

AXIOMS OF CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION: DELEUZE AND GUATTARI MEET SAMIR AMIN

*Axiomas de la acumulación capitalista: Deleuze y Guattari
encuentran a Samir Amin*

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to develop a critical comparison between Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of capitalism on a "global scale" and the works of Samir Amin. This comparative approach is justified given the Deleuzoguattarian influence of Amin's concept of "unequal exchange" in *A Thousand Plateaus*. However, one can identify two more theoretical affinities and a point of intersection in both analyses about the capitalist system in a broader sense: a) they offer an explanation of capitalism's historical accumulation processes that contradicts the evolutionist perspective of classical Marxism and modern philosophies of History; b) both employ the concept of pre-capitalist social formations instead of the well know notion of modes of production – which involves the political debate about the State (discussed in Deleuze-Guattari's *Urstaat* and Amin's "Tributary Formations"); c) and, finally, an analytical consonance between dependency theory and Amin's notion of peripheral social formations and Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of global polarities (i.e., the geopolitical organization between center-periphery and North/South).

Keywords: Urstaat; Tributary Formations; Unequal exchange; Center-periphery; Axioms of periphery.

Resumen: El presente artículo pretende desarrollar un análisis comparativo del capitalismo en "escala global" de Deleuze y Guattari con las obras de Samir Amin. Este enfoque comparativo se justifica debido a la influencia que la noción de "intercambios desiguales" de Amin ejerció sobre Deleuze y Guattari en *Mil Mesetas*. Sin embargo, se pueden identificar dos afinidades y un punto de intersección teórica en sus análisis sobre el sistema capitalista en un sentido más amplio: a) los autores ofrecen una explicación de los procesos de acumulación históricos del capitalismo que contradice la perspectiva evolutio-

nista del marxismo clásico y de las filosofías modernas de la historia; b) emplean el concepto de formaciones sociales precapitalistas en lugar de la conocida noción de modos de producción – lo que implica el debate político sobre el papel del Estado (problematizado mediante los conceptos de *Urstaat* en Deleuze-Guattari y “Formaciones Tributarias” en Amin); c) y, por último, una consonancia analítica entre la teoría de la dependencia y la noción de Amin de formaciones sociales periféricas y la discusión de Deleuze y Guattari acerca de las polaridades globales (es decir, la organización geopolítica y geoeconómica entre centro-periferia y Norte/Sur).

INTRODUCTION

Deleuze-Guattari’s analyses of capitalism, developed in the two volumes of “Capitalism and Schizophrenia, are a product of a very heterodox reading of Marx. Promoting an untraditional interpretation, the French duo was largely influenced by intellectual movements spread all over Europe after the 60s, which didn’t quite fit classical Marxism. These new trends prospered specially in France and Italy, where a re-reading of *Capital* was undertaken by Althusser, Balibar and Macherey, along with the reception of the *Grundrisse* by the Italian autonomists such as Tronti and Negri. Within this fruitful context, the Deleuzoguattarian readings of capitalism have a strong link with all these theoretical references – even though specialized secondary literature doesn’t seem to be very interested in exploring the relationship between Deleuze-Guattari and the Marxist debates of the second half of the 20th century. A few works stand out in this respect, like Isabelle Garo’s research which explores the connection between Deleuze and Marxism (Garo, 2011, Chapters 1 and 3).

However, even in the case of Garo’s workings, some Marxist currents relevant to Deleuze and Guattari seem to be neglected or forgotten, like neo-Marxist economists engaged in elaborating the “theory of unequal exchanges”: specifically, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, Arghiri Emmanuel and Samir Amin. As far as Amin is concerned, his influence has been overt, given how he is directly quoted in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *Anti-Oedipus*, these references are located within the discussion of the “civilized capitalist machine”, outlining the processes of deterritorialization of capitalism under the paradigmatic notion of center-periphery. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Amin’s theses are addressed specifically in the “13° Plateau” (“Apparatus of Capture”), where Deleuze and Guattari explain capitalism’s axiomatics in the context of the transition from

the 70s to the 80s. There, Amin's theses on “peripheral formations” are under the spotlight, along with the idea of “axioms of periphery” – which underpins the statement that Amin is the most relevant influence regarding the theme of global capitalist axiomatics (Sibertin-Blanc, 2016, p. 197).

In a nutshell, all these passages prove the existence of a theoretical intersection between the works of Deleuze-Guattari and Amin's, which can be organized around three major topics: a) the center-periphery paradigm; b) the problem of unequal exchanges; and c) the South/North question. Beyond these points, where their thought intersects, one can also grasp two theoretical affinities presented in their works: both the French duo and the Egyptian economist rejected a certain teleological method of reading the primitive capital accumulation – which is traditionally organized by an image of evolutionary historical stages through the concept of modes of production. Dismissing this economistic reading of historical materialism, they propose – in different ways – an interpretation of pre-capitalism's history focused on the primacy of State's power of domination and exploitation, not on economic factors that would overdetermine the capitalist way of functioning (and simultaneously endorse an exclusively economistic perspective). That explains the debates around the *Urstaat* in Deleuze-Guattari and the Tributary mode of production in Amin. Therefore, in this article, we will begin by exploring what we have pointed out as the two theoretical affinities regarding these authors' work. Then, we will demonstrate how their theories intersect directly on the issues of center-periphery, social formations and the North-South relations.

