



## Rethinking Autonomous Development and Social Change in Africa

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### **Abstract**

One of the most sought-after ideals in post-independence Africa, yet highly elusive, is the realisation of autonomous development and social change. Samir Amin is among the many scholars who have proposed solutions yet whose contribution has not been satisfactorily popularised. Amin was among the first generation of scholars who theorised and conceptualised pathways towards autonomous development and social change in Africa. In his honour, this article revisits the development and social change debate in Africa. Drawing from critical document analysis and underpinned by content analysis, the article cites the dependency syndrome as one key problem to Africa's development trajectory. This syndrome compromised continental efforts towards realising autonomous development and social change. Amin proposed 'delinking' from the capitalist system as the first step towards autonomous development. The article concludes that, problematic and complex as it is, delinking from the logic of imperialism in its entirety in the pursuit of home-grown context and cultural-specific frameworks of transformation is the key move towards autonomous development and social change in Africa.

**Keywords:** *Africa; Delinking; Dependency Theory; Development; Social Change*

### **Introduction**

One of the key persistent questions in developing countries is how best to steer development to achieve positive social change. In the context of Africa, Samir Amin (hereinafter, Amin) was among the first generation of cohorts that theorised and conceptualised pathways towards autonomous development and social change in Africa. Beginning with his doctoral thesis completed in 1957 at the height of independence political development in Africa, Amin commenced his lifelong academic career and intellectual life, which he dedicated to the exposition of the machinery of Eurocentrism and the historical evolution of world capitalism and how the periphery was wrongfully bundled into the world capitalist system (Ghosh, 2021). Like most scholars around that period, Amin trained his intellectual sight on how best to initiate a counterattack on capitalist oppressive systems to build an alternative socialist future which was capable of releasing autonomous development and social change, not only in Africa but in the rest of the developing countries (the periphery). As a scholar and activist, Amin possessed a high degree of knowledge of the geopolitical economy and active engagement in social movement struggles

(Ndhlovu, 2020). Emerging from within the Third World and located within the Marxist tradition, Amin explored how and why attempts at development and social change through incorporation into the world system could not flourish. Since Amin's demise in 2018, studies which piece together, in a connected and intelligible manner, a variety of loose ends scattered in his works concerning development and social change are either lacking or are still in their embryonic stages.

With development and social change still a major issue across much of the Third World (Ajl, 2021), a study which draws attention to some of the initial debates since political independence is vital and informative. With a focus on Africa, this article is located within Amin's conceptualisation and theorisation of development and social change. Posting the suppression of autonomous development by shifting global orders as one key African challenge, the article retraces Amin's critique of dependency, as encapsulated in the dependency theory. It also evaluates the viability of his 'delinking thesis' as a development approach. The study has the potential to motivate further enquiry by scholars on the contribution of Amin to social science, kindle intellection by development policymakers, and provoke action by politicians to initiate projects that can lead to context-specific and autonomous development to develop the much-needed social change on the continent. The study contributes both to the existing and emerging body of literature on development, industrialisation, and social change, as well as to the legacy of Amin.

In the next sections, the article begins with describing the materials and methods used. It then provides a discussion on the trajectories of primitive accumulation in Africa. This is followed by the conceptualisation of development and social change, a discussion on the status of human development in Africa, and Amin's 'delinking' thesis, which he viewed as the solution. Thereafter, the article revisits the debate on the diagnostic potential of an agrarian-based development revolution as the suitable basis for African development and the realisation of social change. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations are drawn from the discussion.

### ***Materials and Methods***

This conceptual article is based on Samir Amin's works and other scholars who share Amin's views on development and social change in Africa (intertextuality). These articles were accessed using a simple Google search method with no scientific criteria set. This enabled the researcher to include any texts that were deemed relevant to support the conceptual debate. The debate was, therefore, informed by the following sources: Amin (1972), Amin (1973), Amin (1974a), Amin (1974b), Amin (1976), Amin (1977), Amin (1983), Amin (1990), Amin (1991), Amin (2006), Amin (2014), Amin (2016), Ajl (2021), Ghosh (2021), Ndhlovu (2020), Gumede (2019), Álvarez (2019), Juego (2019), and Shivji (2019). The use of conceptual research in this article was necessitated by the fact that not all societal challenges are resolved and can be understood through empirical investigation. In addition, the approach requires little resources, provides a framework for solving new and emerging practical problems, and also builds on and relates to an established body of concepts and objectives.

