

# SPIRIT\_47 Initiative:

A Proposal to the 6th South-South Forum on Sustainability  
of the Global University Network



Initiated by: SPIRIT\_45

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MESSAGE TO THE GLOBAL UNIVERSITY AND  
ASIAN REGIONAL EXCHANGE FOR NEW ALTERNATIVES  
FOUNDING MEMBERS

*Eka Swadiansa on behalf of SPIRIT\_45*

**To Mourn or To Celebrate, That is the Question**

I was fortunate to have, by chance, met (the late) Francoise Houtart in mid-2016. For myself, the little less than a week meeting over the 3rd South-South Forum on Sustainability organized by Lingnan University, Hong Kong; was an unplanned yet highly fruitful encounter. One that had filled-in a missing piece of the puzzle. An important piece to the Static City theorem, a heterotopic urban theory I had been working on for some years; which focused on the upbringing of systematic strategies in defending the urban-have nots based on the common values of social justice. Due to the far-reaching differences –maybe even opposite in the field of studies/interests he and I have– during the first day of the conference, I was not expecting any chemistry to happen. Against all odds, his talks on rural-based agrarian questions especially on the cases of postwar Latin America; had contributed significant insight to the development of my theory. Towards a new possibility of the ‘rural-ization of the urban geography’ (as well as enriching dialogue to the Chinese Rural Reconstruction Development?). I was however, not fortunate enough with (the late) Samir Amin.

I recently visited Paris twice, in early 2017 and early 2018; partly with the hope of ‘physically’ meeting Samir Amin; through the Bandung Spirit network and their newborn Rise of Asia Conference Series jointly organized by Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne and Universite Le Havre Normandie. In my earlier visit, he was scheduled to be speaker in the conference, but had canceled his participation few weeks prior to D-day. On the later visit, I was latterly told that he was not even in France. It is ironic, even after carefully planned my continental-long travel, fate had not granted me the long-hoped opportunity.

Unlike Francoise whom I had just known recently in Hong Kong, I have (intellectually) known Samir for sometimes; since 2010 to be precise. Earlier during my undergrad years, I wrote my thesis majoring in architecture under the guidance of my mentor, the French-educated (the late) Galih Widjil Pangarsa; whom in Indonesia is well known for his ‘anti-Eurocentric’ (architecture) theories. However at the time, I had not really known where this theory originated from, until on 2009 I met Pangarsa’s good friend; Darwis Kudhori whom later introduced me to the works of Samir Amin. So then, when the sad news broke, I witnessed how most of you had evidently suffered terrible lost. Undeniable proves how you must have been a close friend to each other –a circle of great thinkers– and for this I envy you all. For now, in such fortunate time which know not of major oppressions and distresses (such as World Wars, Ideological Wars, Pan-regionalism, rise of megalomaniac dictators, etc.); my generation had seemed unfortunately trapped within systematically engineered utopia – facing the death of meaningful movements, entangled in phantom-like stability, forever lost in the distraction of social media.

The story had presumably went on with the development of genuine academic theories within most South-South regions in all aspects of life. As 18th and 19th centuries had respectively brought Europe to the age of reason and age of movements, 20th century had brought the world the age of standardization, or rather Europeanization which would then concluded on the utopianization of the 20th century’s American dreams. It was the age when all must be seen through the standard, perspective, or point of view generated from one eye – North-North’s. Ironically, that was not always the case; even for the Europeans. During the enlightenment period for instance,

had not the basis of European science forged out of clashes of subjective oxymoronic stand points? Through carefully chartered observation, analysis, theorizations, etc.; has not the game of thesis-antithesis built upon patronal reputation always played central-role in the synthesis of new sciences? Was it not scientific ideas that matters the most? Today, after centuries-long of global academic standardization; suddenly subjectivity's position downgraded to mere opinion, while objectivity risen as the new scientific dogma. When references was back then built as case-building thesis in creating antithesis; nowadays it becomes justification tool to measure how objective a hypothesis, dictum, premise, rationale proposition, etc. is. Scientific works then became clipping of references. Not for the sake of questioning truth or for instance, seeking relevancy towards more contextual time frame or geography; but merely to justify its objectivity. And in the web of this so called 'objective knowledge'; when all references that are labelled-scientific were built over North-North-based milieus, what chance do Southern new alternatives have?

