

# CAPITALISM, IMPERIALISM AND THE GEOPOLITICAL DISORDER

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## OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

- I. Imperialism in the 20th century
- II. Neo-liberal globalisation or “mundialisation”
- III. Imperialism and neoliberalism in the 21st century
- IV. Imperialism in a new crisis (2008) and geopolitical reconfiguration
- V. The current picture: a world of wars, pandemics and climate catastrophes

# EXPLAINING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INEQUALITY AMONG COUNTRIES/REGIONS

The theory of imperialism vis-à-vis other paradigms:

- (a) developed X underdeveloped or "developing" - development economics
- (b) dependency theory (centre X periphery) - Frank, Santos, Amin, Marini, Katz
- (c) world-system theory (central, peripheral and semi-peripheral) - Wallerstein, Santos
- (d) theory of hegemonic successions - Arrighi, Fiori
- (e) decolonial thinking - Mignolo, Dussel

The debates among the very defenders of the idea of imperialism.





# IMPERIALISM AS A CAPITALIST WORLD ORDER



**Empires and word “imperialism” predate capitalism** and the debate on the concept is not unique to Marxism. But **capitalist imperialism** is the first **world system** based on the accumulation of wealth by the class of owners of the means of production, through the exploitation of wage labour (of proletarians) - **and the expropriation, since ever, of territories, bodies and wealth all over the world**





## MEANINGS OF “IMPERIALISM”

It was used before the middle of the 19th century to refer to ancient Rome and its conquests

It began to be used by the English right to inflate nationalism and pride in the British Empire. **Only later is it appropriated by socialists and Marxists as a new expression of a capitalist phenomenon**



## MEANINGS OF IMPERIALISM

- Multi-layered theme. The first, oldest, has to do with the geopolitical dimension—the territorial expansion of states. **Territorial and geopolitical logic**
- The second, with the economic dimension, in Marxist terms with the accumulation of capital. **Logic of Accumulation**
- For Marxism, then, to deal with this theme means to deal with the articulation between these two dimensions: **how both influence and reinforce each other**, even if with some autonomy



“The discovery of America and the circumnavigation of Africa offered the nascent bourgeoisie a new field of action. **The markets of India and China, the colonisation of America, colonial trade, the increase in the means of exchange and in the quantity of merchandise gave an impulse, unknown until then, to trade, industry, navigation,** and consequently rapidly developed the revolutionary element in the decaying feudal society. ”

” Prompted by ever-new markets, **the bourgeoisie has invaded the whole world. It is for it a necessity to penetrate everywhere, to establish itself everywhere, to create relations everywhere.** “

(Excerpts from.... from..... of the year from.....)

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**(Excerpts from Marx and Engels “Communist Manifesto”, 1848)**