### **Trajectories of Primitive Accumulation**

Amin's contribution to the development and social change debate covered a fairly large canvas stretching from the fields of development economics, politics, peasant studies, and decolonisation in Africa, as well as land and agrarian questions, thereby flouting disciplinary confines. On the former, Amin belonged to a league of scholars such as Archie Mafeje, Claude Ake, and Issa Shivji, among others, whose scholarly contributions remain fundamental to the understanding of Africa's disruptions by capitalism and imperialism. As observed by Ghosh (2021), Amin clearly identified six global classes that define imperialist global political economy and that have ensured the underdevelopment of the periphery: (i) the imperialist bourgeoisie which seizes most of the global economic surplus; (ii) the working class at

the centre, which used to enjoy wages commensurate with contribution to productivity, but which is now under threat and which now experiences rapid declining wages and deteriorating employment conditions; (iii) the dependent bourgeoisie of the periphery which Amin described as having a fundamentally comprador relationship with multinational capital based in the core; (iv) the working class of the periphery which experiences super-exploitation, and whose wages are far too lower than their actual productivity because of unequal exchange; (v) the peasantry of the periphery who are oppressed and exploited by pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of production; and (vi) the oppressive classes of the non-capitalist modes (such as traditional oligarchs, warlords and power brokers). Amin is remembered and revered for such application of Marxism in analysing the challenges of socialist transformation in the Third World.

The scope of Amin's contribution is huge, but it revolves around underdevelopment and the need to delink from the exploitative world capitalist system, which has rendered Third World development efforts unfruitful and public institutions dysfunctional (Álvarez, 2019). He argued that the reverence of foreign capital and its profits, which were channelled back to foreign nations, resulted in nothing other than the callous and tragic ruin of the people's welfare, peace and communal sovereignty in the periphery, particularly in Africa (Amin, 2016), and is therefore, the major source of the continent's underdevelopment today.

Amin's work centred on three basic elements: value and unequal exchange in the context of a global structure, the development of world capitalism, and 'delinking' as a development theory for Third World countries. Amin built up a theory on accumulation and unequal exchange in the world capitalistic system from the 'law' of value in which the value of commodities is measured through the amount of labour required to produce it. He argued that capital accumulation 'is an essential inner law of the capitalist mode of production, and doubtless also of the socialist mode of production, but it is not an inner law of the functioning of the pre-capitalist modes of production' (Amin 1973: 2). Capitalism, in this view, relates to the production of goods for the markets while in pre-capitalism, goods are not produced for distribution in the markets. Amin trained his sight on how the latter had taken over the world, and thus, argued that there exists no 'single concrete socio-economic formation of our time [which] can be understood except as part of this world system' (Amin 1973: 3). He shares this view with Shivji (2019: 2) who avers that: 'You [can only] abstract from the process of accumulation at your peril.' Shivji (2019) views accumulation as an integral process from the point of production. It is a process which passes through numerous forms and machineries of appropriation of surplus. At the one end lies the producer of surplus (labour), while at the other end is the accumulator of that surplus (capital).

The pre-capitalist societies of the Third World were, according to Amin, imperilled to the rules of capitalism – an evil they did not help commit. As such, the theory of 'accumulation on a world scale' is basic in understanding the development and social change disparities that define 'developed' (the centre) and 'developing' countries (the periphery). The theory is built on the fact that developed and developing countries hold different and unequal roles in the world's capitalist system (Amin, 1976). The developed countries, which also happen to be Africa's former colonisers and, therefore, architects of its development challenges, hold dominant roles in the capitalist system. This affords them an opportunity to dictate the terms and conditions of commodity exchange within the system to their own benefit and to the detriment of the periphery. In no area is the disparity much clear than in the structure of labour remuneration where an assessment of exchanges between developed and developing countries exposes how '...exchange is unequal as soon as labour of the same productivity is rewarded at a lower rate in the periphery, as is the case today' (Amin (1973: 62). Amin argues that these asymmetrical power and exchange relations can only be explained through a precise understanding of policy as well as the capital domination in terms of the reorganisation of the surplus of labour power characterising the periphery. Africa's development and social change challenges are, therefore, products of exclusionary policy acts by the centre achieved through state capture and the installation of puppet leaders who make sure that such exclusionary policies

are executed in the periphery (Amin, 2014). The major losers in the capitalist system are the proletariat and the peasant in their various classes, fractions of classes and sub-classes. Africa's underdevelopment, therefore, is an outcome of an imbalance not so much of a quantitative but rather a qualitative characteristic (Amin, 1991).

According to Amin (1976), underdevelopment generally manifests in three features. The first is the uneven productivity distribution across economic sectors in the periphery. The second is 'disarticulation – that is, the lack of coherent links between productive sectors as the periphery focuses on producing products that will please the centre. This undercuts the transmission of economic benefits throughout the periphery system. The third feature manifests through the economic domination of the periphery by the centre. This condemns the periphery to survival on hand-outs often sugar-coated as international aid, which is meant to ensure that the periphery remains the exporter of raw products and agricultural produce and thus sustains the centre's requirements. The distortion of African economies toward exports allows powerful countries to control the continent in a hegemonic fashion and, thus, frustrate the continent's prospects for development (Amin, 2006). This view is supported by Mokoena (2018: 87), who argues that:

...the capitalist world system continues to hierarchically and dichotomously configure the world culturally, epistemological aesthetically, and ontologically at the exclusion, oppression, exploitation of *othered* populations such as African people thus reproducing the crisis of inequalities ... This world's system is Euro-American-centric, capitalist, patriarchal, hetero-normative, and hierarchical, Christian-centric and characterised by an interstate system.