To sum up the Gordian-knot formed by these objective science; knowledge in general were then, in my opinion, herded towards over-specialized methodologies. First of all, science's last frontiers: the academies, were over-classified almost in taxonomy-like fashion. From 7 classification system of domain >> kingdom >> phylum >> class >> order >> family >> genus >> species, to systems of highly framed of political interest/common interest knowledge >> practical/academic research >> universities/institutes/colleges academy differentiation >> faculty/school (of) specialization >> department >> lab specification >> course or subject. Alienated from each other by means of blind-folded specialized classifications. Thus knowledge then became not only divided, but also dividedly classified into debris of –division of class of knowledge- egocentrically secluded to one another. Unable or rather unwilling to interact in cross-boundaries dialogues.

Returning to Samir Amin, perhaps most triumphantly through his Magnus-Opus *Eurocentrism* (1989, 2009); Samir had not only laid-out, but more importantly also layered-out a completely new navigation system to reread history of the world. Not as singular circuit of dialectics commonly practiced by Hegelian historicists, but through parallel layers of what I earlier referred as division of class of knowledge. The discourse was so rich that he had layered out different classes of dialectics from the 'more traditional' historical (periodization) reading (e.g. slavery, feudalism, nation, capitalism), to the detailing of each class (e.g. pre-capitalism, mercantilism, capitalism, globalization), as well as complicating the already complicated theoretical complex by inserting logics from other class of knowledge (e.g. modernity, modernity and religious interpretations, political Islam, central-peripheral tributary, metaphysics, Marxism).

Although in one hand his methods seemed to be so complex, his goals on the other, were arguably very much focused. From his very first work –his thesis as Francois Perroux's protégé- entitled *The Structural Effects of the International Integration of Precapitalist Economies: a Theoretical Study of the Mechanism Which Creates so-called Underdeveloped Economies* retitled from the original title of *The Origins of Underdevelopment: Capitalist Accumulation on a World Scale* (which I have never read); all the way to his more recent works such as *The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World* (2004), and *Imperialism and Globalization* (2011), the path he sought was crystal clear. It was all about the creation of new world order. The one that would paved closer road to serve social justice. As part of this dream of his, returning to the Eurocentrism-topic which I am more interested in; in the preface of his second edition Samir wrote, in my opinion, at least two very interesting logics. The first is (2009: 8):

*In this work, I propose a critique of what can be called "culturalism." I define culturalism as an apparently coherent and holistic theory based on the hypothesis that there are cultural invariants able to persist through and beyond possible transformations in economic, social, and political systems. Cultural specificity, then, becomes the main driving force of inevitably quite different historical trajectories.*

It is mostly interesting how Samir had seemed categorizes locus of knowledge (i.e. economic, social, and political systems) 'slightly under culture system' (which I loosely interpret as synonymous to culturalism). The way he uses the term culturalism (instead of culture system) also indicates the possibility of how his definition of the term culture, might even be different to what it commonly understood. However for now, to be understood for its wider meaning; it is as if culturalism structurally represents taxonomical domain which oversees smaller scopes of systems of kingdoms which includes (political) economy, social (construct), and (geo) politics. If this logic is as how Samir had meant it, then his taxonomical structure had given much more dynamic understanding to the theorization of history.

This is a very important contribution to the studies of social science, in particularly towards the study of historical trajectories. For now, as products of culturalism; historical trajectories or even hegemony can be understood as products of scientific rationale condensed in relatively long period of time, which in turn, emerge as cultural milieus. Thus, impacts of peripheral hegemony can then be understood to have risen less-from higher level of external power originated from the center (e.g. geo political protocols, globally integrated economic system; evermore abstract powers such as the invincible hand, and centuries old conspiracy theories) –which are far reaching to the peripheral societies- but more-from their own low esteem pre conditions accumulated at societal level. In another words, hegemony could always be maintained as long as the hegemonized population believes in its logic. Whereas construction of social sciences, hegemonic logics can always be neutralized or even counter-measured.