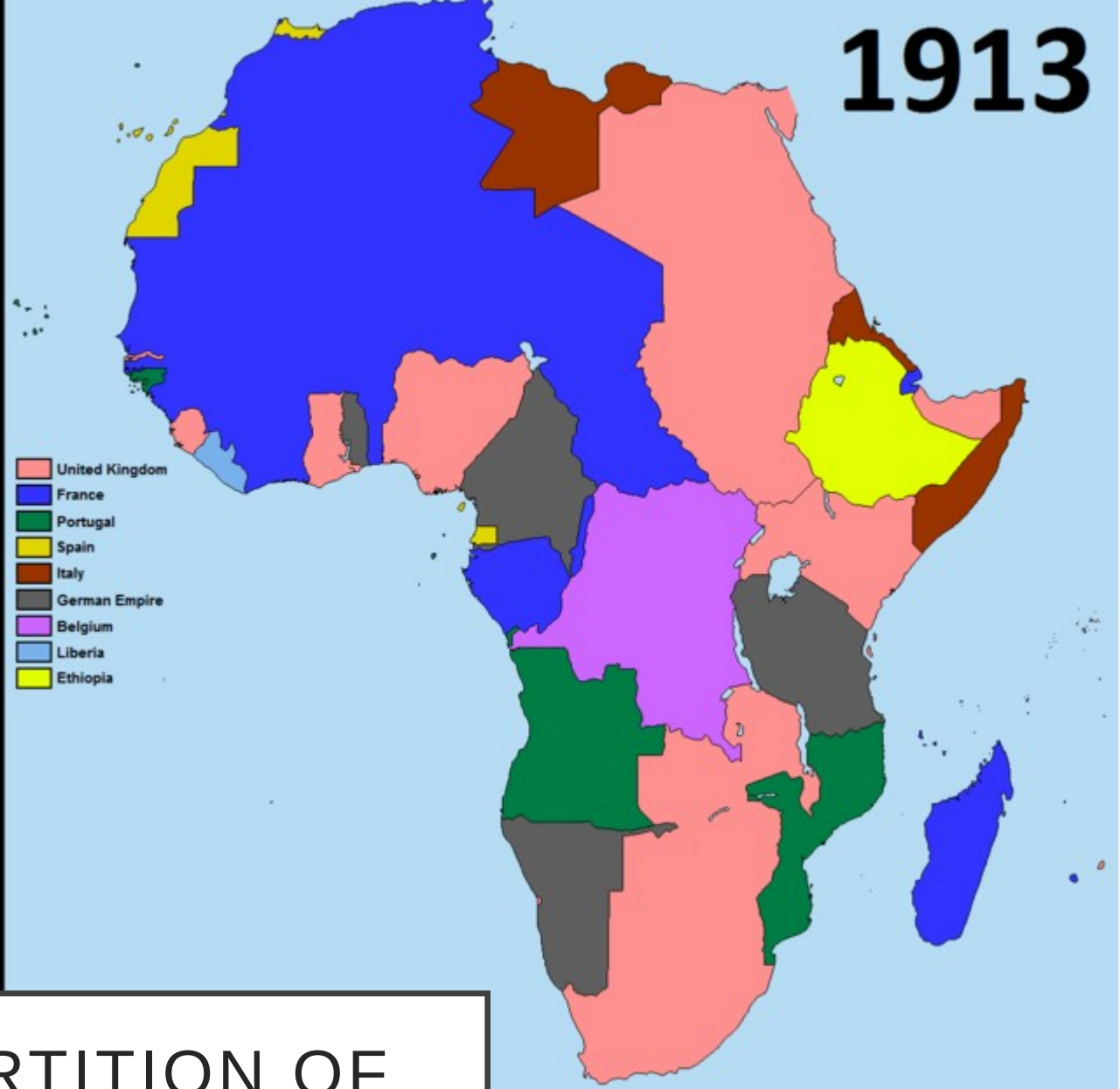




# PERIODISATION OF CAPITALIST HISTORY

- Commercial capitalism (mercantilist epoch) – expansion over new territories: Americas, Asia, Africa– **previous or original or primitive accumulation** - 15th to 17th centuries. **Colonialism begins**
- Industrial revolution and further worldwide expansion - 18th and 19th centuries (until about 1880), initially competitive. **Colonialism continues**
- **Imperialist period or era** – beginning of XX century, after which it would have loose its progressive character **Colonialism continues**





REPARTITION OF AFRICA



## AN USEFUL CHRONOLOGY

1848 - Communist Manifesto

1850s - use of the term for political purposes (positive, by the right)

1867 - Publication of the first volume of Capital (see Chapter XXIV)

1880s - Repartition of Africa among the European powers

1902 - Publication of *Imperialism, a study*, by John A. Hobson (photo)



# THE MARXIST DEBATE AND ELABORATION

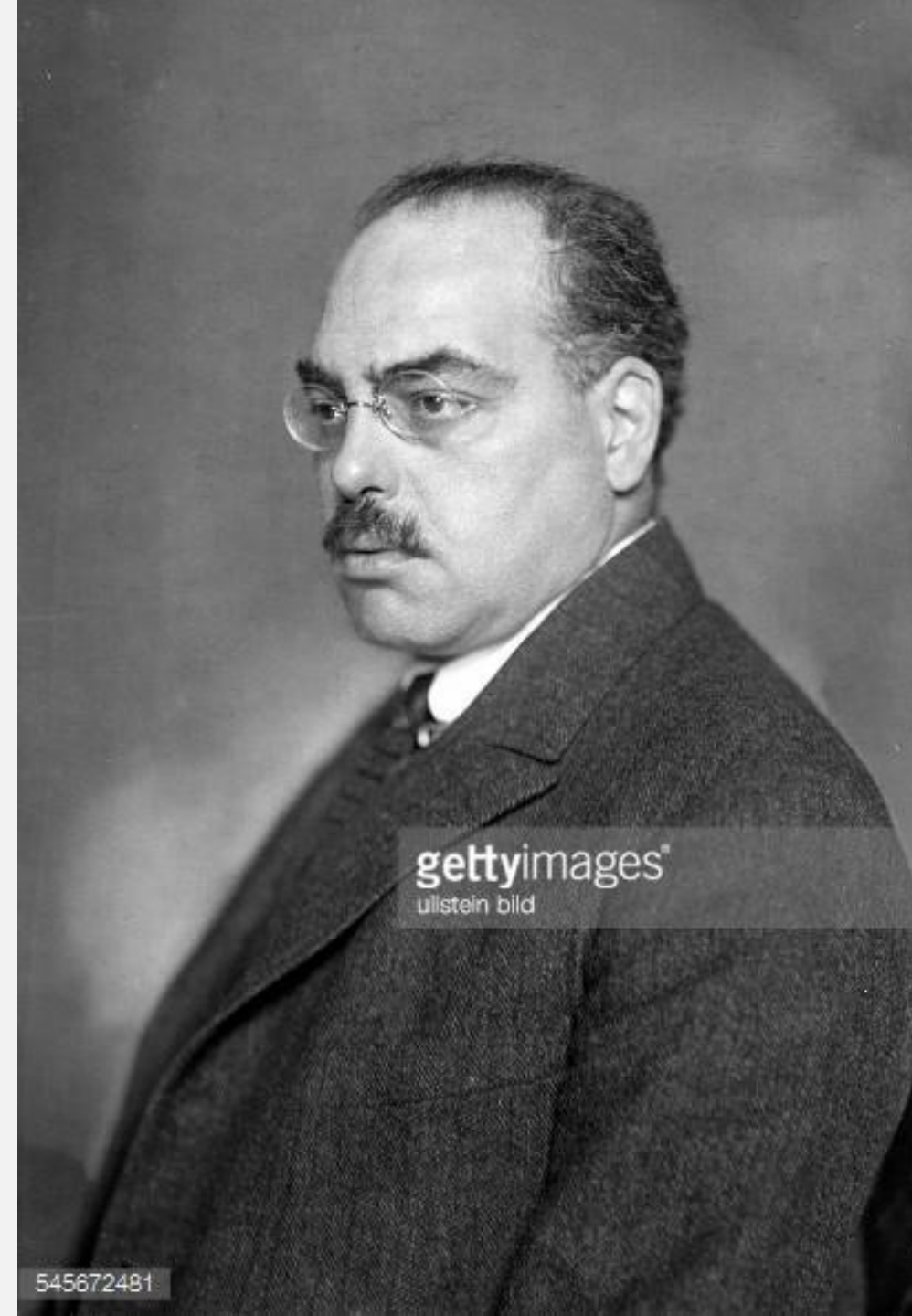
**1910** - *The Financial Capital*, by Rudolf Hilferding, Austrian Marxist (photo)