1.0. Affinity I: A non-teleological proposal of History. A critical review of historical materialism

History as oriented towards a final horizon of realization, starting from an original point in time and evolving dialectically from phase to phase is precisely an image that the Deleuzoguattarian historical perspective tries to subvert in *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze; Guattari, 2005, p. 62; Sibertin-Blanc, 2016, p. 47). The rejection of this teleological conception means not only a radical disagreement with modern philosophies of history but also entails a broader critique of several evolutionist conceptions in the social sciences. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, this evolutionist view, based on categorical series for describing historical stages, can be summarized in three general schemes: a certain

economic evolutionism regarding production (*gatherers – hunters – animal breeders – farmers – industrialists*) (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 430); an ethological evolutionism (*nomads – seminomads – sedentaries*) (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 430); and an evolutionist outlook concerning social formations and their environments, i.e., an “ecological” evolutionism organized around *dispersed autarky of local groups – villages and small town – cities – States* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 430).

However, somewhere between these two poles of critique (the first concerning philosophies of history, the second, the evolutionist framework employed by the social sciences), there is a grey area, one that both authors paid significant attention to: Marx’s and Marxist interpretations of capitalism’s genesis. The traditional Marxist readings of history, underpinned by a strong focus on economics and organized by a linear development, that goes from the “primitive mode of production” to the capitalist one, is well known (Marx, 1981, p. 21). So is the controversy regarding the Asiatic mode of production that became a major problem in 20th century Marxist debates (O’Leary, 1989, p. 18-39): on the one hand, historians found no evidence of the transition from this mode of production to superior ones (Haldon, 1993, p. 14-93); on the other hand, Wittfogel’s thesis linking the Asiatic mode of production to Oriental despotism (understood as a sort of “communal production”) made Soviet Orientalists during Stalinism uncomfortable. Banned from the official Stalinist method of historical-dialectical materialism, the Asiatic mode of production was then replaced by primitive communitarianism (Dunn, 1982, p. 7-37) which influenced Deleuze and Guattari’s heterodox analysis of this theme: in both *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the duo stresses the categories of the Asian mode of production and Oriental despotism in order to describe the so-called *Urstaat* - the despotic State. The definition of *Urstaat* will be explored in the next section, but here it’s enough to point out how it represents a shift from the economic outlook to a political one, neither imposing a teleological explanation based on a vertical chain of power formations, nor proposing a trans-historical idea of the State.

One possible explanation for this theoretical shift is, as we mentioned above, the circulation of Marx’ *Grundrisse* both in France and Italy during the 1970s, especially regarding a text known as “Formen” – “Forms which Precede Capitalist Production” (Marx, 1993) - which overlooks the modes of production progression (from Asian to modern capitalism), demonstrating a more sophisticated version of Marx’s thinking. There, we find Marx’s notion of social formations – structures that correlate forms of

property, organization of labor and political forces. Selecting the communal system of primitive societies as the starting point, Marx discusses in this text some alternative forms of historical transformation arising from these early societies, such as Oriental, Ancient and Germanic social formations (Hobsbawm, 1964, p. 32). The innovation of the *Grundrisse* lies in how it proposes a multilinear perspective of historical process, more focused on the differences of various social formations – and how these societies were oriented towards use value and not exchange value, which is a mark of the capitalist mode of production (Anderson, 2010, p. 154-156). Furthermore, the so-called Oriental form (which is not exclusive to Asian pre-capitalist societies) is related to forms of appropriation carried out in communal production by an Imperial State - which is based on a divine power of despotic nature. Of all pre-capitalist forms, the Asiatic shows the strongest structural opposition regarding capitalism, since it has fully resisted internal changes, therefore persisting the longest over time (Anderson, 2010, p. 159).

Regarding the evolutionist method of reading history, Samir Amin (who was also a persistent reader of the *Grundrisse*) likewise rejected the economistic view predominant in orthodox Marxist circles. For Amin, “the degeneration of Marxism has led to a mechanistic theory of the “stages of civilization” (primitive communism, slave-owning society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism)” (Amin, 1974, p. 138), losing its scientific approach, i.e., its ability to consider history in all its particularities and concrete phenomena. In this context, he goes on by accusing the modes of production perspective of misunderstanding the connections between different domains (economic, political, ideological etc.) that characterize societies. As a result, this orthodox reading of Marx’s works “sets up as dogma the ultimate determination of everything else by the economic factor and gives the same content to this factor in all the different modes of production” (Amin, 1974, p. 138).