In addition, Oloruntoba (2015: 123) notes inequality as one of the key central problems that define the contemporary world. Asymmetrical power relations enable the core not only to invade public goods sectors: education, health, water, flora, fauna, atmosphere, and biosphere, but also to subject peasants, semi-proletariats, and the working poor in urban and rural areas to primitive accumulation. Thus, the power relations that inform and sustain the existing order need to be transformed as the starting point towards turning things around.

The result of centre-periphery asymmetrical power relations, for Amin (1976: 194), is the '...proletarianizing of the small agricultural and craft producers, rural semi-proletarianization, and the impoverishment without proletarianization of the peasants organised in the village communities, urbanization, and massive growth in both open unemployment and underemployment in towns, etc.' The centre sustains its primitive accumulation in the periphery through conditions of monopoly capitalism, which enables its capital to be cut into the basic consumption of the producer. As a result, the working people, particularly the peasantry, who are eventually made to cede to capital both ground rent as a 'landlord' and part of their necessary consumption as labourers, are super-exploited and condemned to sub-human lives (Shivji, 2018). Amin, therefore, pushed forward the need for pursuing an auto-centred development which is built on delinking - a development strategy to which we return to later in the article and one which is aimed at subjecting external trade and financial flows to a popularly determined law of value. Amin, who wished not simply to understand the world but to change it, viewed 'delinking' as having the potential to brew the context-specific development and social change that is needed in Africa as part of the collective and continuous commitment to ladder all peoples out of poverty and realise inclusive development.

### **The Pursuit of Development and Social Change in Africa**

Development and social change constitute some of Africa's key agendas as they reposition themselves to gain relevance in global affairs. The continent's main body, the African Union (AU), in its Agenda 2063, envisions an African future of development and positive social change characterised by Pan-African unity, integration, prosperity, and peace. The broader target of the body is to ensure that

Africa and its people are free from poverty, diseases, and, in general, from lack of development that characterises the continent. However, while social change is widely acknowledged as a man-centred obligation that places the pursuit of values, value systems and institutions explicitly in the service of promoting human dignity and ethical conscience (Mair, 1960; Olatunji & Ujomu, 2014), debates on what development in Africa constitutes persist. Gumede (2019: 51) avers that development should be seen as ‘...improvements in wellbeing, involving socioeconomic progress.’ According to Ndlovu-Gatheni (2012: 2), development should be viewed as a ‘liberatory human aspiration to attain freedom from political, economic, ideological, epistemological, and social domination...’ Brobbey (2010: 1) considers development as ‘the capacity of a state to achieve a higher outcome of production for the satisfaction of citizens and empower them to make demands.’

Lushaba (2006: 3) argues that ‘Africa cannot possibly develop by modernising or becoming like the modern West.’ For Gumede (2019: 51), ‘modernity is not an appropriate form of development that Africa needs.’ Amin emphasised the holism of the historical process and the polarising inclinations of accumulation on a world scale in staking out what development for Africa should constitute. Rejecting the proposals for global forms of social democracy, Amin (1981) argued that even a softer and less extractive form of inclusion within a global capitalist system still relies on value flows from the periphery to the centre, thereby compromising the chances by the periphery to realise development and social change.

Tandon (2015: 145) avers that the ‘major challenge for the theoreticians of the global south and the marginalised peoples and sub-nationalists of the north is to provide a... definition of development’ outside Euro-West dictates. This is supported by Latouche (1993:460), who posits that what is understood as development in Africa ‘has been and still is the westernisation of the world.’ Ziai (2009: 198) rejects the entire concept as ‘...an empty signifier [emerging from the West] that can be filled with almost any content.’ The rejection of the conceptualisation of development in its current form is steeped in the definition first coined by W.W. Rostov, an adviser in both the John F Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson eras of the United States of America, who understood it as fundamentally an evolutionary process through which the western societies evolved and through which the Third World was still in the process of evolving. This thinking was premised on the belief that the Third World could attain development if it would simply copy and paste Western capital, technology, and social organisation and values. Development is also viewed as modernity whereby societies transform from traditional and rural agrarian society to secular, industrial and urban society (Lushaba, 2006). Modernity is a Western construct whereby non-Euro-Western countries are considered primitive and custom-bound and, thus, urged to embrace Western-based lifestyle choices and tastes, among others. This modernity involves social change in the elements of science and technology. Amin and other scholars in Africa and the broader South reject all these views on development.