The keys are to always implore more contextual knowledge based on our-own-peripheral-story (instead of Euro-centric his-story). To conduct multi-discipline dialogues crossing any sub dividing boundaries, and to promote any new alternative antitheses in the wider platforms of multi-national peripheral societies, over its highest possible frequencies. As how it was exhibited in the Pyramid of Capitalist System diagram; the presence of throng numbers of proletarian haves not, are required to feed the few numbers of top bourgeois haves. Presumably likewise, in any culturalism construct; there must had been far less centric power in comparison to the much greater number of peripheral preys. Hence like 1947/1955/1966, it is not the accumulation of any singular power that matters the most. It is the bridging of disconnected debris, however powerless they each are – the power of the bottom of the pyramid. And geo politically speaking; Asian Relations, Asia-Africa, and Tri-Continental conferences had lend us the great examples we all have seem forgotten about. The showcase of united peripheral powers which then lead us to the second important logic (2009: 8):

*Modernity arose in Europe, beginning in the Renaissance, as a break with the “traditional” culture, which had, until then, been dominated by an ideology I have called “tributary” ... Up until that time, in Europe and elsewhere, responsibility for history was attributed to God or supernatural forces. From that point on, reason is combined with emancipation under modernity thus opening the way to democracy ... Modernity is the product of nascent capitalism and develops in close association with the worldwide expansion of the later. The specific logic of the fundamental laws that govern the expansion of capitalism leads to a growing inequality and asymmetry on a global level. The societies at the peripheries are trapped in the impossibility to catching up with and becoming like the societies of the centers ... In turn, this distortion affects modernity, as it exist in the capitalist world, so that it assumes a truncated form in the periphery. The culture of capitalism is formed and develops by internalizing the requirements of this asymmetric reality.*

For the record, I underlined parts of the quotations to make emphasis over selected phrases, and am inserting square parentheses ([...]) to include personal opinions in between truncated quotes. The first six underlines were underlined to indicate three important group of phrases, of which if rephrased would become: tributary traditional ([Eurocentric] culture), democratic modern(ity[, or rather ism]), and worldwide (expansion of) capitalism. The first two rephrases were

quite obvious, indicating the paradigm shift from traditional culture –specifically of those invented in Europe- to modernism; by means of centric-system evolution from tributary to democracy. Notice that in this first line of the quotations, Samir used the word “break with” which connotatively closer to the term “revolution”, instead of utilizing more fluid meanings such as “continuation to” as connotation to “evolution”. Thus with no presence of similar exposition, the third rephrase was indicating other kingdom of discourses; where the expansion of worldwide capitalism is, in my opinion, not representing yet another continuation to the earlier two, but rather representing something else (i.e. centric-peripheral distribution method). Positioned not as further shift or “break with”; democratic modernism was then (seen to be) distributed around the globe through the spreading of global capitalism; of which if cross referenced to his more recent works would then lead to what he later called as: “liberal virus” or “global Americanization”.

With it, there are few key points need to be broken down. First modernism which was seen as European advancement towards the creation of more rational system, had seemed sometimes somewhere somehow not working as it supposed to. Second, this supposedly rational system went astray as democracy, which became modernism forefront tool, had also not functioned as it original design-rationale; and in turn caused (as explained in the seventh underlined phrases) the “growing of inequality and asymmetry on a global level”. Notably through many of his works, Samir Amin often among others, forwarded UN’s veto as a good example to this (failed democracy at the global scale). Furtherly wide ranges of failed global (supposedly-democratic) systems then responsible in creating conditions (as explained in the eight underlined phrases) which “trapped societies at the peripheries in the impossibility to catching up with and becoming like the societies of the centers”. Making connection to the rereading of the first quotations, conditions in the peripheral domains are worsen by (as explained in the ninth underlined phrases) the “internalization of the requirements of this asymmetric realities”. Thus, other than building more contextual knowledge based on our-own-peripheral-story; it is also equally important to pay more detailed counter-studies which focused on both its Eurocentric-based early rationale-development logics, as well as its world-spreading Americanization methodologies.