According to Amin, none of these modes of production has ever existed in “pure state”. By contrary, history shows how social formations came to be with different combinations of modes: on the one hand, “village community, patriarchal slavery, and simple commodity relations among heads of households of neighboring communities” (Amin, 1974, p. 141) were intertwined with “relations between the local community and other communities – relations that manifest themselves through long-distance trade” (Amin, 1974, p. 141). The combination of modes of production begs one important question: why then orthodox Marxism insisted on the idea that European feudalism was

an indispensable historical stage (a necessary mode of production) for accomplishing capitalism? Why is it considered as the only route that could lead to the transition to capitalism in global history? This question intensified several debates regarding what it takes to pre-capitalist civilizations – that many times were seen as historically backwards – to evolve to its capitalist form, as if it was only a matter of time before it could complete its historical destiny.

The retrogressive character of certain parts of the world was explained by the fact that capitalism was not yet achieved in those areas, even though they were actively participating in the capitalist international market, with money relations and a clear division of labor. Amin's response is that "Non-European pre-capitalist societies were not fundamentally different from those of Europe: they were social formations that combined the same elements as in Europe" (Amin, 1974, p. 141), so highlighting feudalism as the necessary stage for capitalist transition could be considered as an European outlook that reduced the infinite variety of Asiatic and African formations to the unique umbrella category of "the Asiatic mode of production" (Amin, 1974, p. 141). This reduction would be a product of Eurocentrism, Amin's notion that can be understood in two senses: 1) as a universal theory of world history in which European civilization is taken as singular and superior; 2) as a world political project that ideologically and culturally legitimizes capitalist expansionism (expressed in conceptions such as "manifest destiny", or "civilizing mission") (Amin, 2009, p. 154; 177-187). The first assumption had its origins in modern philosophies of history and underlies various teleological tendencies in contemporary social theories (Amin, 2009, p. 196-198; 186-187). The second has been historically embodied in colonization and imperialism narratives along with the rhetoric of the Cold War – demonstrating the efforts to legitimize European cultural and civilizational superiority and authorize centuries of domination by North-South capitalism (Amin, 2009, p. 179-187).

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that Eurocentrism as a theoretical inclination would also be complementary to the evolutionist historical orientation thesis (the one that the Deleuzoguattarian interpretation tried to avoid), which "assimilates laws of social evolution to laws of nature" (Amin 1980, VIII), going from "Engels' attempt at a Dialectics of Nature to the positivist interpretation of Kautsky, from Bolshevism itself to the Soviet dia-mat (dialectical materialism)" (Amin, 1980, p. VIII). All these affinities demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattari's investigation of capitalism is consonant to

Amin's work: not only because they developed the same strain of criticism regarding Marxist orthodoxy, but also because they tried to read capitalism as an accumulation system in its real totality: trying not to think of it as pure economical movements and structures, but also as political, social and cultural forces. In doing so, they tend to think of history not as a linear succession of modes of production, but as social formations that display different compositions depending on which part of the globe is being investigated.

2.0. Affinity II: Before Capital - State and Power in the *Urstaat* and Tributary Social Formations

In the previous section we discussed how Deleuze, Guattari and Amin revisited historical materialism as a method. However, further affinities and understandings exist in the works of these authors and in this section we will try to elucidate their accordance regarding the political notion of the State. In *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, the definition of *Urstaat* is described (the primordial State) as corresponding to an institutionalized political order that goes beyond nomadic primitivism and involves a certain degree of power centralization – a common trait undergrounding each and every State form. But this proposition begs the question if it's rather possible to consider so many different effective States under such a broad concept as the *Urstaat*, a question that even the authors answered negatively since, for instance, something like “the Modern State, its bureaucracy and its technocracy, do not resemble the ancient despotic State” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 261). This problem, then, requires asking what are the common features that underlie all variations of the State.

Having this problem in mind, Deleuze and Guattari raise the issue of how the State could evolve over time, inquiring “what are its factors of evolution or mutation, and what is the relation between evolved States and the archaic Imperial State?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 448). According to them, State development doesn't entail an evolutionist model *à la* Hegel, but it is rather about manifesting its most prevailing quality, “the perpetuation or conservation of organs of power” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 357). This tendency towards conservation is different from preserving a way of life or maintaining one's subsistence: on the contrary, it means the establishment and maintenance of certain codes that are divergent from those visible on primitive societies

without State – a movement of replacement of codes that both authors identify as the overcodingⁱ mechanism of the *Urstaat*.

The *Urstaat*, overturning the social reality of nomadic societies, of hunters and gatherers (a process of overcoding) entails the commencement of political power, changing “pre-state codes” in many ways: replacing the communal and propertyless use of land with territorial unification (which the authors define as *reterritorialization*), instituting public functions, taxation and a bureaucracy, simultaneously instilling a division of labor (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 210; 359; 427), metallurgy and animal raising (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 428-429), creating a jurisdiction with positive law, control mechanisms against several threats (police and army) (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 427; 448) and a currency (money) accepted throughout the State’s territory. This level of centralization of power is the very search for political unity – so the social body becomes the body of the Despot (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 146; 194; 211). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the *Urstaat* is therefore set up as a pole of capture, an immemorial State that overcodes what was previously inscribed in agricultural communities, where the “State apparatus is erected upon the primitive agricultural communities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 427-428) being, therefore, similar to Marx’s Asiatic formations. And since the *Urstaat* is a political concept that comprehends all State forms, it is valid for describing Imperial order (Ancient Egypt, but more evidently China), but also Modern Monarchies – giving full significance to the aforementioned thesis of the evolution of the *Urstaat*.

