

**Rethinking the Theory of Primitive Accumulation:
Imperialism and the New Scramble for Land and Natural Resources**

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I. Introduction

The global competition for Africa's land and natural resources is in full swing. It is a 'scramble' in the classic sense of the term, in that it involves monopolistic firms and major states in a 'geopolitical' struggle. This scramble has systemic determinants, as well as definite antecedents in Africa's recent past: the neoliberal prying open and financialisation of national economies; the serial privatisations of state and communal property; the 'silent' alienation and concentration of land by domestic and foreign capital in the 1990s; and most dramatically, the proxy war in the Great Lakes region, after the collapse of the West's strategic pillar in Central Africa. The new scramble, therefore, consists in the geopolitical escalation of an ongoing process of primitive accumulation.

In this sense, it is similar to the scramble of the nineteenth century. However, it has a number of peculiarities which make it substantially different, of which three are significant: the new mode of highly financialised accumulation; the entry of non-Western, semi-peripheral competitors in the race; and the existence of relatively autonomous capitalist states on the continent, born of the global anti-imperialist struggles of the twentieth century; unlike in the past, these have at least the potential to resist and form effective alliances on regional, continental, and inter-continental levels.

This means that the systemic determinants of the scramble are also different. Postwar capitalism matured and entered into crisis in the late 1960s due, in large part, to the

maturation of the centre-periphery contradiction (Amin 2003, Arrighi 2003). This was the driving force of the systemic rivalry of the Cold War, which was, in effect, a Third World War, this time more clearly between North and South. It was a general war which resulted in the globalisation of the states-system, as well as in the rise of a number of new development trajectories in the South, including the emergence of industrialised semi-peripheries and, not least, the unique revolutionary experience of China (Moyo & Yeros 2011).

The subsequent systemic crisis forced imperialism to adjust and, ultimately, to re-launch its global project by means of a new mode of accumulation, highly financialised and ever more predatory and parasitic. It succeeded in containing peripheral nationalism, bringing China back into the fold, and even dismantling the Soviet Union. However, it could not reverse the clock on the states-system, or save itself from its own degeneration, or dispense with its industrialised semi-peripheries, or prevent the re-emergence of new social forces in the South, against parasitic capitalism (Moyo & Yeros 2005). It is no coincidence at all that the new scramble takes place at a time when the national question is being reclaimed in the global development agenda (Moyo & Yeros 2011). The decline of the West and the resurgence of its peripheries and semi-peripheries are the systemic parameters of both scramble and resistance.

The systemic contradictions of the last quarter-century have advanced in some regions more than others, even reaching genocidal proportions in Central Africa and Southeastern Europe. Africa's Great Lakes region became the epicenter of these contradictions, in a

proxy war to regain strategic control over Central Africa. By contrast, the Yugoslav War involved direct intervention to regain control over the intra-European periphery. Meanwhile, Western Asia was invaded twice, in the First and Second Gulf Wars, the latter radiating outwards, beyond Iraq, to Afghanistan and Pakistan. These have been perhaps the most transparent attempts to re-establish order in North-South relations, as well as between the major competitors, as they have emerged. The objective has been not only to gain exclusive control over energy resources and establish a military presence in the region, but more so to send a message throughout the system that the United States and its junior partners are not prepared to cede monopoly control over the world economy without a fight. The lengths to which the fight would be taken also became clear: by infinite war (continuous ‘preemptive strikes’), against an ill-defined enemy (‘terrorism’), the use of disproportionate power (‘shock and awe’), and the utter disregard for civilians (‘collateral damage’) (Wood 2002, Mamdani 2004).

The re-militarisation of all regions of the world is now advancing rapidly. In Africa, the strategy has been spearheaded by AFRICOM, still with no base of its own, but effectively operating out of Djibouti and Uganda; in Latin America, it is the US Fourth Fleet and the expanded bases in Colombia that serve the same purpose. Elsewhere, efforts are underway to co-opt Russia and India, while stepping up the military encirclement of Iran and China. The ‘geopolitical’ stakes may be higher in a nuclear-armed Asia, but the scramble is on everywhere, its dynamics are global, and its social and economic effects will be severe, not least in Africa, where the scramble is now intensifying. The escalation in North Africa, against popular uprisings, is the most recent example.

