...] widely abused as self-medication because of the cultural perception that lighter skin complexion is better than dark skin” (2014, 236) or Lartery et al. (2017) on the use of whitening products in fishing villages in Ghana, which is also widespread phenomenon elsewhere on the African continent and in the diaspora. The BLM movement of 2020 had an international repercussion among companies producing skin whitening products, see for example, Maria Cramer’s New York Times June 19, 2020 article: “Johnson & Johnson Will Stop Selling Skin-Whitening Lotions.”

⁷ As noted by Amin (2019, 249), “these oligarchies now also exercise absolute political power as well as power over the media that is subordinated to them, creating the necessary disinformation to depoliticize public opinion.”
Similarly, using the term “corruptionist” for the Periphery could lead to believe that the Nexus is not corrupt, which is not the case – it is very much corrupt: the system is permeated with corruption at all levels. Figure 1 shows how the “sea” of undecidables is populated by small intermediate “islands” belonging to various transitional groups, many of which are part of – and supporting the Base. Many marginalized and disenfranchised people (at the Center and Periphery) are likewise actively taking part in the corruption, as they have been infected by racist media that are supporting the Base through a diversionist discourse. I shall therefore diverge from Amin in my use of the term corruptionist; for him and the Dependency theorists in general, the corruptionists are the intermediates in the Periphery; for me they are the intermediates at all levels, including in the Center, profiting from a political rent. In Figure 1, I have therefore positioned the corruptionists as partially integrated with the Racist Economic Nexus. In the global periphery there is a small group of representatives of the Global Center and in the global Center there is a large periphery.

In Samir Amin’s terms, a global law of value characterizes the unequal commercial exchanges between countries. The difference in salaries of the proletariat in one country compared to another is superior to the difference between productivities, and results in a global imperial rent accruing to global corporations, most of which are led from the Triad/Polyad (albeit not necessarily paying taxes to Triad/Polyad countries). Triad/Polyad governments and global corruptionists (at all levels) sponsor the interests of allied corporations, combat workers’ alliances that could lead to higher wages, and thus restrict

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**Figure 1** The Global-Local Rent Extraction System
the mobility (and prosperity) of labor. This leads to a corruptionist-led world where workers’ (proletariat’s) wages are low and stagnant. It should be noted that none of this is reflecting classical economic theory as explained by Adam Smith, Friedrich August von Hayek and others. In Samir Amin’s words, classical economic theory is

economic theory [that] goes on describing an imaginary system (and not the actual capitalist system) and, what is more, in a fashion that explains anything and everything by way of ‘expectations’ whose degree of conformity to reality is unknowable to the ‘expecters’ themselves. More than ever economic theory has become ideological rhetoric (in the most bluntly negative sense of the term) whose objective is to make us accept whatever is decided by the sole deciders: the generalized monopolies.

AMIN, 2018, 155

The difference between workers’ wages in low-income countries and those in the Triad/Polyad (at similar levels of productivity) contributes to the stability of the system in the form of imperialist rent benefiting the Triad/Polyad’s proletariat. Racist social control structures and low-intensity democracies complement the global neoliberal system of exploitation.

Social Control in a Democracy of Divide and Conquer

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., in an April 16, 1963 letter from Birmingham Jail wrote that “Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.” Further, he writes:

8 On this point, my thinking diverges from that of Samir Amin, who saw the international rent contributing to the stability of the Triad through increasing wages of the proletariat (i.e., rising with productivity). For a neoliberal discussion on wage stagnation in the US, see the Brookings Institution’s article of Tuesday, September 10, 2019: “Are wages rising, falling, or stagnating?” (Reeves et al 2019). The article does not include a racial component of wage stagnation, but demonstrates that in a best-case scenario (depending on years compared, inflation rate used, gender, and level of income), wages are rising – and in a worst-case scenario (based on variation of the same criteria), they are falling.

9 Reflecting Revelation 3:15–16: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”
The Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can’t agree with your methods of direct action;’ who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man’s freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a ‘more convenient season.’