Even though the State in its overcoding process transforms primitive societies, the Deleuzoguattarian analysis also claims that the State constitutes a precondition for capitalism’s flourishing. The Modern State, defined as the “capitalist machine” in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, introduce a third re-inscription of codes – succeeding the first one, related to primitive societies (territorial machine responsible for coding the “full body of the earth”, (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 261) and the second (regarding the *Urstaat*, the Imperial machine, and its effort in overcoding the past primitive codes). This third re-inscription corresponds to economic flowsⁱⁱ and its movement of total decoding, the very loss of social rules, habits and representations that once regulated our social reality. The capitalist machine modifies the Modern State since it introduces flows of production, of money-capital and work (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 33; 221). The transition to capitalism is therefore described by Deleuze and Guattari as the replacement

of “territorial codes and the despotic overcoding with an axiomatic of decoded flows, and a regulation of these flows” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 261). The Despot’s body thus becomes the full body of Money-Capital.

The definition of the *Urstaat*, that evolves from the despotic State to the Modern capitalist State as variations of one single political order, was not exclusively endorsed by Deleuze and Guattari: Samir Amin also identified such a model which he called a Tributary System. Having the same disagreement regarding evolutionary stages of modes of production, which the author denotes as a manifestation of a “flagrant West-centeredness of the end of the last century” (Amin, 1980, p. 47), the Tributary System not only transforms radically communal formations, mainly primitive societies, but it is also organized around political power centralization. According to Amin, communal formations, normally investigated in anthropology and largely unknown due to the scarcity of historical documents, revolves around kinship relations which regulate both the social domain (Amin, 2011, p. 14) and the relationship between man and nature (Amin, 2009, p. 112) – being marked by a communal system of land’s property (Amin, 1980, p. 49), a great social diversity and exchange relations in short and long distances (Amin, 1972a, p. 107-109).

By the other hand, the Tributary System (which Amin analyzes in more depth), represents not a specific mode of production, but a type of social organization that controls the surplus based on a logic of centralization and distribution. In *Class and Nation* (1980, p. 50-53) and *Eurocentrism* (2009, p. 221-230), one can summarize its fundamental features: 1. The surplus produced by the Tributary society is not appropriated by an exploiting class but is extracted by non-economic means and centralized by a ruling group for collective use and redistributed according to the needs of reproduction. As a consequence, social stratification begins since exploited groups have to pay tribute to a ruling group; 2. Its essential organization is based not on exchange value, but on use value – meant for consumption either by the producer group or the ruling one; 3. There is dominance of the superstructure. Using the Marxist terminology, Amin points to the predominance of non-economic relations in the social domain. That implies the emergence of State religions as a mechanism of social consensus (ideology), like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and so forth; 4. There is apparent stability and even stagnation – a consequence of the dominance of use value –

which could lead to the false impression that Tributary Systems are intrinsically backward and not just stable (Amin, 1980, p. 53).

Even though the Tributary System in its most developed form would be China, Amin provides an interpretation of European feudalism – fragmentary and decentralized – as a type of peripheral Tributary State which, due to its “unsystematic” nature (a pre-capitalist social formation that precedes Modern era) could establish a “organization of production within the framework of a domain, involving rent in labor, and the lord’s exercise of political and judicial prerogatives” (Amin, 2009, p. 233) that would result in multiple small States as private properties, with no territorial unity and no political single order (contrary to the case of Empires). It is this fragmentation that explains the emergence of capitalism for Amin: instead of centralizing the surplus by a strong political force which will subsequently distribute it, surplus is produced in several (and small) feudal properties, then liberated to be transported and traded randomly. This is the beginning of capitalism as an order, that comes to life with mercantile exchanges and with the prevalence of exchange value – based on the flow of commodities, property and money, organized not from the *Urstaat* as an Imperial Tributary State in its most finished version, but from a variety of modern States.

The greatest result of the previous comparison between the Deleuzoguattarian *Urstaat* and Amin’s Tributary System is the explanation of the emergence of capitalism which is directly caused by State form as its condition of possibility. Of course, there are differences regarding the authors’ theoretical backgrounds and interests (one can point to the philosophical/metaphysical concerns of Deleuze and Guattari, which are so absent in Amin’s work, as one can also denote Amin’s insistence on traditional Marxist notions such as superstructure and ideology, which are definitely inexistent in Deleuze and Guattari’s texts). But it is possible to unveil a theoretical affinity between their State conceptions: on the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari try to underline how *Urstaat* as a political order organizes the social domain (*socius*) in contrast to primitive societies’ codifications in order to demonstrate the emergence of power as a political force that institutes a territorial unity, social strata and techniques of economic production. On the other hand, Amin’s proposal of the Tributary System, largely influenced by classical Marxism, points to how Tributary societies are organized by non-economic factors replacing communal social formations. In both proposals, production is carried out by

organized labor that produces surplus, not yet exchanged by monetary relations (exchange value still predominates).