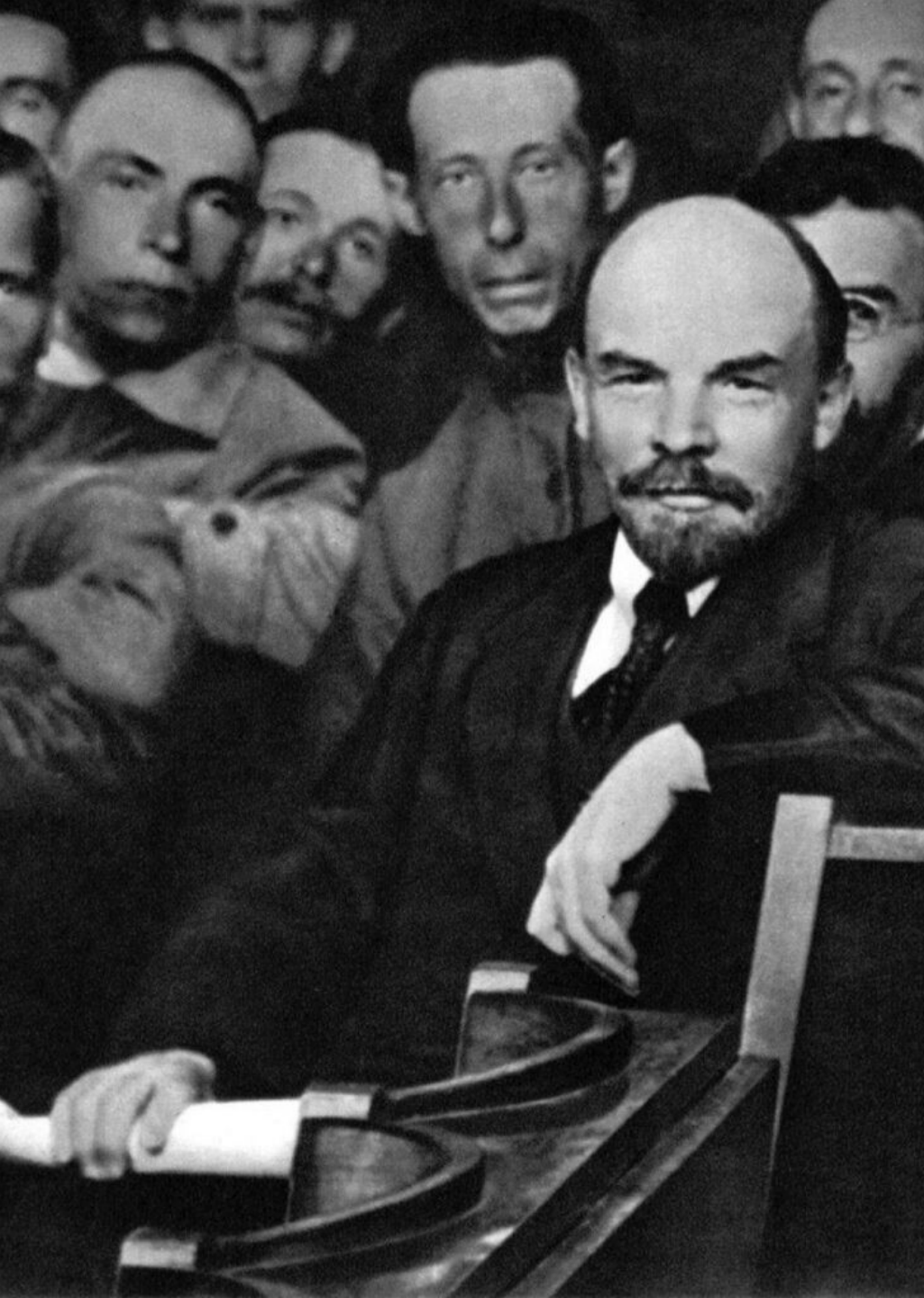
**1910** - Rosa de Luxemburgo, *The accumulation of capital*

**1914** - Karl Kautsky, *Ultraimperialism*

**1915** - N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and the world economy*

**1916** - Lenin publishes ***Imperialism, the advanced (or superior) stage of capitalism***, a major anti-war pamphlet, with a compilation of contributions on the subject





## LENIN'S SYNTHESIS

- Increasing **concentration** of capital
- End of the era of competition, arrival of **monopoly and oligopoly**
- Supremacy of **finance capital**, merger of banking and industrial capital
- **Export of capital**, no longer just goods
- **Division of the world** between biggest companies and the powers.
- Growing rivalry between imperialisms = **inter-imperialist wars**

## CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPERIALISM (CLASSICAL MARXIST THEORY)

- Time of the systemic predominance of the association between the banking capital and the industrial capital = **financial capital**
- Tendency to growing oligolisation and monopolisation of capital – **end of the free competition era**
- Increasing **development gap between metropolitan/imperialist** (colonialist) countries of the North (Europe, USA, Japan) and those restricted to primary production or simpler industrial production (**colonial or semicolonial countries of the South**) = **growing inequality**.
- Tendency of **metropolitan/imperialist nations** to extend their political, military and economic power over others
- **Growing rivalry between imperialisms = inter-imperialist wars**



## UNDERSTANDING THE IMPERIALISM

**Rosa Luxemburg** – The outward expansion of the centers is a necessity of capitalism. Pillage and predation are essential to the system functioning.