Amin believed that if Africa and the Third World should realise development and positive social change, they needed to delink from the ‘original sin’ - the world capital system. Delinking, for him, is an important response to an exploitative system which deploys the law of value and accumulation on a world scale to create core and peripheries. Amin identified five conditions of auto-centric accumulation, which unfolded in the core: (i) the reproduction of the labour force. This refers to an agricultural development that produced surplus foodstuffs and, in the process, sufficient wage goods for the working class; (ii) surplus centralisation, which entailed the protection of political institutions from transnational capital flows so as to retain national aptitude to control investment; (iii) control over a market principally prioritises local production, and guaranteeing the competitiveness of local goods on foreign markets; (iv) formal ownership and freedom of choice to use or not to use natural resources; and (v) local control over technology. Auto-centric meant that dealings with other markets and producers were subjected to local needs and the ‘logic of internal accumulation’ which regulated the socio-political sphere of the accumulation process (Amin, 1990:11). Amin considered the auto-centric logic to be lacking in the periphery: a situation which requires immediate attention and an urgent resolution.

In exploiting the periphery, the centre sustains uneven accumulation which is based on unequal exchange *via* price compression. Amin (1974b) explained that this compression of price is built on the suppression of the costs of labour. The lower the costs of labour, the limited the buying power, and, therefore, the smaller the internal market share. Amin reveals that from 1955–1980, the periphery’s agrarian bourgeoisie were adjuncts to the accumulation of the peripheries’ resources by the core. Even at independence, periphery countries in Africa, for instance, remained linked to the core in terms of production-consumption relations and development knowledge production, which enabled them to manipulate the periphery. Knowledge, by nature, has ‘...a privileged position: it occupies the level of the enunciated, where the content of the conversation is established, and it occupies the level of enunciation, which regulates the terms of the conversation’ (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018:144). The core has also managed to foster coloniality in the periphery through the manipulation of knowledge production. Coloniality is a hidden and almost undetectable power structure that allows former colonial powers to dictate and dominate those they once colonised (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

The core dominates and dictates the periphery by controlling how the periphery should behave regarding knowledge production. As a result, development models and technology are either copied or directly imported from the core without considering the contexts of cultures and situations of the periphery countries. This guaranteed unrelenting value outflows – the essence of the dependency relationship, which continues to frustrate development and positive social change (Ajl, 2021). It is for this reason that Amin criticised the discipline of economics in which he trained, arguing that ‘The only possible science is the science of society, for social reality is one: it is never “economic” or “political” or ideological’ and that ‘The conceptual equipment of this “pure” economic theory is situated at the level of abstraction that makes it useless for analysing the working of the mechanisms – even the economic mechanisms – of any society whatsoever’ (Amin, 1974a: 5). The core thus, uses knowledge production to dominate the world much to the continuation of human development challenges which African governments continue to grapple with as discussed in the next section.

### The Human Development and the Quest for Change in Africa

Africa’s continuous dependency on its former colonisers for donations, loans, and development models remains a key challenge to realising human development. From 1980 to 2019, Sub-Saharan Africa’s (SSA) Human Development Index (HDI) was the lowest compared to other regions. East Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific were making better HDI progress when compared to SSA (Table 1). Although the HDI for regions such as the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, Central Asia, and the Arab States had not shown any noteworthy improvement in the 2011–2015 period, the HDI levels of those regions were still better than for SSA suffered a ‘dependency syndrome’.

Table 1: Human Development Levels by Regions

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	2017	2018	2019
Very high human development	0.766	0.791	0.858	0.888	0.892	0.894	0.896	0.898
High human development	0.614	0.574	0.687	0.739	0.746	0.744	0.748	0.753
Medium human development	0.420	0.465	0.548	0.625	0.631	0.624	0.627	0.631
Low human development	0.316	0.356	0.383	0.453	0.497	0.507	0.509	0.513
Arab States	0.444	0.556	0.578	0.639	0.687	0.699	0.702	0.705
East Asia and the Pacific	0.428	0.516	0.581	0.666	0.720	0.735	0.740	0.747
Europe and Central Asia	0.644	0.652	0.68	0.744	0.756	0.785	0.787	0.791
Latin America & the Caribbean	0.582	0.626	0.68	0.728	0.751	0.762	0.764	0.766
South Asia	0.356	0.438	0.468	0.545	0.621	0.635	0.637	0.641
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.365	0.399	0.401	0.460	0.523	0.542	0.544	0.547

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020).