It is capitalism that will make exchange value with money to be predominant, but it wouldn't succeed in this task if Modern State (a variation of the *Urstaat*/a Tributary Social Formation) couldn't prevail. Capitalism wouldn't exist if it wasn't for the State form: it's what makes capitalism possible, what explains its transition from European feudalism – not as a superior economic mode of production *per se* and not because it is the necessary step before capitalism happens according to the five universal stages of historical development (primitive, Asiatic, slavery, feudal, capitalist), but because it was the first moment that a loose order of production-redistribution, organized through political power and territory, occurred. That is also the reason why capitalism didn't prosper first in other parts of the world (like China, which was so much more developed than Europe before the XVI century). It takes the Modern State with its political power apparatus, not so strong as in an Empire (that suffocates competition and regulates labor exploitation), but just the right level of bureaucratic and political arrangements entirely mobilized to accomplish capitalist endeavors. Departing from the State form, what then is the capitalist system according to our authors? This last problem will be discussed in the next section.

3.0. Intersection: the axioms of periphery

The exact date of birth of the capitalist system is an object of controversy. One thing is certain: the XVI's mercantilist phase played a strong role in what this system came to be. It is not only the moment when America was invaded (transferring major exchange routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic), but also when relations between colonies and metropolis were consolidated. Marx named this movement *primitive accumulation*, mainly based on exploitation of resources and the installment of the plantation and *hacienda* economies. This exploitation process (that accomplished primitive accumulation) became an important object of investigation and grounded interpretations like Gunder Frank's metropolis-satellite relational axis – which states that once a country or a people is converted into “the satellite of an external capitalist metropolis, the exploitative metropolis-satellite structure quickly comes to organize and dominate the domestic economic, political and social life of that people” (Gunder Frank, 1969, p. 10).

The metropolis-satellite structure, with its exploitative logic (Gunder Frank, 1969, p. 282), was the starting point of an everlasting inequality that began with the extraction of resources. But this inequality was actually consolidated by an economic mechanism named *unequal exchange*.

The neo-marxist concept of unequal exchange, formulated by Arghiri Emmanuel (1972, p. 161) and sustained by Amin (1974; 1980; 2010) throughout his career, explains how the unbalanced condition between center and peripheries was maintained. In order to better clarify how Amin understood the center-periphery relation, it is important to elucidate more about the concept of unequal exchange – as outlined below. Amin approached this conception in many moments of his work, specially trying to refute classical economic theories, mainly Ricardian ones about comparative advantages. Amin's idea was to address the complex dynamic of world trade which engendered a structural economic disproportion among regions in the world. To explain this concept succinctly, we could say that, in a nutshell, unequal exchange happens when products of unequal value (with different prices of production) are traded, even if the productivity of labor is the same. So basically, given two distinct products, both are produced with the same level of productivity, the same amount of work, but they are exchanged by different values (eventually one is going to be cheaper than the other). This difference of value means not only that there is a variation on prices, but also that one has a lower production cost – which means that necessary labor for its production has to be less rewarded.

Two consequences can be derived from this thesis: one is the exploitation of work producing those cheaper products (that have different rewards for the same productivity). The other is the transfer of value (Amin, 1974, p. 115; Amin, 2010, p. 84-85) as result of unequal exchange. If two products are exchanged by different values, it is easy to see how it entails a process of accumulation, since the buyer of the cheaper product has a significant advantage – a process of value transfer that is nothing less than the appropriation of surplus value. According to Amin, this mechanism is exactly what explains primitive accumulation in mercantilist era, through capitalism expansion to pre-capitalist areas, spreading market relations that would eventually cover the entire globe (Amin, 1972, p. 708; Amin, 1974, p. 94; Amin, 1994, p. 337-339). But it also explains why an economic imbalance produced by international trade seems to persist, penalizing the same set of countries and always privileging others – and here we grasp Amin's acclaimed differentiation between capitalist centers and peripheries (Amin, 1974, p. 134).

In exchange relations, countries that hold better positions in terms of trade tend to begin a process of development and become the centers of capitalism. Meanwhile, countries with more disadvantaged terms of trade (whether due to differences in productivity, low wages that block a domestic market, or disparate technological relations) tend to evolve into peripheral areasⁱⁱⁱ.

We formerly discussed Amin's refusal to define global history using modes of production as criteria. What he will use instead is a Marxist social concept (that is not presented in *Capital*, but is debated in the *Grundrisse*), i.e., social formations. Consonant to World Systems' Theory, Amin's description of capitalism revolves around a structural geographical organization axis of centers and peripheries – interrelated locations showing a fundamental disequilibrium between each other. And this imbalance is mainly derived (historically and economically) by unequal exchange. According to Amin, even though it started during colonialism – mercantilism in America, but also within imperialist processes that marked the XIX century that wiped out the African continent – unequal exchange, and therefore center-periphery relations, persists today as a form of contemporary accumulation of capital. That is the core of Amin's explanation of how different social formations exist: since capitalism is from its beginning a heterogeneous system, its development necessarily involves global areas based on different levels of socioeconomic organization and development. How can one identify and describe peripheral social formations then? Unfortunately, it is not possible to reproduce Amin's analytical exposition at length – which Deleuze and Guattari will quote and use it to ground their own analysis of global capitalism in *A Thousand Plateaus*, as we will discuss later – but it is possible to summarize it in the following points (Amin, 1974, p. 390-394)^{iv}:

1. In peripheral social formations, the onslaught carried out by capitalism causes certain crucial retrogressions, such as the ruin of the crafts without their being replaced by local industrial production. These retrogressions will determine pre-capitalist areas to have an extroverted economy (production oriented towards the center) and won't be corrected by foreign investment.

