

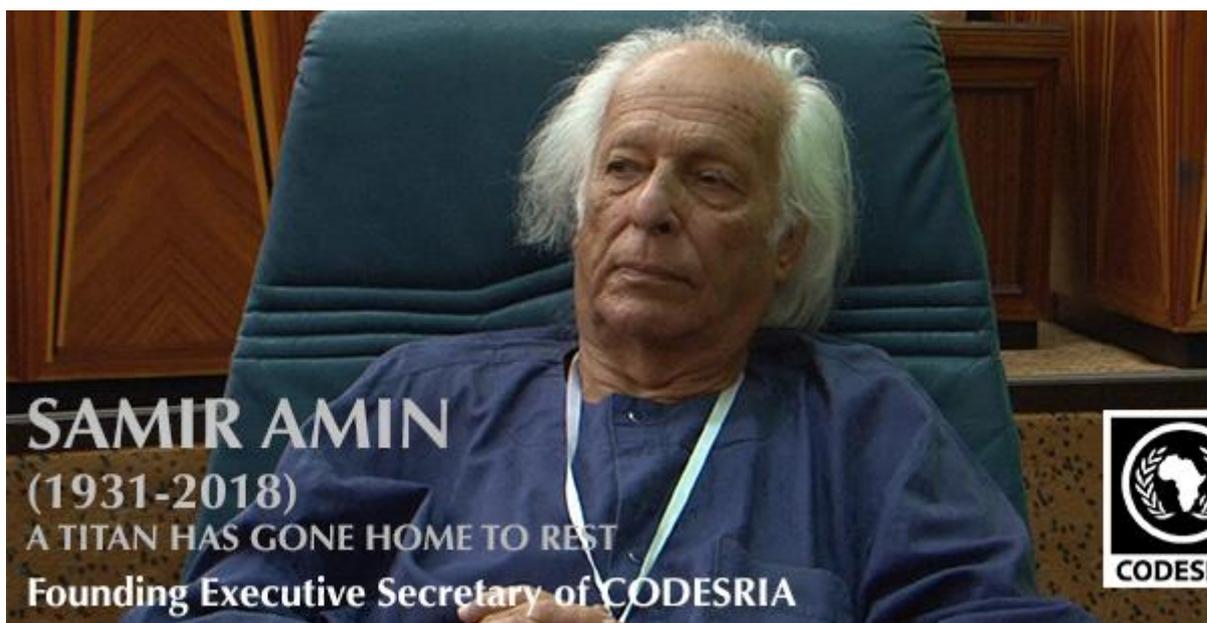


Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
Conseil pour le développement de la recherche en sciences sociales en Afrique

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CODESRIA TRIBUTE - SAMIR AMIN (1931-2018): A TITAN HAS GONE HOME TO REST

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) wishes officially to inform members of the African intellectual community of the passing on of Professor Samir Amin on Sunday, 12th August 2018. For CODESRIA, this marks nothing less than the end of an era in the history of African social research given the many pioneering roles the late Professor Amin played as a scholar, teacher, mentor, friend, and revolutionary. A model for three generations of African and, indeed, radical scholars globally, Professor Amin was that giant Baobab tree whose grandeur of intellect and spirit made him a worthy role model. While serving as Director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP), he hosted the initial scaffolding of CODESRIA at IDEP, brought together and nurtured new talent that laid the foundations which launched the Council on a path of growth and resilience to what it is to-date. Serving as CODESRIA's founding Executive Secretary, he worked very closely with Abdalla Bujra and later Thandika Mkandawire, to shape the initial years of CODESRIA's intellectual identity and trajectory.



After CODESRIA relocated from the premises of IDEP to a new home in the Fann Residence part of Dakar,

Samir Amin remained engaged with Council and its community of scholars, participating actively and effectively in all its activities. The forthcoming 15th General Assembly of CODESRIA to be held in December 2018 might be the first Assembly without Samir Amin. But his intellectual and revolutionary spirit will definitely be present even as his thoughts and ideas that he shared so generously and to the very end will continue to inspire reflection and debate.

Samir Amin's intellectual journey was long and illustrious. It was marked by commitments that distinguished him as a scholar of unparalleled convictions. He died still an unapologetic socialist academic or, as the title of his memoir reads, "an independent Marxist" whose work was driven by an unshakeable conviction to confront and oppose totalizing economic orthodoxies as a prelude to social transformation. He was steadfast in his belief that the world must shift away from capitalism and strive to build new 'post-capitalist' societies. He described capitalism as a small bracket in the long history of human civilization. His works identify and record the multiple crises of capitalism, a system he described as senile and obsolete. In its place, Samir Amin formulated a political alternative that he envisioned would proceed by i) socializing the ownership of monopolies, ii). definancializing the management of the economy and iii) deglobalising international relations. For him, these three directions provided the basis of an active politics of dismantling capitalism; a politics he committed his skill and energy to mobilizing for. Even as he grew older, he mustered fresh bursts of energy to continue the struggle.