These words seem an almost prophetic vision of the then-future presidency of Bill Clinton (1993 to 2001). His – and later, Barack Obama’s presidency of 2009 to 2017 – could be seen as such negative peace, in which little economic justice was present – and in which active and violent tensions continued. The current Joe Biden presidency is no different. Martin Luther King Jr. explained how the racist social structure functions, and the same vocabulary can be used to describe the global economic system of exploitation.

The racist structure of negative peace described by Martin Luther King is emblematic of the low-intensity democracies referred to by Samir Amin. Any private funding-supported election system will promote the values of the rich, without real democratic choices, and without a real attempt at economic justice. At best it will be “lukewarm acceptance” and “shallow understanding from people of goodwill.” In the US, for example, the Democrats (traditionally with a discourse promoting more economic equity) have enabled the Racist Mafia Economy through the indiscriminate sale of their morality to Wall Street. For example, Bill Clinton enacted important economic deregulation policies such as the Financial Services Modernization Act of 1999, repealing the 1932 Glass-Steagall Act. He started the US anti-human rights and racist mass incarceration policies through The Violent Crime Control

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10 For example, the “Statement by President Biden on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination” (White House Press Release, March 21, 2021) was issued at the same time as policymakers in half of America sought to suppress Critical Race Theory, and to limit access to voting for Black people).

11 I underline, as I demonstrate below, that racist groups (including the “White Citizen’s Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner”) are hugely problematic entities that must be exposed and dealt with by the Justice system (if existing). However, the point here, as exposed by Martin Luther King, is that the “lukewarm acceptance” and inability to change are the main obstacle to change, not the racist-extremist fringe. In other words, the systemic racism of the “everyday citizen” (including many so-called woke citizens) is the problem, together with the systemic racist economic and social structure.
and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, which was written by Senator Joe Biden, later to become the 47th Vice President of the United States from 2009 to 2017 and President of the United States at the 2020 election. Samir Amin rightly characterizes current democracies, and especially those with private funding-supported elections, as a “farce”: “Contemporary capitalism’s preferred political system, henceforward, is plutocracy, which easily goes along with continuation of representative democratic institutions in what has become a ‘low-intensity democracy’: you are free to vote for whomever you want, because your choice has no importance. It is the market, not the representative assembly, that decides everything. The market gets along just as well with autocratic political regimes as it does with those designated by an electoral farce” (Amin 2018, 29). In line with this, I do not wish to draw a line between the discourses of the Republican and Democrat. While the Republican discourses often are overtly racist, the Joe Biden and Democrats’ “one-size-fits-all” lukewarm support of change and reform does not worry the rich sponsors of the American elections. Hence, I shall use “American” to characterize the US Racist Mafia Economy; it is embedded in both Republican and Democrat values. Incidentally, the US Supreme Court is an example of a similar farce, a demonstration of the undemocratic nature of late-stage capitalism; the political empowering a few people who are allowed to lie “to Congress and to the country” (Waldman 2021) with impunity. They are above the law – or in fact they are the law, and exemplifying the farce of the American democracy (or its “stench,” to use Sonia Sotomayor’s term).

To understand the May 25, 2020 killing of George Floyd, a black man by a white police officer as only attributable to police racism and violence is therefore too simple. It neglects the vicious and immoral economic-political system as a whole, with a racist economic system that “has many of the characteristics of a Ponzi scheme” (Brown 2009, 14). This labor base is in part composed of marginalized Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), and in part of what is characterized as “white trash,” low-income and uneducated white people (Isenberg, 2016). The worldwide capitalist system is brilliantly executed to divide and conquer. Hence, at community and national levels natural allies among the proletariat are segregated through manipulation – through an offer of endless individualized “political choices” that are said to be part of democracy: prolife vs. prochoice; healthcare “freedom” vs. “affordable” care; “restoring the American Dream” vs. Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors.