**Nicolai Bukharin** – In analyzing the international system, he emphasizes the role of the states.

**Leon Trotsky** – Not only are there different and combined rhythms in the historical development of the countries, but there are, within the same country, unequal developments





## THE IMPERIALIST EPOCH AND ITS PERIODS

- World War I (1914-1918)  
- Russian Revolution
- Crisis of 1929-1933
- Rise of Nazi-fascism and  
decline of the British  
Empire
- World War II (1939-  
1945) the rise of the  
United States as the  
hegemonic power
- Post-IIWW: The 30  
glorious years, the  
Welfare State and the  
wave of national  
liberation of colonies
- China and Cuba's  
revolutions





## THE POST-WAR DEBATE (1950-1970)

Economic mechanisms of global inequality,  
beyond **unequal exchange**

*Why are there rich and poor, advanced  
(industrialized) and backward (agrarian-mining)  
countries?*

### **Paul Baran (1909-1964)**

Management of the surplus generated in each cycle of accumulation: in the center, invested in military activities, luxury and imprudent expenditures; in the periphery, largely transferred to the central economies to expand. Importance of political autonomy, of resistances, to contain the process.

### **Monthly Review School**

Paul Sweezy (1910-2004) Henry Magdoff (1913-2006) Stagnation of system due to underconsumption, monopolies, and financial parasitism - which led central countries to



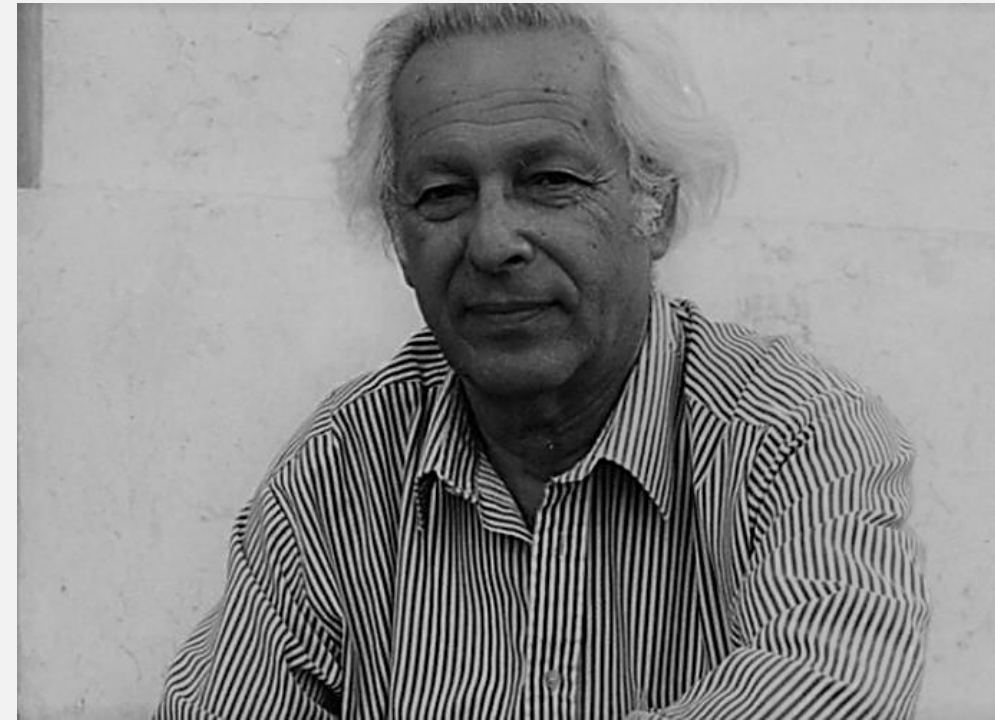
## THE POST-WAR DEBATE (1950-1970)