The scramble has its own specificities and antecedents in every region. In the case of Africa, these are related, first, to its pre-colonial integration in the world economy as a slave reserve, its relatively recent history of colonialism, and its settler experience. Together, these have yielded a process of primitive accumulation which has been more intense and more continuous than in any other continent. It also means that the current experience with ‘foreign land grabs’ must be placed in its proper historical context. Second, the belated decolonisation of the continent in the 1960s left little room for nation-building; indeed, between decolonisation and neoliberal restructuring, less than two decades transpired, while in settler Africa specifically, the one was conditional upon the other. Third, the racialised global culture woven by imperialism – an often underestimated component of Western imperialist expansion since the slave trade – has yielded an enduring ‘hierarchy’ of peoples, including a special paternalism towards the African continent, to which even the new, non-Western competitors can easily succumb. The projection of externally derived pseudo-‘models’ of development to be emulated by Africa, or even the prioritisation of alliances with supposed ‘vanguard’ social forces at the centre, is a real tendency in the new scramble.

Fourth, the recent experience of anti-colonial nationalism, and the continental solidarity which it evoked, has yielded a pan-nationalism whose potential is also unique to the continent (Mkandawire 2011). Despite its various historical shortcomings, Pan-Africanist solidarity has been making a comeback and has been crucial in defending against imperialist militarisation, especially in Southern Africa. Needless to say, this would have

been an unthinkable feat a century ago. The Pan-Africanist project must now be reclaimed, on new terms, towards a new policy of collective self-reliance and resistance, as well as tri-continental solidarity based on a strategy of non-alignment among the peoples of the South.

In what follows, the various issues above will be elaborated, with an interest in clarifying the links between imperialism, primitive accumulation, and scramble; the stages of imperialism and primitive accumulation up to the present scramble; and the dynamics of natural resource grabbing and resistance in progress on the continent.

II. Imperialism, Primitive Accumulation and Scramble

Recent debates on imperialism have resurrected an older concern with the relationship between imperialism and ‘primitive accumulation’. Perhaps the most quoted statement on the matter has been David Harvey’s (2003) thesis on ‘accumulation by dispossession’, by which he has sought to emphasise the permanent nature of primitive accumulation under capitalism, as more than just a one-off event which established the historical conditions for ‘expanded reproduction’ (that is, a pure form of exploitation by capital over labour). However, there are a number of problems with this formulation which must concern us, especially Harvey’s understanding of the role of the periphery.

A brief conceptual retrospective would be useful. Marx’s own writings on primitive accumulation were more descriptive than systematic. His objective was to show, first,

how capitalism deploys *extra-economic* force to separate peasants from the land and transform land and labour into capital; and, second, how the capitalist system, once created, continues to exploit labour by less transparent means, that is, by the appropriation of labour power beyond the labour time necessary for the social reproduction of the workforce. His critique was aimed at the apologists of capitalism, who saw in capitalism a ‘liberation’ of rational human beings from economic repression. Marx accepted generally that capitalist transformation was historically progressive, but he sought to dispel myths about both its birth and its mature form.

Subsequent analyses, as by Lenin (1996) and Rosa Luxemburg (1951), were prompted by the new wave of militarism and colonial expansion at the turn of the twentieth century, led by large monopolistic firms and major capitalist states in the classic scramble. The problem was to explain whether the scramble was a result of monopoly capitalism (in the case of Lenin), or an inherent need in capitalism to plunder non-capitalist societies as a means of overcoming a chronic problem of ‘underconsumption’ (Luxemburg). Both emphasised, once again, the use of violent, extra-economic force, but they disagreed on the relationship between primitive accumulation and expanded reproduction. For Lenin, the scramble would yield a new stage (the ‘ultimate’) of unequal development, but also one which would establish the conditions for expanded reproduction in the peripheries. For Luxemburg, the scramble would re-create the necessary organic relationship between expanded reproduction and primitive accumulation, until the final exhaustion of non-capitalist societies, and hence, of capitalism itself.

We might say that later developments at least partially vindicated both theorists: the unequal development of capitalism in its monopoly form became long-lasting, while primitive accumulation also persisted and flourished in a variety of new forms. In the postwar period, these dynamics were best captured by the ‘underdevelopment’ school, which emphasised the necessary conflict between centres and peripheries in the reproduction of capital on a world scale (Amin 1976, Marini 1968, Patnaik 1972). The overall argument (despite a number of differences) has been that Western monopolies exploit the peripheries either directly or indirectly, the net result being a systematic transfer of surplus value, far beyond the initial investment. The mechanisms of transfer include the repatriation of profits, interest payments, and dividends, the imposition of monopoly rents, as well as unequal exchange. Through these mechanisms, moreover, the centre is able to displace its own contradictions of accumulation.