Many of Samir Amin's writings make the point repeatedly about the urgent necessity to dismantle the "obsolete system" known as capitalism but none was as emphatic in rethinking the underlying cultural underpinning of the "obsolete system" like Eurocentricism. In that engaging publication, he provided a resounding critique of world history centered around Eurocentric modernity and invites us to understand modernity as an incomplete process that, to survive its current crises, will need "economic, social and political reconstruction of all societies in the world". Embedded in this argument is a long held position about the importance of the Bandung moment (1955) as a moment of an alternative globalization based on Afro-Asian solidarity. It is from this perspective that one understands Samir Amin's towering global outlook and presence and the resonance of his work in oppressed parts of the world.

There is no doubt that Samir Amin's intellectual presence was defined by depth of knowledge, complexity of thought and fidelity to Marxist organising principles. There is no way of summarizing the corpus of work he produced, the revolutionary engagements he undertook and the transformative potential that led him to remain steadfast even when many others were only too happy to find a good reason to backtrack and conform. His work is enormous in volume but also in the depth of its knowledge and relevance to society. He provoked and joined debates across the globe but more importantly with comrades in Latin America and Asia, those of the dependency and underdevelopment school. In CODESRIA's flagship journal Africa Development alone, Samir Amin published twenty articles. A biodata document he shared with the Council has 24 books in English and 41 in French. He is published in at least 14 different languages including English, French, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. In all these publications and in the various languages, Samir Amin articulated his belief in alternatives, a belief that remained strong even to the last month of his life on earth.

Born to an Egyptian father and French mother on 3rd September 1931 in Cairo, Egypt, Samir Amin's convictions owe much to the context of his childhood that started all the way from Port Said in northern Egypt to Cairo where he schooled. He spent his early life in Egypt where he attended his formative schooling before proceeding to France to pursue higher education at Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) where he earned a diploma in 1952 and later a PhD in 1957 at the Sorbonne. Samir later earned another diploma in mathematical statistics from L'Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. Samir had always been interested in radical thought and action from early on, noting in an interview that he already

considered himself a communist in Secondary School. Even though he and his cohort did not know what communism really meant in their early childhood, they assumed it meant “equality between human beings and between nations, and it meant that this has been done by the Russian revolution.” It is not surprising that with this pedigree, Samir Amin focused in his graduate research on “The origins of underdevelopment - capitalist accumulation on a world scale” and emphasized in his work that underdevelopment in the periphery was due to the working of the capitalist system. He consequently underscored the need to search for socialist alternatives to liberal globalisation.

Samir Amin returned to Cairo in 1957, worked briefly in Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Institute for Economic Management (1957-1960) before heading to work as an adviser in the Ministry of Planning in Mali (1960-1963). Subsequently, Samir Amin’s intellectual life became largely internationalist in orientation, and anchored principally on the question of accumulation as key to understanding underdevelopment. He maintained the sojourn between France where he took up a Professorship in 1966 and Dakar, Senegal his adopted home where he worked for ten years, from 1970 to 1980 at IDEP. Later in 1980, he founded the Third World Forum, originally hosted at the CODESRIA Secretariat, and lent his considerable weight to the institutionalisation of ENDA and the World Forum for Alternatives. His support for revolutionary politics is marked not just in the books and papers he published but also in the lecture circuit where he spoke to audiences about the persisting relevance of radical politics.

Samir Amin’s alternative thinking was in large measure defined by the solidarity built around the Bandung Conference of 1955. This remained a critical touchstone in his work in which non-western civilisations and histories played an important role. Bandung, for him, inaugurated a different pattern of globalisation, the one he called “negotiated globalisation.” Though not a sufficient basis for complete de-linking from “obsolescent capitalism”, Samir Amin saw in Afro-Asian solidarity possibilities and pathways to that delinking; the process, as he explained, by which you submit “external relations to the needs of internal progressive social changes and targets.” The notion of “delinking” occupied a major place in Samir Amin’s thinking and is positioned in contrast to “adjustment” that was the preferred approach of the Bretton Woods Institutions. He noted that delinking is in fact a process that, depending on the societies implementing it, can be used to install gradual level of autonomous development instead of countries in the periphery remaining locked into and merely adjusting to the trends set by a fundamentally unequal capitalist system.

In Samir Amin, we found the true meaning of praxis; a thinker who insisted that his work has immediate relevance to society. His departure deprives us of the practical energy he brought to our meetings and debates; and denies radical thinkers a model around whom they found the compass that enabled them to navigate the treacherous, indeed murderous, waters of capitalism. We however are lucky to have lived in his company, to have learned from his fountain of knowledge and to have shared in the passion of his convictions. The Council plans to invigorate the value of his legacy by celebrating him at the 15th General Assembly. CODESRIA remains an inheritance that Samir Amin bequeathed the African social science community. We shall never forget. Never.

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