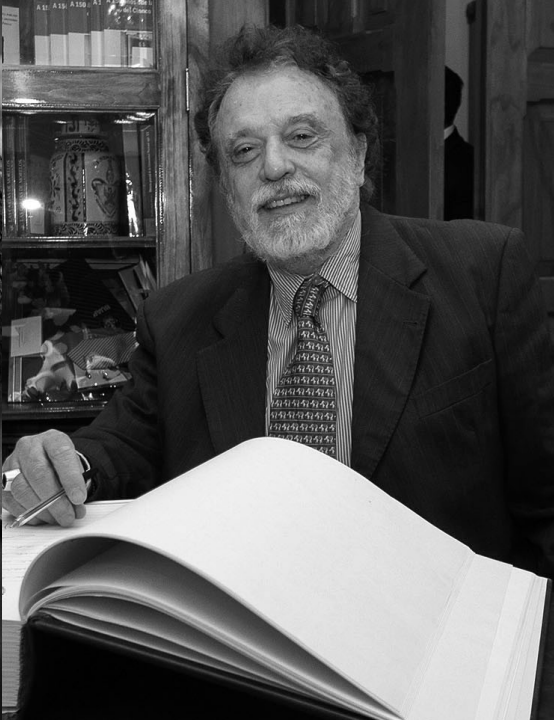
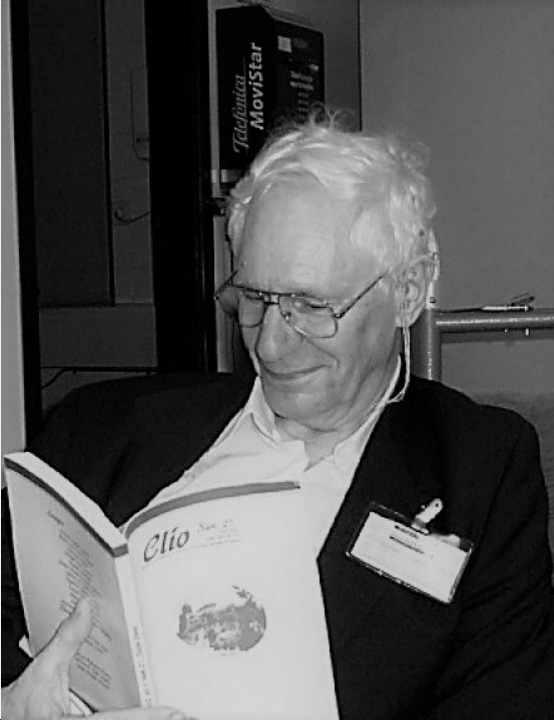
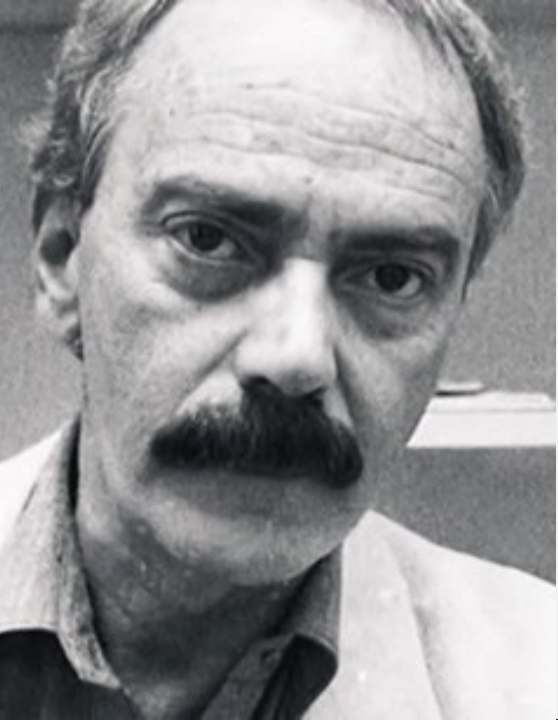
### **Samir Amim (1931-2018)**

Imperialism is a tool for consolidating inequality of income and living conditions between countries. Great contradiction is the capital mobility in the face of labor immobility. This immobility guarantees huge armies of unemployed in the periphery, low wages. Hence higher rates of exploitation. When studying the multinational companies of his time, he affirmed the validity of the law of value on a global scale. Concept of "collective imperialism"

### **Ernst Mandel (1923-1995)**

Different levels of subordination to the centers. in a world system that brings together different social-economic formations. Capacity to subjugate the peripheries varies in history and depends on resources. More comprehensive view of capitalist dynamics, imbalances in the accumulation process (not the end of competition. stagnation)





## DEPENDENCY THEORISTS (1960-) AND MARXISM

**Influence of the Cuban Revolution and the developmentalism of ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)**

**Raúl Prebisch, Celso Furtado** = backwardness of the periphery resulting from deteriorating terms of trade and "structural heterogeneity" - high unemployment, consumerist elites and stagnant agriculture.

**Andre Gunder Frank** - Underdevelopment development, "metropolis-satellite"

**Rui Mauro Marini, Bamberger and Santos** – Studies on the industrialized peripheries = concepts of "super-exploitation" and sub-imperialism





## THE IMPERIALIST EPOCH AND ITS PERIODS

- Crisis of the 1970s, **transition to neoliberalism** (dollar, oil crisis, Vietnam)
- Beginning of **capitalist restoration in China**, led by the CCP (1973)
- Thatcher and Reagan's victory (1979-1981)
- **Defeat of the non-capitalist states, end of the USSR (1989-1991)**

**Bensaïd refers to this moment as the beginning of "a new historical epoch" (1995)**





## THE NEW CAPITAL'S REGIME – NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISATION

Decisive political factors: Margaret Thatcher comes to power in the UK in 1979; Ronald Reagan takes over the White House in 1980 - **neo-liberal governments of the world powers.**

**Intense deregulation (liberalisation) of financial markets.** Widespread **dollarisation** of credit systems. **Globalisation of the production chains.** Reduction of the working class, cutting of rights, criminalisation of popular and trade union mobilisations and organisations

"These policies **sterilize the endogenous growth potential of national economies** and **convert public deficits into structural deficits**, useless for a policy of economic reactivation in a Keynesian approach." (Maria da Conceição Tavares, 1985)

"The whole world is ordered around three poles of the triad (USA, Europe and Japan), but it is in conditions in which **the United States is the pivot of everything** (...) the globalization of capital does not erase the existence of national states, nor the political and domination relations between countries. **It has accentuated the factors of hierarchisation between countries.**" (Chesnais, 2001)