An important aspect of this analysis has been the relationship of primitive accumulation to the process of accumulation as a whole. While primitive accumulation has always occurred at the centre of the system as well, it has been expanded reproduction that has prevailed there under monopoly capitalism. In the periphery, primitive accumulation has been more intense and continuous, even in the semi-peripheries which have undergone industrialisation. What distinguishes the peripheries of the system is the extroverted nature of accumulation and industrialisation, which has set into motion an incomplete process of proletarianisation, denoted by the term ‘semi-proletarianisation’ (Moyo & Yeros 2005). This involves the expulsion of small producers from the countryside *without* their full absorption into the industrial or service sectors. In turn, this expelled

population has a fundamental function in the world economy, not merely as a labour reserve which drives down wages all around, but as a reserve which also *subsidises* the reproduction of capital by its own unremunerated labour, or self-exploitation. This is an extra-economic contribution to capital, and a definite form of primitive accumulation, in the sense of not being accounted for by the market itself. Thus, even after the exhaustion of non-capitalist societies, capitalism has extended its life by feeding off of permanent semi-proletarianisation.

Such primitive accumulation assumes both rural and urban forms: by the maintenance of family plots in the countryside for ‘subsistence’; by the unremunerated labour, especially of women and children, for the social reproduction of the household; by the construction of self-housing in urban slums; and by a number of informal activities geared towards the production of cheap wage goods, especially food (Moyo & Yeros 2005, Shivji 2009a). On a global scale, this means that capitalism has always reproduced itself by creating the conditions for the perpetuation of non-remunerated labour outside the market and the displacement of the cost of social reproduction onto the labourers themselves. This is precisely the process which today finds expression in appalling national statistics of maternal and infant mortality, malnutrition, illiteracy, and life expectancy.

Different terms have been employed by the underdevelopment school to explain the same phenomenon, some drawn directly from classical political economy, other invented anew. For Ruy Mauro Marini (1970), it is such ‘super-exploitation’ that differentiates peripheral capitalism and links it to accumulation in both the periphery and the centre. For Alain de

Janvry (1981), the phenomenon is one of 'functional dualism' between accumulation and self-exploitation in the periphery. Similarly, for Prabhat Patnaik (2005: 1) 'accumulation through encroachment' has been seen as an 'integral' part of the accumulation process; while for Utsa Patnaik (1999), it assumes the form of a necessary 'demand compression' in the periphery. The common thread is the understanding of really-existing capitalism as organically linked to primitive accumulation within a structured centre-periphery relationship.

The arguments of the underdevelopment school have been markedly different from those of Harvey. In his case, the permanent relationship between expanded reproduction and primitive accumulation, for which he argues, is not founded on a permanent center-periphery contradiction and permanent semi-proletarianisation. These he substitutes by a more fluid and indeterminate 'space economy', which is driven, especially in times of crisis, by a variety of 'spatio-temporal fixes', the most recent of which, since the 1970s, has brought primitive accumulation back to the forefront of accumulation as a whole.

Harvey's lack of appreciation of the centre-periphery contradiction in historical capitalism is further exemplified by his understanding of the process by which capitalism has expanded to the periphery in the last century. He expressly disassociates the nineteenth-century scramble from the 'logic of capital' (now understood in a pure sense), thus attributing the scramble to a distinct 'territorial logic', *contrary* to the logic of capital (Harvey 2003: 140). Similarly, the expansion of capitalism in the peripheries in the aftermath of the Second World War is seen as being driven by the logic of pure

capitalism and its 'spatio-temporal fixes', and not as a universal centre-periphery conflict over the development of the productive forces in the periphery (Harvey 2003: 57–62, 115–124). Indeed, both inter-imperialist scramble and centre-periphery conflict appear as incidental to monopoly capitalism.