2. The relationship between center and periphery develops significant distortions like peripheries developing mostly an economy of exports activities, displaying a level of wages lower than those of the center, a hypertrophy of the tertiary sector and being condemned to develop only light branches of economic activity.

3. Peripheries won't respond to Keynesian multiplier mechanisms since their surplus is transferred to the center.

4. Peripheries are impotent in challenging monopolist production from the centers, their economic growth is blocked, which denotes an almost perennial situation of subordination from the centers.

5. They will therefore show a dominance of agrarian capital and ancillary (*comprador*) commercial capital which demonstrate how peripheral national capitalism suffers with strict limitations, making their development dependent on political relations.

In this sense, Amin and Emmanuel's concept of unequal exchange involves a very specific form of inequality: the center, benefiting from the transfer of value (transferred from peripheries to the centers), peripheries being economically depleted from the centers^v. It uncovers capitalism's double movement, which operates since the very beginning of this system: the capitalist form of accumulation penetrates pre-capitalist areas, exporting its functioning mechanisms – like the market, labor exploitation, monetary relations and so on – and once it is installed in those areas, the second movement starts, the process of unequal exchange. Those flows indicate that centers and peripheries are interrelated, but they also disclose something more fundamental, grounded on capitalism essential dynamics: *the fact that peripheries are only peripheries because of the centers and vice versa*. According to Amin, the high wages in the center (so traditional in European and North America's Keynesian Welfare State) are only possible because there are low wages in peripheries (Amin, 1974, p. 115), which means that high consumption at the center is only possible because there is a small internal market at peripheries with economic activities destined to exportation.

And that is why we can return to Gunder Frank's *dependentista* analysis of the underdevelopment (Fajardo, 2022, p. 166-167)^{vi}. Gunder Frank addresses the issue of development, not always prioritized by Marxist *intelligentsia* (Foster-Carter, 1978), pointing to the generally held conception that economic development occurs in a succession of capitalist stages and that underdeveloped countries are still in a backward phase, with an uncompleted capitalist economy. But these analytical terms only make sense in the context of capitalism's expansion to former colonies. This allows Gunder Frank to point to historical evidence that demonstrates that "underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and the now developed countries" (Gunder Frank, 1970, p.

4). It confirms the idea not only that capitalism's accumulation started with colonialism, but also that metropolis-satellite relations engendered development and underdevelopment – an intertwined process that explains inequality between center and peripheries, using Amin's and World System's Theory terminology^{vii}. In conclusion, underdevelopment is not a symptom of economic backwardness. Neither it is due to the fact that satellite areas had their historical transition blocked to a superior stage in the modes of production chain, needing to "catch up": "underdevelopment is not the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history" (Gunder Frank, 1970, p. 9). It is rather generated by the same historical process related to development: *capitalism itself*.

This long explanation about unequal exchange, peripheral social formations and development/underdevelopment begs the question of how it fits the Deleuzoguattarian interpretation of capitalism in *A Thousand Plateaus*^{viii}. The latter, which is specially discussed in "13th Plateau", is organized through axiomatic propositions that elucidate the very nature of capitalism. The duo's efforts are engaged in showing how this system works and how it can be transformed and changed in time. In "13th Plateau", we can then apprehend three axioms relevant to our task here: 1. Saturation (regarding Marx famous chapter on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall); 2. Models, isomorphy (which deals with heterogeneous forms of State); 3. The included Middle (discussing unequal exchange and bipolarity between North-South or center-periphery geopolitical axis).

Saturation of capitalism concerns mainly the tendency of the rate of profit to fall because it explains the movement of crisis and expansion of capitalism. Profit from production, decreasing in time, is an index that commodities are not being absorbed by demand. And since this insufficient demand could lead to an overproduction crisis, a reversal of the tendential atrophy in the consumption market is needed. The most obvious solution is to expand capitalism to areas that were not yet engulfed by it (as we saw, colonialism and the formation of international capitalist trade). In this way, capitalism "confronts the limits of the Universe ... But all it confronts are its own limits (the periodic depreciation of existing capital); all it repels or displaces are its own limits (the formation of new capital, in new industries with a high profit rate)" (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 463). Deleuze and Guattari's notions of capitalist decoded flows expresses exactly this expansionist movement. On the one hand, the flow of labor, on the other, flow of capital, both being conjugated: "capitalism forms when the flow of unqualified wealth encounters

the flow of unqualified labor and conjugates with it. ... This amounts to saying that capitalism forms with a general axiomatic of decoded flows” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 453).