**FINANCIAL DEREGULATION + DOLLARISATION OF CREDIT**

# NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISATION

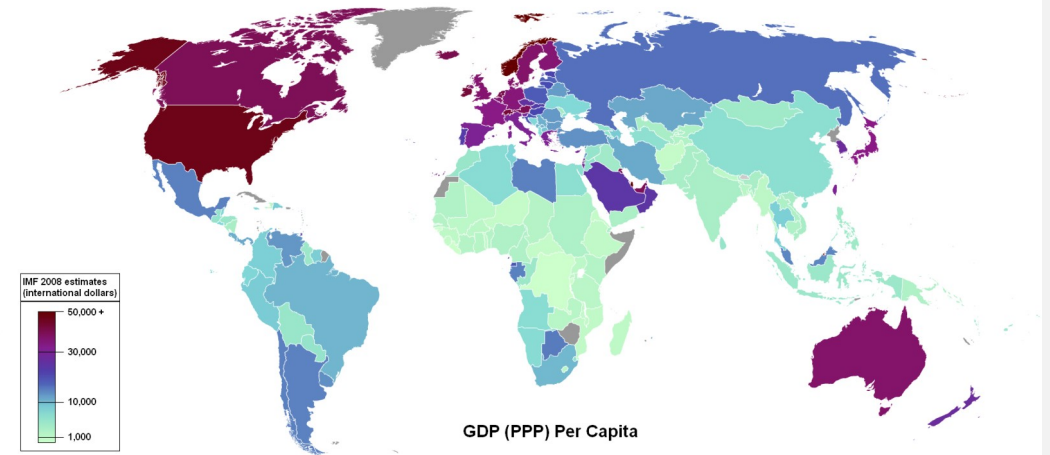
- **Global inequality and hierarchy of powers** (Chesnais, Katz)
- **Armed globalization: the "war on terror"** (Afghanistan, Irak) and on drugs militarise life
- The dream of a **unipolar US imperialism** (1990-2000)





# WORLD INEQUALITY

"The so-called developing countries, as well as those that still had an economic and social system ordered around state ownership have been forced to accept the new order of liberalization and deregulation. **The globalization of capital has put an end to self-centered development** practices resting on the limited but secure steps of political and economic sovereignty that had been won thanks to decolonization and the wars of national liberation of the period 1945-1973."  
(Chesnais, F., *Twelve Theses on the Globalization of Capital*, 2005)

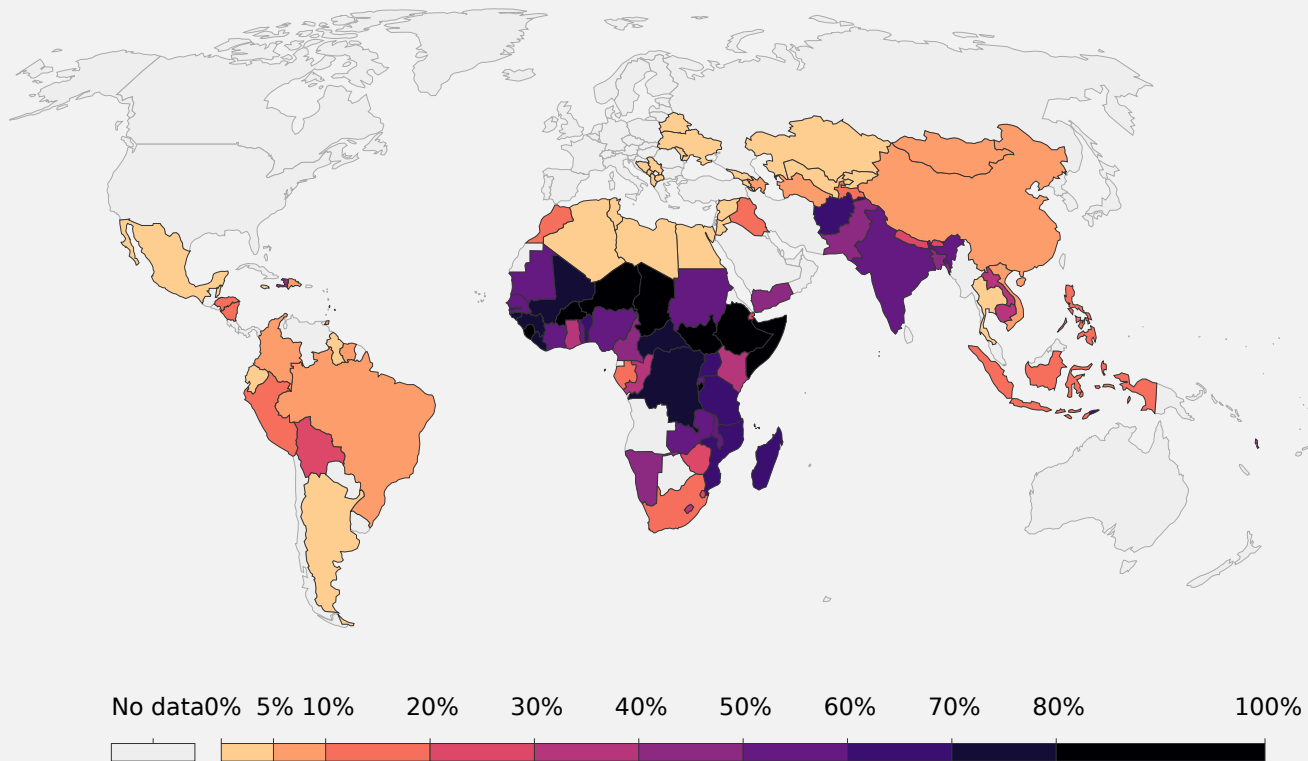


# WORLD POVERTY

## Share of population living in multidimensional poverty, 2014

Proportion of people who are poor according to the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The MPI weights ten indicators of deprivation in the context of education, health and living standards. Individuals are considered poor if deprived in at least one third of the weighted indicators (see source for more details).