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12 As is made clear above, Samir Amin in this quote is not referring to the “market” in the sense of the imaginary free markets described by Adam Smith or Friedrich Hayek. Here, the “market” is referring to monopoly capitalism.
(DREAM Act), to mention just a few choices. More directly, anti-memory laws are set up to shield White people from history, and to prevent Black people from voting:

In most cases, the new American memory laws have been passed by state legislatures that, in the same session, have passed laws designed to make voting more difficult. The memory management enables the voter suppression. The history of denying Black people the vote is shameful.

Snyder, 2015

What is common for all, is that the basic underlying capitalist Base dividing the world into “winners” and “losers” remain the same, while the Superstructure may superficially change according to the latest political fad to preserve the illusion of a democracy.

As shown in figure 2 below, the Superstructure’s main function is to preserve the Base, to protect it. The Superstructure may even occasionally influence or change the Base – but the stronger force is presented by the Base, both shaping and preserving the Superstructure. While the ideological debates are continuing at Superstructure level (for example regarding Black Lives Matter and racism in society), the Base, i.e., the Racist Mafia Economy, also needs to be reimagined in order to generate lasting change. Since that force (the Base) is stronger than the Superstructure – and self-preserving through internal surviving mechanisms (e.g., the Supreme Court, local courts, political structures), it may take nothing less than a revolution of the minds of the proletariat (and especially, the white, uneducated, conservative, proletariat) to change the Base (the Racist Mafia Economy).

What is common for the political trends at the Superstructure level is that “fake news” permeate the field, and even public health concerns are politicized.

**Figure 2** Relationship between the Base and the Superstructure
Hence, one part of the US believes that Covid-19 is largely a political fad from the “left” side. These debates are not situated between an oppressed proletariat and an oppressor bourgeoisie, but in-between many segments of the former, each believing a different mediatized story. As noted by Amin (2018, 25), “social polarization has taken on an extreme form” with “agglomeration of dominated classes made up of segments whose diverse statuses belie their common inclusion in what I call a generalized proletariat.” White Supremacists (and self-preserving corruptionists working to maintain the racist Base), therefore seek to distract and convert the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, into a discussion about whether or not to keep statues of historic figures of White Supremacists. This debate in itself is important (since it is seeking to establish a sense of historic truth) – but should not become a diversion from the core question of the transformation of the Base.

An example of the divide-and-conquer style of brainwashing is the Council of Conservative Citizens (ccc), which seems to be an inspiration to many current politicians in Washington DC (albeit they officially criticize it).13 The ccc website14 is a perfect example of how to keep America divided, from “whitelives”-tagged headlines and stories (e.g., “Monty Python Terry Gilliam: ‘I’m Tired, as a White Male, of Being Blamed for Everything’”) to poetry.

As an example of this latter, ccc’s President Earl P. Holt III wrote in 2017 a poem titled “Getting to Know You” which is full of racist banter, and available, among others, on the group’s web site. Sadly, it is both a precursor and a reaction to current US discourse. Media is depicted (by Holt) as “deceitful” and there’s a clear jab at “journalists.” Obsession with “fake news” as propagated by the machinery of the White House under the 45th US president (Donald Trump) used the same terminology.15 A reference to “Marxism’s followers, it’s dogma must obey” would be risible if politicians, including the 45th president of the United States and the media, did not use that very language to depict conservative center-right Democrats such as Joe Biden. The poem ends with a false statement that has followed Black people for centuries: “Blacks are