The conjunction of free exploitable labor and unregulated wealth circulation resonates to the transfer of value and dependency relations between centers and peripheries. Peripheries/satellite areas provide the labor force and exploited work, centers/metropolis drain value and wealth with transfer mechanisms provided by State apparatus – State codes now being strategically used to foster and improve capitalism in Deleuze and Guattari’s words (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 434). This exposes heterogeneous forms of State that coexist with each other. It is true that “international economic relations, and at the limit all international relations, tend toward the homogenization of social formations” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 436), and yes, all social formations tend to become isomorphic since they are comprehended in one centered world market. But our authors warn us not to confuse “isomorphy with homogeneity” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 436), which means that international capitalism only assures isomorphy on the center (where domestic market is developed and expanded), and then, it requires a certain peripheral polymorphy, i.e., the heteromorphic social formations of the peripheries, combining “an ultramodern capitalist production (oil, mines, plantations, industrial equipment, steel, chemistry), but which are nonetheless pre-capitalist, or extra capitalist” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 436). This heteromorphy is nothing but the center-periphery organization, derived from unequal exchange, something that Deleuze and Guattari (2005, p. 468-469) agree by directly quoting Amin and demonstrating the validity of dependency and domination of peripheries from the centers:

The third fundamental bipolarity is the center and the periphery (North-South). In view of the respective independence of the axioms, we can join Samir Amin in saying that the axioms of the periphery differ from those of the center ... central capitalism needs the periphery constituted by the Third World, where it locates a large part of its most modern industries; it does not just invest capital in these industries but is also furnished with capital by them. The issue of the dependence of the Third World States is of course an obvious one, but not the most important one (it was bequeathed by the old colonialism). It is obvious that having independent axioms has never guaranteed the independence of States; rather it ensures an international division of labor (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 465).

By affirming a fundamental bipolarity between North and South, both Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge a global geopolitical and “geo-economic” division (Sibertin-Blanc, 2016, p. 194-195) overtly aligned to what Amin and Gunder Frank proposed regarding metropolis-satellite and center-peripheries. These divisions have the fundamental aim to address criticism of contemporary capitalism. If back in the days of Marx, exploitation was seen in the context of the bourgeois class (the owner of the means of production) that exploited and subjugated the proletariat, today exploitation happens between regions of the world: certain localities and countries comprehending global peripheries are the very *loci* of appropriated work and resources from the centers, in a sense that Northern high levels of consumption and wealth is directly provided by the Global South (Barbour; Hickel; Lemos, 2024).

CONCLUSION

Even though the terminology of Three Worlds idea has disappeared nowadays, the North-South contrast remains a potent theoretical differentiation in order to address territorial disparities “overdetermined by emerging social inequalities - not just ethnic, but class and gender – that render the South a site of internal contradictions and conflicts” (Dirlik, 2007, p. 15). Contemporary social theories deal with this issue stressing problems as they denounce Occidental knowledge hierarchies (like Decoloniality) and claim for cultural recognition (Multiculturalism). However, criticism targeting world capitalism is not only still necessary, but is mostly elaborated by Schools of thought influenced by Marxism (even though with certain restrictions or occasional criticism). This is the case of Marxist *dependentistas*, World-Systems Theory and, as we tried to demonstrate, Deleuze and Guattari.

The main conclusion we have come to from our previous exposition is that the critiques developed by these authors are grounded on the evidence that *capitalism is not a homogenous system*. Historical evolutionism – largely accepted by orthodox Marxists, which proposes an evolution of modes of production – is not a valid perspective, since world history doesn’t evolve in a single pace: not every country in the world had a historical development directly oriented by the five universal stages of history (primitive, Asiatic, slavery, feudal, capitalist). Sometimes it’s a combination of all of them in the sense that they coexist. The capitalist system is neither pure economy. It is formed by

different aspects and forces, it displays different social, political and cultural relations, all intertwined and differing from place to place. Different States have different capitalist organizations – which explains why the authors prefer the Marxist notion of social formations instead of modes of production. And finally, capitalism as a world-system shows a strong disequilibrium between centers and peripheries, a disbalance that appeared from the very start, ever since pre-capitalist areas (former colonies) were engulfed by world market in a process of unequal exchange – and which eventually led to relations of underdevelopment in peripheries and development in the centers.

In this article, we tried to address how Deleuze and Guattari agreed with Amin about these problems. But there is one focus of disagreement that we need to draw attention to. In the “13th Plateau”, Deleuze and Guattari point to the moment when the “periphery and the center exchange determinations” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 468). According to them, “a decoding of the center in relation to national and territorial aggregates cause the peripheral formations to become true centers of investment” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 468), obliterating the centers’ economic stability. In this sense, “central formations peripheralize. This simultaneously strengthens and relativizes Samir Amin’s theses” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 468-469). Center and periphery are interrelated concepts, and just like development/underdevelopment, it’s a relational axis that depends on context and locality. This clarifies the Deleuzoguattarian diagnosis originally written in 1980, which affirms how “the States of the center deal not only with the Third World, each of them has not only an external Third World, but there are internal Third Worlds that rise up within them and work them from the inside” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 468). Peripheral zones of underdevelopment are today installed inside the center, internal Third Worlds, internal Souths, which explains impoverished areas in the Global North, where “masses of the population are abandoned to erratic work (subcontracting, temporary work, or work in the underground economy)” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 468). This reflects with the most frightening accuracy today’s precarious and informal work conditions and, in this context, Deleuze and Guattari’s dialogue choices shift from Amin or Gunder Frank to theorists from Italian *Operaismo* – something that justifies Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri’s allusions in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 271).