Our World  
in Data



Source: OPHI Multidimensional Poverty Index - Alkire and Robles (2016)

“We have witnessed in twenty years the reappearance in poor countries of the worst scourges of malnutrition, of malnutrition, famine, disease and devastating pandemics in poor countries. These scourges are not more than the increase in the number of unemployed, precarious workers or the homeless, they are in the OECD countries.”

*(Chesnais, F., Twelve Theses on the Globalization of Capital, 2005)*

# NEOLIBERAL IMPERIALISM 21TH CENTURY VERSION

- Even greater predominance of finance:  
**financial globalisation** centre in WS-City
- Moving the world **industrial axis** eastwards -  
encouraging **China's restoration**
- Global restructuring of production chains with  
**informatization**
- **Reformatting of working classes**,  
weakening or destructing their previous forms of  
organization
- Worsening of **inequalities of class, race,  
gender and between nations**, and  
overexploitation of the most vulnerable sectors -  
with a tendency to **discard populations  
(necropolitics)**







## THE PRESENT MARXIST DEBATES

- 1) New chapter of "ultra-imperialism" debate (*Empire*, Hardt and Negri, 2000) *versus* the defenders of the permanence of national states. **What is exactly the states' role?**
- 2) Debate about a "new kind" of imperialism or a new configuration of imperialisms (Woods, Harvey, Chesnais, early 2000s). **What is different in the 21st century compared to 100 years earlier?**
- 3) Debate on the hierarchy between imperialist and non-imperialist states - configuration of the international geopolitical-economic system. **Is the world divided (only) into imperialist states and new colonies?**

# THE STATES' QUESTION

States survive and are strengthened, despite coexisting with major **imperialist supranational organisations** (UN, WTO, IMF, NATO, Bird, BCF, WHO) and regional blocks. **There is no any global state.**

**National states are also in crisis** because of a contradiction between (1) the bourgeois domination necessities, which is exercised in a territorial and juridical limit, and (2) the globalized economic pressures





:

*“Divided by competition, the ruling class only exists as such through the state project that unifies it. The nation-state project (which emerged in the course of the last century in the dominant countries, and in the course of this century with decolonization and independence) has exhausted its integrating and unifying effects without any alternative project emerging. **The existing states remain the necessary form of class domination. But they are already no longer the appropriate form in terms of the main tendencies of globalization. This explains the destabilization of the ruling classes and their political personnel,** which is perceivable everywhere: galloping corruption, clientism, drug trafficking; the rise of adventurers (Fujimori, Collor, Berlusconi); the tendency of those petty-bourgeois and bourgeois layers who are least able to accept a loss of state sovereignty and to adapt to the effects of liberal competition to challenge the rule of the dominant forces, producing a crisis of identity in bourgeois parties and some signs of fragmentation among their leaderships; and signs of division within big business on immediate perspectives and solutions(...)”*

**Challenges of the new world situation, 14th FI congress, 1995**

# THE ECONOMIC INSTRUMENTS OF OPRESION

## What exactly is different nowadays?

Arendt, Harvey, Woods point to the **unprecedented supremacy of one imperialism** over others, and the **new forms of extraction of wealth from oppressed countries**: debt, control of international currency (devaluations and speculative attacks), more unfavourable terms of trade, health barriers, patents, blockades.

Harvey talks about **accumulation by dispossession**. What is this?

Michael Roberts insists on the







## A NEOLIBERAL IMPERIALISM?

**Bensaid's thesis:** A new capitalist epoch, with more conflicts and contradictions, but difficulties for socialists (14<sup>th</sup> FI Congress, 1995)

**Dardot and Laval's thesis** (but not only): After the 2007-2008 crisis, a new moment is opening, with a reconfiguration of neoliberalism. It is the NEOLIBERALISM 2.0: radicalization of the accumulation regime

**It is more necessary than ever to guarantee "extraordinary profits" (Braudel) by means of multiplied exploitation, extermination of rights, discarding of populations, expropriation, oppression = necropolitics**





## IN THE GLOBAL INTER-STATE LANDSCAPE

- Rise of **new capitalist powers**, such as China and Russia, which dispute in the economy and geopolitics with dominant imperialism (US, EU) - to which it reacts.
- Revival of **nationalism and protectionism in the core countries**, in response to the crisis of 'neo-liberal globalisation'.
- Rise of **post-fascisms** (Enio Traverso) or **neoliberal fascisms**
- Fierce **competition between the United States and China** for global hegemony



## MARXIST NEW DEBATE

### **New relevant debates:**

1. What is happening inside the ruling classes of the imperialist countries, with reflexes for the bourgeoisie in general?  
**Dispute over two world projects**
2. **Is the idea/concept of imperialism still useful?**
3. What are China and Russia today? **New imperialisms in consolidation?**





## AROUND THE BOURGEOIS DISPUTE

“Globalist” alternatives increasingly reveal their anti-democratic character associated with their radical social attacks. At the same time, the only “universalist” dimension of the extreme right-wing alternatives is their xenophobic, especially islamophobic, planetary axis. (...) **Today’s conservative nationalisms (...) are revolts against globalization, revolts against modernity.** The increasingly anti-environmental and misogynist character they acquire is exploited by globalist currents to present themselves as representatives of the struggle of civilization against barbarism, when they themselves are central actors in the destruction of social and environmental protections.”