The UNDP (2020) found that Africa also underperformed in terms of life expectancy, expected years of schooling, mean years of schooling, gross national income (GNI) per capita, gender equality, and women empowerment compared to other regions. In the context of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, about 28.2 million to 49.2 million Africans could be plunged into extreme poverty as an estimated 24.6 million to 30 million jobs could be lost due to the pandemic. The direct impact of the pandemic on more than 23 million workers who are already vulnerable on the continent would drive the total number of people living in extreme poverty to 463 million in the worst-case scenario as unemployment levels sour (African Development Bank (ADB), 2020). The lack of efficient political institutions and economic environments is the source of the continent's underperformance. SSA's development levels have been the slowest globally, while poverty is large and deepening. The region also presides over very weak public and private institutions. Approximately 27.4% (about 333.2 million people) of the African population was classified as severely food insecure (FAO, 2017), while 20% was undernourished in 2016 (WHO, 2018). Most African households could ensure their own food security without relying on the state if they had adequate access to land for agricultural activities. In Southern Africa, for instance, agriculture is a source of livelihood for more than 70% of the population (Moyo, 2016). The number of people engaging in agricultural activities increased from 100 million in 1980 to 212 million in 2013 (ILO, 2014). This indicates the diagnostic potential of land access and utilisation in the realisation of resilient food systems on the continent and yet land continues to be released to foreign-based capitalists for speculative purposes.

Covering 28 countries for the period 1960-1987 and using panel analysis, Savvides (1995) found that their economic performance was correlated to trade openness, investment, initial income, schooling, and growth of government. Examining the economic performance of 17 countries and applying ordinary least squares and generalised least squares techniques, Ojo and Oshikoya (1995) found that investment, external debt, population growth, human capital and proxies for macro-economic environment significantly determined the long-run development in Africa. Gyimah-Brempong and Traynor (1999) explored the relationship between instability, investment, and economic growth in the SSA region, and through a dynamic panel approach, they confirm the inverse relationship between political instability and economic growth. In addition, Gyimah-Brempong (2002), in a panel data context, observed that corruption negatively affected investment and growth performance in a sample of 22 SSA countries. From a historical viewpoint, Bertocchi and Canova (2002), using factors such as legal origin and degree of economic penetration of former colonial powers, found that colonial legacy explains the different growth performances in Africa. The central thread running through reviewed literature is that colonialism interrupted Africa's development, thereby condemning it to a condition whereby it is a dependent 'late comer' which has to 'run while others walk' to 'catch up' with the West (Mkandawire, 2011a).

At independence, and particularly in the 1980s, most governments across the continent embraced neoliberal and capitalist development policies with the hope to ladder their people out of poverty eventually. Neoliberal policies promote the privatisation and individualisation of public institutions, believing that private institutions are more effective and efficient in providing social services than their public counterparts. In Africa, the result of the adoption of these policies has been a plethora of disastrous socio-economic outcomes, including increased poverty, job loss, and weakening of income distribution. The 1980s in Africa saw the genesis of the collapse of public institutions as neoliberal and capitalist development policies focused on production and the well-being of the 'labour' itself. The decrease in public spending and state involvement saw the rapid collapse of public institutions, aggravating ordinary citizens' vulnerability. In this context, Amin proposed that Africa delinks itself from the Euro-American-centric development framework in pursuing home-grown versions that are cognisant of African social and political realities.

## Delinking from the World Capitalist System

Amin (2016:141) argued that the new development model required in the periphery is ‘shaped by the renewal of non-capitalist forms of peasant agriculture, which in turn implies delinking from the imperatives of globalised capitalism.’ Amin proposed the ‘delinking’ or ‘de-connexion’ framework whereby the periphery abandons the core, which is the source of its misery to effect context-specific development and realise positive social change. For Amin, delinking was a basic condition for ‘auto-centric’ peripheral development and a political choice by which the periphery could place itself at the centre of decision-making and governance. Delinking would also allow the periphery to have power over its own public institutions and design its own development models without subjecting itself to what could work in the capitalist global market (Juego, 2019). Amin posited that an internal ‘popular alliance’ based on the delinking project would enforce checks, thereby affording the periphery to make choices according to its own law of value – based on the interests of workers and peasants (Amin 1990: 18). Since the capitalist law of value uses relative prices as tools of value extraction and to inform decision-making, abandoning it is fundamental so as to lock in value. Such an alliance has the potential to initiate a positive programme predicated on three pillars: a repudiation of a world ‘capitalist rationality’ and subject all external relations to internal choices and values; political aptitude to introduce reforms in an egalitarian direction; and the capacity for ‘technological absorption and ingenuity’ (Amin, 1990:60). The capacity of political capacity to effect development and the social change of institutions, however, requires the backing of the domestic bourgeoisie which supports and benefits from the status quo.

In pushing for delinking, Amin drew from the worker–peasant alliance of Maoist China, where production output reflected labour inputs. In Maoist China, wages and prices were standardised to guarantee that workers located both in urban industries and in the agricultural sector in the countryside had the power to claim the shares of the social output commensurate with their labour inputs (Álvarez, 2019). The delinking model pursues production conditions whereby returns for labour are to be made constant (Amin, 1990). It posits that wages and prices must be constantly readjusted to ensure that increased output does not translate to rural–urban income disparities. Amin required the urban intermediary goods sector to nourish the productivity of the rural sector, which would, in turn, nourish the urban sector. Amin’s inter-sectoral and cross-spatial exchange view was founded on a specific technological package which was increasingly but not exclusively capital-intensive and, thus, input-dependent industrialised agriculture (Ajl, 2021).