This haphazard understanding of imperialism extends to Harvey's analysis of resistance to primitive accumulation. On the one hand, there is a conceptual recourse to the theory of 'hegemony', which underplays the emergence of global liberation struggle and the social agency of the semi-proletarianised peasantry. By emphasising its lack of organisational unity and ideological convergence, the argument has the effect of diminishing its collective impact on the system, which is the only way to account for the universalisation of the states-system against the logic of monopoly capitalism: it is the emergence of liberation struggles that have hampered the capacity of monopoly capitalism to reproduce itself by the unencumbered drain of surpluses. This, in turn, also explains the postwar re-militarisation of centre-periphery relations and the search for neo-colonial solutions. Indeed, whatever hegemonic 'consent' there was to postwar primitive accumulation, it was limited to tiny comprador classes.

With regards to the current period of neoliberalism, there is a similar tendency in Harvey to highlight the 'stunning variety' of struggles and their lack of unity, as opposed to their common basis and collective potential: '[i]t is hard to imagine even connections between them', Harvey tells us (2003: 166). Once again, there is a lack of appreciation for the structural conditions that produce such struggles and their collective potential. Indeed, the

leading force against primitive accumulation is once again the semi-proletarianised peasantry, whose ranks have swelled in both town and country; its goal everywhere is to reclaim land and natural resources and affirm sovereignty over national development. The evident ‘diversity’ of the new struggles (feminist, ‘indigenous’, environmentalist) are also intelligible by the commonality of the structural conditions. Pushed to the limit under neoliberalism, the escalating contradictions have opened a new space for the direct participation of women (for whom land is the most crucial element in the social reproduction of the household), propelled to the forefront the racially oppressed (who most often constitute the bulk of the semi-proletariat), and underpinned environmental sustainability with a militant social agent, given the immediate destruction of the means of subsistence of the semi-proletariat as a whole. It should come as no surprise that, under neoliberalism, these ‘diverse’ contradictions have been lining up.

Finally, the common political context of diverse political struggles must also be appreciated. Despite the destructive forces unleashed anew, primitive accumulation today must still contend with the existence of relatively autonomous capitalist states, whose ruling classes remain tiny and dependent on external support. Under such political conditions, the challenge for the peoples of the South is neither to ‘return to a more benevolent “New Deal” imperialism’, nor merely to ‘watch, wait, and hope’ for the emergence of that missing vanguard social force at the centre, as Harvey provocatively suggests (2003: 209, 212). It is to muster the political forces in the periphery to exercise the political autonomy that has already been captured from monopoly capital. This will not only advance, immediately, the goal of autonomous development in the periphery; it

will also force the centre finally to face up to its internal contradictions, by depriving it the capacity to displace them outwards.

III. The Stages of Imperialism

Besides identifying the function of primitive accumulation under capitalism, it is important to distinguish between successive stages of capitalist expansion, with an interest in the substantive transformations of the capitalist system. In what way is imperialism today different from the imperialisms of the past? In recent years, much of this debate has shifted to the study of successive ‘hegemonies’, which focus on the cyclical rise and fall of a singular leading state in the system, and less on the qualitative changes of capitalism. Where substantive changes are considered, they are conceptualised in terms of a changing ‘volume and dynamic density of economic transactions’ (Arrighi & Silver 1999), or in the supposed formation of a ‘transnational ruling class’, above and beyond nations and states (van der Pijl 1984, Cox 1987, Robinson 1996). The term hegemony itself is abstracted from Gramsci, for whom hegemony was intimately related to the rise of ‘civil society’ in discrete national settings. Clearly, it would be difficult to project hegemony onto the whole of imperialism, without the banalisation of the concept: a ‘free’ civil society is a relatively recent phenomenon and still very restricted on a global scale (Moyo & Yeros 2007). Force is, and has always been, an essential feature of capitalist expansion and primitive accumulation.

For Lenin, imperialism was, properly speaking, the property of capitalism in its monopoly stage, a qualitatively different type of capitalism. But insofar as *polarisation* between centres and peripheries is also an essential feature of imperialism, we ought to conclude that capitalism has been imperialist throughout its five-hundred-year history (Amin 2003). This does not mean that qualitative changes are negligible. What is qualitatively different under monopoly capitalism is the consolidation of a centre-periphery relationship under giant firms which have closed shut the possibility of emergence of new centres (Baran & Sweezy 1966). Under competitive capitalism, the rise of new centres and the decline of old ones was a cycle, which reproduced the centre-periphery relationship anew. A new historical cycle under monopoly capitalism is impossible – although, as we will see, it has indeed been possible for monopoly capitalism itself to undergo qualitative economic and political mutations.