Returning to earth, I feel very lucky to have cross-path with all of you. Comrades of GU and ARENA whom through common interests, are all continuously and voluntarily sharing and working on producing new theoretical alternatives, from-by-and-for ourselves – societies of the peripheries. However as most of you wrote the altogether lengthy remembrance tributes to Samir Amin, I couldn’t have written a single line; because I really do not personally know him. However, as his digitally-illegal/self-proclaimed student, I would love to commemorate him in my own style, and bring our beloved networks a little closer to his dream. Realistically I will focus to what I was trained as: architect. Hence I am proposing to organize architects meeting, of practitioners and theorists, inside our next South-South forum. However in order to enclosing Samir’s colossal dream; I will need to make some technical adjustments. First, and the foremost important measure, is that this 6SSFS’s ‘architecture package’ will need to be establish as all-invitees symposia, as opposition to the open-call format. The idea is definitely not to display some degrees of elitism, but more to serve militancy agendas. As the topic to be discussed will be strictly ideological one; say towards the creation of peripheral group of architects discussing about peripheral style(s) of architecture; I will need to make sure that all that involves in the discussion is advocating the same spirit of peripheral struggles, which in architectural point of view can then be define as the genuine Asian vernacularism. Second, both to rejuvenate our network and as direct cause to my very own limited network, I will have to focus on the younger generation. This is also partly because I would like to **attempt**, with both italic and bold style implications applied; to establish series of future events which may lead to long-standing blueprint at pre-movement level. But why blueprint? Why the 6SSFS? The answer to these questions laid on the previously discussed rereading of Samir Amin’s legacy: to break all boundaries created by the division of class of knowledge. But how to do this?

In the recent past, I have been active in a world of say, two different kingdom of knowledges: as professional through my architecture/urbanism practices/researches; and as free-thinker in the struggles-related (borrowing Samir Amin's logic) Global South counter-culturalism, especially through forums/conferences organized by GU/ARENA and the Bandung Spirit network. In one hand, discourses generated by the earlier are typically too technical, lacking sense of vision, especially those that would make contribution in changing the landscape of the currently practiced/taught heavily-Eurocentric/Americanized global, or rather one-sidedly-claimed universal theories. On the other, bringing-in the rigid engineering-related kingdom of knowledge into the highly dynamic milieus of among others, geo politics and political economies; had created void between milieus. Hence as cross-boundaries discourses were a kind of lost-in-translation, as product of these voids of debate-less sessions, essences of the subjects were then inevitably degrading into unfinished conclusions. After sometimes, I finally think that the solution to the two is to bring advantages-substitutes of the two conditions together; of which in this case, can be define as bringing-in carefully curated group of architects/urbanists into the highly dynamic discussion-atmosphere of South-South Forum on Sustainability.

The idea is to create *Internationale*-like forum which hopefully, in turn, could catalyst the birth of a new architectural movement; similar to those of *1947 Asian Relations Conference New Delhi/1955 Asia-Africa Conference Bandung/1966 Tri-Continental Solidarity Conference Havana*; which arguably fostering the birth of non-aligned movement (to be understood as postwar policies between partnering countries and not as NAM conference series), or rather the movement of the Global South. As reference, I will provide narration of precedents to visualize how, in the architecture world, modern architecture was actually given birth in similar fashion of meetings. Moreover I shall present strategical blueprint to how could peripheral-based architecture *Internationale* be formed, as well as technical drafts on how this blueprint can be executed as soon as of 6SSFS. In conclusion, with this message I am proposing the creation of new Architecture *Internationale* within our GU/ARENA networks, in order to discuss architectural/urbanism topics through Samir Amin's culturalism framing. After all... what would be better way to mourn the loss of a great thinker other than celebrating his legacy?

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