In his model, Amin drew from a history of agriculture that made use of capital inputs and traditional technologies and thus became central to early Maoist development. Amin (1990: 64) supported the adoption of ‘renovation and improvement of traditional technologies’ combined with a selective use of imported ones. By this, Amin affirmed Mao’s technological blend, where pig fertiliser, night soil, and green manures were used alongside chemical fertilisers and other imported technologies. Amin’s ‘de-linking’ model can, therefore, be aptly understood as a concrete geo-political and geo-economic strategy of the periphery to circumvent the structure of mal-development under imperialism, if not surpass the level of capitalist development of the core countries (Juego, 2019). Amin combined his delinking push with de-globalisation thoughts of the periphery from the core to protect itself against neo-imperialism and to make possible self-reliant and egalitarian development. Delinking would lead to the creation of productive forces that could improve the social conditions and quality of life of the population, ensure state sovereignty, and create a socio-economy of the commons where economic innovation in the agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors also enables for human prosperity in sustainable communities and other alternative ways of living. Delinking is not about engaging in an inter-imperialist rivalry with the Euro-North American powerful countries of the North; it is all about breaking away from the logic of imperialism in its entirety in the pursuit of home-grown context and cultural-specific frameworks of transformation.



## The Potential of an Agrarian-based Transformation

Amin belonged to a cohort of scholars such as Mafeje, Shivji, and Moyo, among others, who recognised the diagnostic potential of agriculture and other agricultural-related activities in stirring development and social change in Africa. As a result of the great potential of agriculture as a livelihood tool in SSA, it would, therefore, be expected that the majority of socio-economic development measures of the majority post-liberation and post-colonial SSA economies would focus mainly on the sector to improve the lives of the majority of the populace in the region. Indeed, agriculture received increased post-independence development ahead of the other economic sectors (Ndhlovu, 2020). One of the contributing factors which promoted the focus of the post-independence government on agricultural development over the rest of the economic sectors had to do with affordability in terms of capital availability and sectoral expertise in agriculture (Ndhlovu, 2022). Most post-independence governments were resource-poor and, therefore, opted to begin their agricultural development agenda mainly because the region's general populace already had indigenous skills in agriculture and not in the other economic sectors. Although the SSA region is still experiencing low levels of agricultural productivity and mainstream market expertise and participation of farmers, the region is known globally to advance in crop farming, horticulture, fisheries and livestock production, albeit dominantly for subsistence reasons. African agriculture is characterised by intensive subsistence farming and surplus-based informal marketing.

The colonial displacement of Africans from their land and the subsequent distortion of their agricultural activities, thus, constituted the highest form of disruption to the course of development on the continent. Amin detailed how Africans, who depended on land for survival, had been evicted from their lands to make way for colonists. Amin, therefore, avers that the failure to place the peasantry at the centre of analysis often occludes the understanding of how precisely development and social change should be pursued. Development frameworks should, therefore, return to the source of the continent's nature and form of development that was interrupted – agriculture. Amin (1976) argues that the alteration of the African traditional modes of production not only temporarily evicted a significant number of the peasantry from land, but it did not also offer anything of compensatory value in terms of providing employment opportunities to reimburse for the pre-capitalist production modes that had been subjugated to create room for foreign capital. Considering that the industrial development of the nineteenth century was based upon the capacity to absorb a large share of rural populations that had been evicted from the countryside, the failure to absorb land-dispossessed peasants in Africa constituted a perfect recipe for underdevelopment. Amin (1976) concludes that this situation doomed agriculture to stagnation on the continent, much to the suffering of the majority. In this view, Amin proposed the need for delinking to reconnect with the interrupted past as part of our re-Africanisation.

Delinking needs to be pursued at whatever costs. Amin argues that however hard and opposed, this delinking is crucial as it has the potential to lead to the adoption of policies that 'promote the consolidation of food sovereignty, and sovereignty in the control of its own natural resources, as well as access to this outside of its own territory' (Amin, 2016:142). The delinking project is placed right in the hands of the state, which must adopt and implement policies that can benefit the entire populace. For Amin (2016: 144), the state should

... possess the capacity to coherently construct and implement a project of production geared primarily to serve national requirements. Its effectiveness is also complemented by policies to ensure that the majority of popular classes are also able to benefit from growth.

The form of development that should emerge from these efforts should be opposed to 'lumpen development', which is characterised by the social fragmentation often imposed by powerful countries on the countries they dominate.