The key stages of the reproduction of the centre-periphery relationship must be sought in the type of capitalisms that have emerged. Mercantilism (1500–1800) was a pre-industrial form of capitalism in which primitive accumulation was almost exclusively its mode of operation. Led by merchant capital and chartered companies, it did not seek to establish capitalist relations of production in the peripheries. Instead, it implanted varieties of forced labour and, not least, it resurrected an archaic European slave system specially made for the Americas. It was also the most genocidal form of capitalism to date. This system gradually unraveled in the second half of the eighteenth century, by the onset of the industrial revolution and a cascade of social and political revolutions in both centres and the peripheries (Moyo & Yeros 2011).

The nineteenth century set the terrain for a new type of imperialism, stretching until 1945, first under the leadership of small, competitive industrial capitals and then, at century's end, a highly monopolised form of corporate capitalism under the leadership of finance capital. By this means, expanded reproduction took hold in the centres of the system, but once again it required the escalation of primitive accumulation in the peripheries and the deployment of chartered companies. The export of manufactures and capital deepened the world market, while new forms of forced labour in the peripheries took hold, especially by the colonisation of Africa, Asia and the Pacific. As Lenin rightly argued, the rise of monopolies and a financial oligarchy necessarily gave way to capital exports and the partition of the world. The determining factor of imperialist expansion was neither a generic underconsumption in the centre (Luxemburg 1951), nor merely technological development (Hobsbawm 1994), but more precisely the centralisation of capital under monopolistic firms (Patnaik 1986).

This 'classical' stage of monopoly capitalism was a period of intense centre-periphery and inter-imperialist conflict, which produced two general wars, a socialist revolution in Russia, and the emergence of liberation struggles throughout the periphery. The inter-imperialist dimension of the conflict consisted in a succession struggle over the leadership of imperialist powers, which ultimately gave way to US-led order and a new period of peace between rival imperialists. However, this postwar period can hardly be described as one of 'hegemony', as it became more clearly a generalised conflict between centres and peripheries over political independence and the development of the

productive forces outside the centre. More properly understood, this was a phase of *systemic rivalry* between monopoly capitalism and the social forces seeking an alternative, planned system, inspired on the experience of rapid development ushered in by the Soviet Union. In all, it was a tri-furcated rivalry between the West, the East and the South, but whose motive force remained the centre-periphery contradiction, especially as the Soviet Union, under bureaucratic sclerosis, would opt for 'peaceful co-existence' with the West (Amin 2003, Moyo & Yeros 2011).

It is this tri-furcated systemic rivalry that accounts for the emergence of new development paths. The rapid reconstruction of Europe and Japan was by no means on the agenda of monopoly capital; nor was the industrialisation of the periphery. Monopoly capital was forced to devise a new global strategy to contain the South by a strategy of re-militarisation, large-scale financing and protection of selected partners, and co-optation of nationalist movements. The strategy did not create a 'transnational ruling class', in the sense of superseding national rivalries. More precisely, as Germany and Japan recovered and began to compete with US monopolies, monopoly capital underwent a transition to a 'collective imperialism' (Amin 2003), a new and, arguably, qualitatively different period of monopoly capitalism itself. Under the continued leadership of the United States, the Triad partners re-adjusted themselves to a coordinated governance of their monopolistic control over technology, finance, natural resources, media, and weapons of mass destruction.

This was the first of the systemic mutations of the postwar period. It is arguable whether it amounts to a new *stage* of capitalism, or a *phase* of capitalism in its monopoly stage. Be that as it may, it has been accompanied by a deepening internationalisation of production, under the aegis of vertically integrated mega-firms in all sectors of the world economy. What this also means is that the capitalist system in the postwar period succeeded in eliminating its non-capitalist ‘others’ and subsuming the whole of the world economy more directly under its logic. This process was reinforced by the ongoing expulsion of populations from the countrysides of the peripheries and the formation of ever-larger semi-proletariats, in an organic relationship with capital. Put differently, by the time that collective imperialism took hold, the world’s labour reserves ceased to be organised under whatever was left of semi-distinct ‘modes of productions’. Importantly, the simultaneous reintegration of China, the only remaining autonomous system, opened up the country’s own massive labour force to the same reserve-creating forces underway in the rest of the South (Minqi 2008).