**(International situation report, IC 2021)**

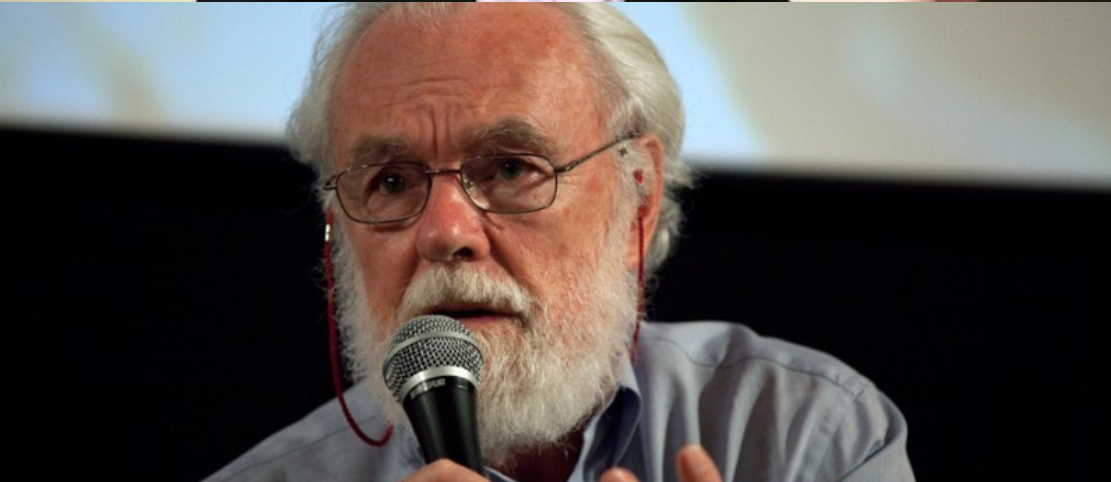
“Neoliberal fascism is a **specific political formation, which mixes economic orthodoxy, militarism, contempt for institutions and laws, white supremacism, machismo, hatred of intellectuals and amorality.**

From classical fascism it retains: love of the boss, hyper-nationalism, racist ghosts, contempt for the fragile, inferior, foreign, disregard for people's rights and dignity, violence against opponents”

**(Henry Giroux, 2018)**

“Major differences with fascism: **it does not impose a single party**, nor the prohibition of any opposition or dissent, **it does not mobilize or frame the masses in obligatory hierarchical organizations, it does not establish professional corporatism**, it does not practice liturgies of a secular religion  
**(Giovanni Gentile, 2004, fascist italian philosopher)**

## **THE POST-FASCISMS**



## IS IMPERIALISM STILL AN USEFUL CONCEPT?

**For David Harvey** Definitely no. There is no sense in the North-South Global divide in times of wealth "drain" from the West to the East.

**For John Smith and an the "campism":** Definitely yes, and little has changed in the global configuration from WWII to today. World divided between imperialists and semi-colonies.

**For Patrick Bond, and us:** Still useful, as long as it acquires new configurations. new, more complex and changing configurations. There are imperialist, sub-imperialist and underdeveloped countries. The drainage of wealth continues towards the centres. East Asia and China in particular is becoming a



## AROUND CHINA'S NATURE

**“The present chinese regime has certainly helped to extend (massively) the sphere of international accumulation of capital. It has been integrated into globalization and economic financialization.** It has legitimized the dominant order by joining the world trade organization (WTO) (...) It has provided transnational companies with a labour force that has no rights and can be exploited at will (the migrants from the interior of the country) - all things that are part of the role traditionally assigned to sub-imperialisms. In doing so, **China could have once again become a dominated country like the others, under the voke of the traditional imperialist powers.**”

**(Pierre Rousset, Chinese Ambitions, an imperialism in formation, 2014)**



## AROUND CHINA'S NATURE



“This possibility was perceptible in the early 2000s, but the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the new Chinese bureaucratic capitalism decided otherwise. They had the ability to do so thanks to the legacy of the Maoist revolution: **the relationships of dependency with regard to imperialism had been broken, which is not true of any other member of the BRICS except Russia** - and unlike the latter, the ruling party has been able to control continuously the process of capitalist transition, profoundly transforming the class structure of the country.”

**(Pierre Rousset, Chinese Ambitions, an imperialism in formation, 2014)**





## THE PRESENTE CRISIS (2019-2021)

### **Convergence of several crisis**

- 1. Ecological crisis:** global warming and pandemic
- 2. Economic structural crisis:** debts, jobs, recession
- 3. Social and political crisis:** New uprising of anti-neoliberal resistances
- 4. Geopolitical crisis:** Hegemonic imperialism transition - USA X China; OTAN X Russia



MORE QUESTIONS AS  
FINAL APPOINTMENTS

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Is there a new productive restructuring from **platforms and apps**?

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Will the power of **Big Techs be controlled** by states?

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In the dispute between US and China, is there the **possibility of a new war** between imperialisms?

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How far will **post-fascisms and fundamentalisms** go? Is there a correlation of forces to overcome them?

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What is the role of **international struggles** and articulations in the current period?