Amin (1976) posits that the ‘lumpen development’ type is often defined by the booming of survival strategies, such as the growing informal sector and the worship of donor hand-outs, an intrinsic feature of one-sided capital accumulation. Amin bemoans how most African countries are under ‘lumpen development’. He argues that the hand-outs or ‘international aid’

...extended by the World Bank, or by development agencies from Western imperialist countries, the United States or the European Union—is not genuine development aid. It is a financial support intended to maintain our position as subordinate countries, and thus to reproduce underdevelopment (Amin, 2016:155).

Therefore, some powerful, radical governments will mobilise the vast majority towards the realisation of land and agrarian questions as an integral part of the development agenda. It is in this view that Shivji (2019:7) argues that: ‘A revolutionary resolution of the agrarian question in the South by the semi-proletarianised working people holds the key to the liberation of the working people, not only of the South but of the North as well.’ Unless Africa admits the diagnostic potential of the role of agriculture and peasantry, which already make up the majority of the world population, the realisation of human welfare, peace, democracy, and consequently, development will remain an elusive undertaking.

For Amin, an agrarian revolution would allow Africa to pursue autonomous development while sustaining industrialisation prospects. An agrarian revolution is imperative bearing in mind that close to 70% of the households on the continent, both urban and rural, directly rely on agro-based livelihood activities today (Moyo, 2016; Ndhlovu, 2021). Amin promoted the adoption of approaches that promoted the renewal of the peasant economy, which was interrupted, distorted and disfigured by imperialistic tendencies. He subscribed to the lesson offered by China, which bridled its financial system and made sure that it remained outside the globalised finance system and pursued a non-capitalist agricultural renewal model. This has allowed China to resist financial imperialism better by investing directly in developing its own ‘sovereign projects’ instead of relying on the capitalist former oppressors (Amin, 2016). According to Amin (2016:155), Sovereign projects are those projects ‘which are conceived of by us, for us and which are to the greatest extent independent of the tendencies and pressures exerted by the global capitalist system.’ Amin also encouraged African countries to work together with other countries in the South to solve their own problems. He was fascinated by south-south collaborations, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). He promoted that they be reinforced as examples of such working together and also as part of the collective inward-looking countries in the South. Amin (2014) believed it would ensure that Africa is no longer shaped to satisfy the requirements of the centre.

Amin’s prioritisation of the agricultural sector is not new. Julius Nyerere, the former leader of Tanzania, had proposed the adoption of Ujamaa not only as a development model but also as a political-economic management framework (Nyerere, 1967). The *Ujamaa* promoted the villagisation of production, which essentially collectivised all forms of local productive dimensions. This model largely focused on agricultural production, which Nyerere believed could easily help his people get out of poverty. The call for land reform in South Africa and Namibia, as well as the radical fast-tracked land reform in Zimbabwe, highlights the centrality of agriculture in African development and, thus, confirms Amin’s argument. Disengaging would allow Africa to use its own knowledge, production practices, and tools and the tools and knowledge from elsewhere to construct a better Africa, which it wants to achieve. The renewed commitment to grab land by the United States, some European Union, and Arabic countries to quench the 2007/8 global financial crisis that had manifested itself in soaring food prices and high bills for food imports, as well as an energy crisis points in Africa’s capacity to make a huge contribution through the agricultural sector.

While Amin’s mobilisation for an agrarian revolution is widely acknowledged, his ‘delinking’ thesis is not without criticism. Gumede (2019), for instance, argues that while delinking could fundamentally be a foundation phase for the ‘socialist transition’ in developing countries, it would be

important if Africa were to rather ‘disengage’ than ‘delink’ from the rest of the world. Disengaging will not only allow Africans to acknowledge the importance of agricultural activities as a source of development but also encourage them to put their labour to productive use in agricultural-based activities, which have already been vilified by northern-based scholars who viewed the agrarian question as having been resolved (Bernstein, 2010). Since Africa was wrongly integrated into the world capitalist system through the slave trade, colonialism, and globalisation, among others, ‘delinking’ alone is not sufficient. Disengaging goes further than ‘delinking and could therefore pry open an opportunity for Africa ‘to get its house’ in order, so to speak, then reintegrate with the rest of the world in its own terms rather than the terms that were imposed on it’ (Gumede, 2019:64). Gumede further argues that ‘disengaging is not an economic process like delinking... [as it] goes a step further in the sense that it would not only allow Africa to adopt market and production strategies that are different from the global capital’ (Gumede, 2019:64).