A second systemic mutation in the postwar period has been the reincarnation of finance capital, a process intrinsic to the clinching of collective imperialism. This new financial system is not a mere replica of its late-nineteenth century counterpart. There is general agreement that one of the main differences is its relationship with the ‘real economy’: whereas finance capital in the prior period, as Lenin had observed, was still primarily linked to industrial expansion, and secondarily to speculative activities, in the current period there has been a shift in the centre of gravity from production to finance. Not only has finance gained a life of its own, industrial enterprises have themselves become

‘financialised’, in the sense of drawing an ever-larger part of their profits from financial instruments, including speculation on commodities, exchange rates, real estate, and so forth. This amounts to a qualitatively different logic of accumulation, designated as by John Bellamy Foster (2010a) as ‘monopoly-finance capital’. Unlike the monopoly capitalism of the early postwar period (Baran & Sweezy 1966), in which normal accumulation was conducted by adding to the stock of capital goods, today ‘this is only one aspect of the process. Accumulation is also a matter of adding to the stock of financial assets’ (Foster 2010a: 6). Thus, ‘[m]ore and more, the speculative asset-pricing structure, related to the inflation (or deflation) of paper titles to wealth, has come to hold sway over the “real” pricing structure associated with output (GDP)’ (Foster 2010b: 7). In other words, asset-price bubbles have become the main engine of growth, from one bubble to the next. This type of capitalism has not spared the emerging semi-peripheries either, especially China, which have experienced rapid industrialisation. China, too, has come to depend on this superficial ‘wealth effect’ of its major consumers in the West, as well as its own real estate bubbles.

The final mutation of monopoly capitalism is the rise of the industrialised semi-peripheries themselves. One of the postwar strategies of monopoly capital, in its drive to contain the South, was to select Southern partners as proxies in regional stabilisation, a policy which gained its fullest expression in the Nixon-Kissinger Doctrine (Litwak 1984). This strategy, moreover, combined with the ongoing developmentalist strategy ‘from below’, entailing the strengthening of bureaucratic apparatuses in support of domestic capital. According to Marini (1972, 1977), the result was the formation of a dependent

form of monopoly capitalism, what he called 'sub-imperialism'. This monopoly capitalism was different from that of the centre, not only in its dependence, but also because it was not based on a class pact (that is, a positive relationship between productivity and wages); sub-imperialism was based on the *super-exploitation* of domestic labour. It was natural, therefore, that, as it grew, it would require external markets for the resolution of its profit realisation crisis. In practice, there was no antagonistic contradiction between pursuing relatively autonomous regional objectives and remaining subservient to overall imperialist strategy. In the ensuing decades, monopolistic blocs of domestic capitals continued to grow in a handful of semi-peripheries, especially through the process of privatisation and enhanced extroversion ushered in by neoliberalism.

There has already been considerable debate in Africa and elsewhere as to the merits of the term sub-imperialism (Nabudere n/d, Tandon 1982, Mandaza 1980). The question today is really whether the 'emerging' economies are essentially subservient regional stabilisers, or an anti-imperialist force. Put differently, are the BRIC or IBSA alliances, or the G20 forum, laying the basis for a multipolar world? Have the semi-peripheral bourgeoisies become, inadvertently, anti-systemic? We cannot foreclose on these questions without further debate and analysis. For it is clear that these semi-peripheries today differ very significantly from each other. Some are driven by private blocs of capital with strong state support (Brazil, India); others, like China, include the direct participation of state-owned enterprises; while in the case of South Africa, it is increasingly difficult to speak of an autonomous domestic bourgeoisie, given the extreme

degree of de-nationalisation of its economy in the post-apartheid period. The degree of participation in the Western military project is also different from one case to the next – although, one might say, there is a ‘schizophrenia’ to all this, typical to ‘sub-imperialism’. South Africa, ironically, has signed up to a regional mutual defense pact, effectively against Western military interference, while continuing to serve as a hub for Western economic interests on the continent. India has increasingly fallen into line with US strategy, especially in the nuclear field, but internal resistance remains significant. Brazil has zealously led the post-*coup* invasion of Haiti, in contradiction to its independent foreign policy on other matters. Russia has remained a blocking power in the UN Security Council, though it has also shown signs of co-optation by NATO. China is the clearest counter-force to the West, consistently exercising full strategic autonomy, despite its economic dependence. Their modes of engagement with Africa are no less diverse. But at the end, one would have to ask: does the emergence of the semi-peripheries imply a system-changing diversification of economic partners among the South, as Arrighi (2003) and others have argued. Or is it a conjunctural event, heralding the final demise of the capitalist world economy (Minqi 2008)?