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13 The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has tallied a number of current and past politicians to be sympathetic to it, and characterizes it as a part of the “neo-confederate movement.” See: www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/council-conservative-citizens.
15 It may seem contradictory that the Trump administration characterized as “fake news” the very media that ultimately serves the Base. However, I see this as a diversion strategy to confuse people and to delegitimize research and theory. In Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) terminology, “truth” becomes an increasingly floating signifier, a “myth” ascribed meaning according to the personal political belief of each individual.
predatory and, synonymous with crime." I quote from this despicable poem since its writer, Earl P. Holt III, is a well-known Republican funder. During an interview with Lindsey Bever of the Washington Post back in 2015, he said that “the current RNC leadership seem particularly susceptible to what are often opportunistic and mercenary blacks feigning allegiance to GOP principles in order to benefit themselves in some manner.” Holt “and wife” further indicated their plan “to contribute directly to conservative Republican candidates, ONLY, because we do not trust the RNC to spend our money as wisely as we would. Moreover, if it occurs to us to mention it, we also indicate our preference for Tea Party-endorsed candidates, to whom we have been quite generous the last few election cycles.” A second reason to particularly mention this author (Holt), is that this kind of writing is having direct effects: Dylann Roof, the perpetrator of the Charleston church shooting on June 17, 2015 killing nine people, mentioned the CCC in his racist manifesto, saying he learned about “brutal black on white murders” from the group’s Web site (Bever 2015). The lies of Earl P. Holt III are having their wished-for consequences; murder in the hope of creating a race war, which was the intended outcome of the Charleston church shooting.16 From a Racist Mafia Economy’s perspective, this racial hatred is desirable and even necessary, as it displaces problems of poverty (including white poverty) and economic injustice (e.g., the Government support of the richest). The white supremacists, under an agenda of law and order (which President Clinton wholeheartedly subscribed to, by being “tough on crime”), then oppresses the “other poor,” instead of asking for economic justice. The problem becomes the immigrant, not the economic injustice. The problem becomes “crime and looting,” not the economic injustice. The problem becomes statues, not the economic injustice. The economy is inherently racist because it is self-preserving of the steering class to be racist; the system itself is racist (which does not excuse the individual racism of people inhabiting the economic system).

The Covid-19 global health crisis has been converted by the Mafia economy worldwide to establish tighter control and more desperate measures to further accumulate capital and political power, together with escalating international tensions. It can be inserted as a historical path of capitalism towards its most logical and racist conclusions, to a fulfillment ending in senility: “The second long crisis [of capitalism], which started with the U.S. termination of the international convertibility of the dollar to gold in 1971, has followed a path like that of the first part of the previous crises: concentration of capitals, forced and violent globalization, and financialization. It is now entering into its second part,

16 Such race war is oft-referred to as the “boogaloo” in white supremacist circles.
whose outcome will be shaped by ever-intensifying interstate conflicts (in particular North versus South) and social struggles” (Amin 2018, 116–117). As for the latter point, social struggles, the 2017–2021 US administration seemed to seek to stoke social clashes rather than to seek healing – in a desperate attempt to displace discussion on the deeper social and economic fissures. Hence, the open racism in the American discourse under that administration can be understood as a political strategy to displace social economic struggles to racial struggles, deliberately seeking to divert people who are natural allies of the proletariat. The discourse is created to shift questions of economic injustice to questions about conflict between races. For the current US administration, Putin’s war against Ukraine is a perfect opportunity to strengthen military spending (both in Russia and in the US), reallocate funding to support military purposes, and displace public attention away from issues of national injustices.

The Base itself is only able to be kept together through complicity of the political and economic elite. Samir Amin has characterized this system as “obsolete” and “senile,” proving that “capitalism finds its identity in oligopolies and the state, powers ‘above the market.’ In the ‘new capitalism,’ this collusion, which was far weaker during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, now operates as forcefully as it did at the very beginnings of capitalism [...] the system really has become obsolete, has entered its senility” (Amin 2018, 28). Amin in particular used the medieval republic of Venice as an example of a state that is run like a “joint-stock company” (ibid. 28), perhaps inspired by Karl Marx’s historical studies and accompanying notebooks (Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe Volume iv/29; see Krätke 2018). As noted above, this version of late-stage capitalism is not a market economy, but an oligarchy. The assumptions of neoclassical economics have failed, and proponents of the Racist Mafia Economy have set up self-preserving safeguards to have the system duplicate itself: “Capitalism cannot be reduced to its conceptualization as an ‘economic system,’ and still less to that – even more simplistic – of a ‘market economy.’ Behind the capital accumulation that governs it looms the active intervention of the market alienation that conditions its deployment” (Amin 2018, 113).