While pushing for ‘delinking, Amin (1990:64) also argued for the need for ‘renovation and improvement of traditional technologies’ alongside selective use of imported ones. Amin did not completely reject the technologies through which capitalism had reshaped African agriculture, thereby retaining some ‘linking’ in his ‘delinking’ (Amin, 2003). No wonder Mazama (1995) ironically criticised Amin for being Eurocentric while Amin himself criticised Eurocentrism. Gumede (2019) suggests ‘disengaging’ rather than ‘delinking’. While Amin’s argument seems to highlight the challenge which Africa faces on its delinking path if it still needs to retain some imported technologies to combine with the local ones, it needs to be noted, however, that Amin did not advocate for a return to a primitive past, but rather to societal transformation that leads to inclusive development in the face of contemporary challenges thrown up by the global capitalist system.

Amin also seems to have overrated the importance or the necessity of external technologies and inputs to Chinese agricultural productivity as empirical evidence shows that chemical fertilisers did not contribute much to early yield increases (Aziz, 1978). Without critiquing the agro-ecological effects of chemicals on human health, Amin seemed to view chemical inputs into farming as the base for perpetual productivity. Aji (2021: 86) also posits that while chemical fertilisers played a role in yield increases, ‘there is no reason to automatically build them into an after-the-fact model for future popular development efforts, particularly since there is evidence that post-Mao agricultural intensification has damaged soil and water.’ In addition, as part of disengaging, Africa can also think of suitable technologies that answer to its own development and social change needs without harming its environment – something which former colonisers and contemporary investors pay little attention to. This should not be merely reducible to the question of state control over technology and inputs.

By focusing on ‘traditional’ technologies, inputs, and agricultural activities that prioritise the health of people, the eco-system, and socio-ecological resilience, Africa could be able to revive and sustain its time immemorial popular law of value, which is not merely in productivity terms as under capitalism, but one which is rooted in the context of cultures and context of situations. Such a move would allow Africa to abandon the out-of-context capitalist law of value, break up with its technology and epistemology, and thus adopt indigenous knowledge that responds to the context-specific development needs of Africans in their various cultures and locations. This is also what Amin sought when they criticised African national projects for having failed to mobilise internal popular support and employ endogenous knowledge to chart a self-directed development and social change trajectory, as well as being unmindful of imperialism and neo-colonialism (Amin, 2011). It is in this considered view that writers such as Gachet and El-Amami (1978:12) also added their support by calling for a need of a:

...regional agricultural plan, decentralized and depending primarily on the mobilization of the creative will of peasants capable of ‘moving mountains’ and of defeating difficulties of all genres

and of living with droughts in order to limit the havoc [which] could in this manner constitute a real tool of development in the rural world.

This places the peasantry of Africa at the centre of the development project. When Amin mentioned endogenous knowledge, he was already considering the important role of cultural context-specific development models.

As argued elsewhere, considering the agrarian nature of the African society, where most rural households (who also make up the majority) rely directly on farming and other farm-related activities for survival, the kind of development model that needs to be pursued should be agrarian-based (see Ndhlovu, 2020). This could, however, be linked to prospects of industrialisation. This view is supported by Aji (2021), who posits that appropriate development, which is consistent with Amin's 'delinking' thesis, should be one that is clearly based on placing the peasantry at the centre, not as an object of developmental plans, but as the subject taking part in the making, remaking and improving their own lives with state support. Such a view is consistent with the Maoist model from which Amin drew, which emphasises local self-reliance, the need for maximising the use of local labour, and the democratisation of consumption as part of a national-popular project oriented to a better future.

### **Conclusion**

Amin's delinking thesis was part of the continuous and collective efforts of first-generation African scholars who rejected Eurocentric views and frameworks of development and sought to break from dependency. Amin excelled among his peers in his criticism of dependency and promotion of inward looking and home-grown development projects. In recognition that Africa was an agrarian community, Amin pursued a development path offered by China's example based on empowering peasants and workers, as Maoism had done in practice. Amin believed that instead of succumbing to pessimism and resignation, the Third World needed to confront the impediments that had occurred and devise a new strategy for moving humanity in a better direction.

In the context of Africa, Amin argued that development issues needed to be understood within the context of imperialism (in its colonial, neo-colonial and neo-liberal phases) on the one hand and the continuous struggles by Africans to expel it from their lands on the other. In this view, he pushed forward a revolutionary idealism based on a 'delinking' thesis and the pursuit of 'sovereign projects' to break away from the monopolistic and hegemonic tendencies of imperialistic forces. Amin believed in the diagnostic potential of cooperative and coordinated action of committed revolutionaries to lead the global transformation. In this regard, Amin left behind an intellectual and political legacy for activists contemplating bringing change for the world's poor majorities. Amin had his own generalisations. For instance, he partially embraced the modernisation of the agricultural sector, which he believed had seen China freeing its land and increasing its agricultural productivity, feeding its people rice, assuring them medical care, and eliminating poverty. He also overrated the necessity of modern farming technologies and chemical fertilisers for agricultural productivity, which merits criticism. However, his contribution still remains a dreadful night searchlight into the political skeletons of imperialism. This is explained by the magnitude of attention dedicated to his legacy at his passing in 2018.

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