The more immediate question for us concerns the type of alliances that are necessary to oppose contemporary imperialism. Issa Shivji (2009b: 9) has argued that Africa must now rekindle the spirit of Non-alignment and Pan-Africanism and ‘define its solidarity with the oppressed people against both established and developing imperial hegemonies’. In so doing, the positing of an equivalence between Western imperialism and the emerging semi-peripheries – already a strong, and highly ideological, tendency – must be

avoided. Whatever one makes of the new semi-peripheries, they are certainly not the main agents of imperialism. Nor, for that matter, are they cohesive nations, given that their own accumulation strategies depend squarely on the super-exploitation of their own working classes *en masse*. In any case, the first principle in the rekindling of Non-alignment, as before, remains the non-participation in the military project of the West. The second is the devising of a strategy *vis-à-vis* both the West and emerging powers which would enable a larger degree of maneuver for national development; the longer-term goal would be to bring about an effective ‘multipolar’ world (Amin 2011). It implies not only resisting the West and ‘looking South’, but also setting conditions on investments from the South. In the end, such resistance can only be effective by collective strategies on the continental and sub-regional levels. Establishing mutual defense pacts, like in the Southern African case, would constitute a fundamental building block, as would new forms of regional integration, beyond rule-based, commercial integration, that would serve, in the first instance, agro-industrial coordination and food sovereignty (Moyo 2010).

IV. Scramble and Resistance in Africa

To understand the new scramble for Africa we must identify not only the overall systemic dynamics, but also their relation to regional dynamics and the changing object of the scramble. To be sure, a new phase of land alienation was already underway in the 1990s, under structural adjustment (Moyo 2008). To this was added a renewed interest in oil, gas, and minerals at the turn of the century, until the most recent surge in land alienation

for the production of food and bio-fuels. Systemic pressures 'from above' and 'from below', plus conjunctural events all contributed to the scramble.

In relation to energy resources, the 9/11 attacks on US targets was a turning point. For it raised the prospect of prolonged instability in Western Asia, setting off a policy debate on the possibility of expanding oil production in Africa, as proposed by the Cheney Report on energy (NEPDG 2001). This, in turn, raised obvious concerns in China as to its possible exclusion from key sources of oil and shipping lanes, thereby compelling Beijing to fine-tune and upgrade its own Africa strategy over the following years (GoC 2006). The re-militarisation of US strategy has been most closely associated with this dynamic.

But the less acknowledged source of the scramble has been the changing security context on the continent. And here, several inter-related events shook the foundations of US geostrategy. The first event was the political transition in South Africa. Controlled though it may have been, the transition nonetheless deprived the Western alliance of a staunch ally in Southern Africa. The second was the state fracture and war in the DRC, by which the United States lost its main pillar in Central Africa. Indeed, the two Cold War pillars of US strategy in these regions – the apartheid state and the Mobutu regime – collapsed in the space of a few years. The third event has been the re-radicalisation of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe, which challenged outright the controlled character of the transitions to majority rule. These events have been compounded by escalating disputes over the control of Somalia and Sudan in the East, over Ivory Coast in the West, and over

North Africa, which again threaten the control over critical sources of energy. All these have thrust collective imperialism back into crisis and raised the stakes of the scramble. It is in this light that the establishment of AFRICOM – which was deemed unnecessary even in the heat of the Cold War – must be seen. AFRICOM's most immediate target may be China, but it is the loss of firm control over large swathes of the continent that has made it necessary.

If re-militarisation is most closely linked to the scramble for oil, gas, and minerals, with deleterious political effects on states and regions, it is the scramble for agricultural land which will have the most immediate social effects. Much of the debate has entailed a blame game, directed especially towards non-Western competitors, or otherwise has sought to posit land alienation as presenting possible 'opportunities' for African states (World Bank 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009). It is important to interrogate more carefully the causes of the land grabs, as well as their modes of operation and their developmental consequences.