Concluding and Forward-Looking Reflections: Delinking, and Rehabilitation of the Marxist Ideal

Another powerful and self-preserving part of the Racist Mafia Economy is its demonization of the terms “Marxist,” “socialist” and “welfare system.” The theories that are created with a purpose to protect the most exploited and vulnerable, and to establish justice, have in the United States and in many other
countries been misconstrued to mean something undefined and evil – a Big Brother 1984 Orwellian system of mental control and physical torture (while liberal-democratic systems such as the United States are excelling in torture; see for example The Torture Papers: The Road To Abu Ghraib).17 Hence, even speaking or writing about Marxism as a positive force for social justice is banned through public ostracism and discredit of the author or speaker. In a Racist Mafia Economy, self-claimed Marxists such as Samir Amin will have very little public appeal. Some democrats with a more progressive agenda, such as Bernie Sanders, have been stamped as “extremist,” “socialist” or “Marxist,” “proponent of a Welfare State” or some other “horrible” label, and will not have a chance to convince many from the group of white uneducated people that his politics actually makes sense for them and are in their favor. The “protection” pillars of the Racist Mafia Economy, which consist of racism, white supremacy, interracial segregation and political feeding of distrust, together with religious bigotry (e.g., pro-life vs. pro-choice), is making a large part of the US population vote against its own best economic interest and social protection. Internationally, similar protection pillars are protecting the corruptionists and the ever-frailer international capitalist architecture.

How do we bring the Racist Mafia Economy to its conclusion? How do we break the pillars protecting it? Samir Amin (2018, 130) did not see a possibility for the collapse of the Mafia Economy until the poorer countries stop paying imperialist rent, which means doing away with the corruptionists as well: “As long as the peoples and nations of the peripheries remain unable to eliminate imperialist rent, or to substantially reduce it, there is small chance that public opinion in the opulent Northern societies will arrive at conceiving the inescapable necessity of nationalizing the oligopolies.” Amin labeled this process “delinking’ from the system of worldwide expansion of capitalism” (Amin 1990, xiv; see also Zhang 2013). Samir Amin further believes that restoration of the Marxist discourse in the Center might be possible with this delinking: “There are likewise good reasons to think that the Northern peoples – who are not ‘by nature’ wicked devils – once deprived of the advantages of that rent which until now made them accept the terms of a ‘consenting’ pro-imperialist allegiance, will be capable of forming themselves into alternative historic blocs open to the socialist perspective. The monopoly of power by the plutocracy that governs them, albeit reinforced, is not necessarily stable” (Amin 2018, 128). It is not clear as how such delinking can come about, because of the extreme heterogeneity of the “Periphery.” Hence, the divide-and-conquer principle at play at micro levels works very well at international levels too. After all, the only

17 Greenberg and Dratel, 2005.
The definition of the Periphery is a negative one: “regions that are not constituted as centers of the global system” (Amin 2018, 150). One possibility to delink though, is through refusal to pay back unjust loans, which would disrupt the stability of the Racist Mafia Economy. Also, if one considers that international rent is not contributing to the stability of the Triad through increasing wages of the proletariat (i.e., rising with productivity), since wages have not been increasing for large segments of the workers, the instability Samir Amin mentioned in the quote above may increase. Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement, I believe, have accelerated this instability – the corrosion and further aging of the already senile system – insomuch as islands in the disenfranchised center are revolting against the injustice of the world order. Covid-19 has shown how fragile the senile economy is, and Black Lives Matter movements have shown how racist and unjust the structures are, not only with the peripheral corruptionists but also in the Center (i.e., in the Triad). The Pan-African former President of Burkina Faso, Thomas Sankara, called them “valets locaux” (local valets). Samir Amin (2018, 126–127) asked the critical question on whether “it [will] be possible this time to build convergences between the struggles in the North and in the South? These were lamentably lacking in the Bandung epoch. The peoples of the imperialist centers then aligned behind their imperialist leaders.” Amin continued, “The challenge of constructing an anti-imperialist internationalism of workers and peoples remains to be tackled” (Amin 2018, 127). I believe with Samir Amin that this is possibly the moment in which there is hope for change, due to the fissures in the economy caused by Covid-19 and the intolerable collusion between political and economic power, together with the white supremacy represented by leading political actors.