The surge in land grabs caught the attention of the media and policy and academic circles only in 2008, on the back of the surge in food commodity prices (Moyo 2010). The blame game that ensued pointed the finger to the supposed increase in grain consumption by India and China; or to the food deficit countries of the Middle East and East Asia; or to the surge in the price of oil and, hence, farm inputs; or to the diversion of grain to bio-fuel production; or to the reduction of Western grain stocks due to weather-induced harvest failure, especially in Australia; or to the restriction of rice and wheat, albeit after

the fact, by countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, India, Russia, and Argentina. However, it has been convincingly shown that the diversion of food production to agro-fuels and the oil-related price increases accounted for 85 percent of the food price increases (Ghosh 2008, Tabb 2008). These, in turn, have been determined by the ‘security’ and profit concerns of monopoly-finance capital – the Western agro-industrial complex, energy firms, and capital funds, whose underlying engine of accumulation is commodity speculation. Even so, speculation has only fed on an established historical structure of demand compression in the South, which has undermined the capacity of the world’s peasantries to produce food crops (P. Patnaik 2008). Especially under neoliberalism, enforced cuts in state expenditures, privatisation and commercialisation of state-owned enterprises, trade liberalisation, financialisation, and a new wave of land alienation have all taken their toll on global food security.

However, the ‘food crisis’ is only a recent determinant of the scramble for land in Africa (Moyo 2010). We must recall that land alienation has a longer, almost uninterrupted, history. The first major wave of land grabs accompanied colonial expansion, mainly in the Africa of the ‘reserves’ (Southern Africa, Algeria, Kenya) and in the ‘concessionary’ economies of Central Africa, via the establishment of mining and agricultural enclaves, but also, albeit to a much lesser extent, in the economies *de traite* of West Africa (Amin 1972). This wave lasted until the 1960s, before giving way to the developmentalist policies of the newly-independent states. The latter halted the thrust of colonial land alienation and sought to promote expanded reproduction among the peasantries. But land

alienation did continue, through ongoing ‘modernisation’ and intergration into the world market, the promotion of capitalist farmers, and state-owned farming enterprises.

These experiments lasted for a relatively short time, before the continent as a whole was re-subordinated to unfettered primitive accumulation. As it has been argued (Moyo 2010: 6), ‘[r]ather than enhancing the participation of the majority of small African producers, agrarian reforms [under neoliberalism] mainly sought commodity marketing and land tenure reforms, which led to the deeper integration into the world food system and prepared the ground for the current land grabbing’. During the 1990s, the commodification of land through the appropriation of land held under customary tenure, and its conversion into private property, expanded African land markets, but largely in newer ‘enclaves’. This was the second large wave of land alienation on the continent. It was led by local capitalists under the wing of foreign capital and World Bank advice, which expanded activities to ‘non-traditional’ crops, such as cut flowers, horticulture, and tourism (Moyo 2000, 2008).

The current process of land alienation is widely experienced as the ‘third wave’. It has combined with the scramble for energy resources to make for a robust scramble. It includes private investors and sovereign funds, from as far afield as the United States, Europe, China, South Korea, the Gulf States, and Brazil (GRAIN 2008). It has been facilitated by neoliberal policy and land tenure changes, as well as the solid position that local and foreign capitalists have obtained. Much of the new land grabbing is associated with previously privatised large estates, but peasant ‘communal’ lands are also coming

under threat. The real causes notwithstanding, there has been a systematic effort to justify the land acquisitions as a way of plugging, once and for all, the finance and technology gaps, so as to enhance productivity, utilise ‘unutilised’ land, obtain food security, and introduce ‘green’ farming. Externally-derived examples are once again being touted, with special emphasis on the ‘Brazilian model’. One has to wonder where all the expelled populations will go. The real menace is of a twenty-first-century political economy whereby foreign-sponsored rentierism based in land and energy resources sustains large-scale rural expulsions, land degradation, and immiserisation, while militarisation and geopolitical disputes set off cycles of conflict with foot soldiers drawn from the selfsame expelled populations.

There is, of course, another scenario. It requires collective resistance to the US-led military project, such as in Southern Africa, and regional coordination on agro-industrial development, with the immediate purpose of strengthening small producers, democratising communal land ownership, and expanding women’s rights to land. Such resistance is already in force, not only in diffuse forms, but also in national policy. The recent experience of state support for small producers in Malawi against neoliberal advice, or the radical land reform in Zimbabwe and its inward-looking strategy, are the leading examples of what is possible in the development front. And it is here that the ‘Look South’ policy will stand or fall: either it will support the project of autonomous development on the continent, or deepen its integration into the world economy.

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