The change must necessarily come through education and repositioning of the terms of welfare state, socialism, communism, Marxism, etc., to reclaim them (and the concepts they represent) for the people. In other words, there is a need for rehabilitation of the Marxist project. The ideological brainwashing


19 A worry is the possible co-option of the BLM movements and discourse by the very actors that Martin Luther King Jr. characterized as “lukewarm” – and thus the creation of an illusion of change through insignificant acts a revised vocabulary. Samir Amin (2019, 250) described such take-over in the following terms: “Many of these struggles have been absorbed by the system and foster the illusion that it is possible to reform it.”
of American children through the school system, is positioning them in young age to embrace the Racist Mafia Economy, and thus to reject what is perceived as “evil ideologies” of welfare and Marxism. To create change – or to repoliticize – towards the “rebirth of the left” is through reflection and accountability (Norval 2004), leading to decisions in a terrain of undecidables, and struggle. Moral people, both in the Triad and in the Periphery, have the responsibility to seek a shift from the global Racist Mafia Economy, and work towards healing of the world from late-stage capitalism, infusing humanity into our economic structures. Samir Amin sees this as an outcome of local revolutions and consent: “The only thing I ascertain is the expected implosion (or perhaps the explosion) of the system. It shows itself in the revolts of the South’s peoples (in Latin America, in the Arab world, and elsewhere), the rising conflicts between the emergent countries and the centers of the historic imperialist Triad, the implosion of the European system, and the rise of new struggles in the centers themselves. All of these are omens of potential repoliticization, which is itself the precondition for the rebirth, if it rises to the challenge, of the radical left” (Amin 2018, 155). It is the responsibility of each of us (in the Center and in the Periphery) to transcend historic determinism and seek alternative futures. There is a time for change – and the time is now: we all are facing decisions in undecidable terrain, what Søren Kierkegaard (later echoed by Derrida) called the “madness” of decision.20

I will end with this desire and hope towards the future, that movements such as Black Lives Matter could be integrated in a larger structure of solidarity among workers. At the end of his life, Samir Amin proposed a way forward in a July 3, 2018 letter “to his comrades, workers, activists and friends” (Amin 2019, 247), in which he came back to a proposition of creating a new International of Workers. With him I believe, “[t]he aim should be to establish an Organization (the new Internationale) and not just a ‘movement.’ This involves moving beyond the concept of a discussion forum” (Amin 2019, 253). Using contemporary online media platforms, such Organization could recruit trendsetters21 rehabilitating the idea of a Marxist project, and organize against the global Racist Mafia Economy. With a change of the Base the Superstructure can free itself from its inherent need for

20 “The instant of decision is madness” (Derrida: “L’instant de la decision est une folie, dit Kierkegaard”). Kierkegaard stated that we need to make decisions only when one choice is not clearly better than another (otherwise, reason/rationality will indicate which option is better, and thus “make” the decision for us). See also Bennington 2011; Norval, 2004.
21 An example of such trendsetter is Raoul Peck, a Haitian former Minister of Culture, political activist and filmmaker, directing, among others, the Oscar-nominated “I’m Not Your Negro” (2016) and “The Young Karl Marx” (2017).
racism and other diversion strategies – and allow humanity a chance to transcend the limiting and destructive system of late-stage monopoly capitalism.

References