What then are the alternatives proposed by our authors to deal with today’s capitalist phase, especially concerning neoliberalism and globalization – world tendencies

they came to witness in life? For Amin, it is a delinking movement that would give economic options with popular relevance to countries (Amin, 1990, p. 62), therefore reorganizing the global system while grouping scattered parts of the peripheries, starting a new age of “Non-Aligned Movement” (Amin, 1994, p. 347). On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari come up with the idea of “becoming of minorities” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 469-471): when minority groups unite their struggle and demands surpassing the majority system’s power. All these positive propositions derive from their common investigation of capitalism’s nature and mode of functioning which we tried to expose in this present article.

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ⁱ For a clarification of the notions of codes and overcoding, see: Reed (2008, p. 142); Zourabichvili (2003, p. 28); Buchanan (2008, p. 31); Smith (2011, p. 49); Sibertin-Blanc (2009, p. 130).

ⁱⁱ About the notion of economic flows, which marks a break off with a substantialist ontology (defended by some Marxists) grounded on the division between base and superstructure, see Garo (2008, p. 67). For a definition of the concept of flow in Deleuze's work, see Zourabichvili (2003, p. 17-19).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is worth quoting at length how Samir Amin explains the connection between unequal exchange and the formation of peripheries and centers of capitalism: "The relations between "advanced countries" and "underdeveloped countries cannot be understood within the context of analysis of the capitalist mode of production. This question is actually a matter of relations between different social formations: more precisely, between those of the capitalist center and those of the periphery of the system. Analysis of these relations forms the essence of a study of accumulation on a world scale. It reveals the contemporary forms assumed by the mechanisms of primitive accumulation: unequal exchange, that is, the exchange of products of unequal value (or more precisely, with unequal prices of production, in the Marxist sense – the social formations of the center (since the appearance of monopolies) and of the periphery (where the precapitalist economy provides reserves of labor power) allowing of different rewards for labor with the same productivity" (Amin, 1974, p. 134). Therefore, places with more disadvantaged terms of trade tend to fall victim to the process of transfer of value (caused by unequal exchange), thus becoming peripheries of capitalism, and places with better terms of trade benefit from unequal exchange, developing and becoming centers of capitalism. This is connected to the wage gap between these places - peripheries show lower rewards of labor and greater work exploitation, while the centers have better wages and thus greater capacity to satisfy their consumption needs.

^{iv} The following points are also what Deleuze and Guattari called "axioms of the periphery" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 465).

^v Larrain wrote an excellent comparative summary about the concept of unequal exchange developed in the works of Amin and Emmanuel. "For Emmanuel: unequal exchange in the strict sense, is when the exchanging countries, start from different levels of salaries and have different rates of surplus-value. (The country with the lower level of wages has the higher rate of surplus-value and vice versa). In this case the country with the higher level of wages gets part of the surplus-value produced in the country with the lower level of wages, even if the total capital invested is the same in both countries and there is a higher organic composition in the backward country: it thus becomes clear that inequality of wages as such, all other things being equal, is alone the cause of the inequality of exchange ... Amin also insists that in order to improve Emmanuel's conception of unequal exchange one must take into account the fact that most of the exporting sectors of the third world use the same advanced techniques as similar sectors in the developed world and yet pay less to their workers. By introducing the notion of productivity, Amin arrives to what he labels a "superior" and correct definition of unequal exchange: "the exchange of products whose production involves wage differentials greater than those of productivity". Amin adds that not all exports from the third world are produced within a capitalist mode of production but that this does not affect unequal exchange" (Larrain, 1989, p. 134-139).

^{vi} The fact that theories of world-economy and dependency theory were major influences for Deleuze and Guattari was already proven by Sibertin-Blanc (2016, p. 40). It should be pointed out that "dependency theory" – i.e. theoretical productions developed by those who were considered as *dependentistas* (whether written in Portuguese or Spanish) – has become an umbrella term designating different perspectives to the unequal relations between peripheral and central economies concerning the issue of development/underdevelopment in Latin America (Fajardo, 2022, p. 165; 178; 196). The polysemy of the vocabulary "center-periphery" marks different views to the problem of development/underdevelopment in the intellectual environment of the economic thought of Latin American (Fajardo, 2022, p. 12; 41; 210).

^{vii} To see more about World-Systems Theory and how its proposal in reading capitalism as a world-system organized by unequal exchange – a thesis defended by Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, Wallerstein and Giovanni Arrighi –, see Larrain (1991, p. 114). There is also one strain of interpretation that considers Dependency Theory as a form of transition from classic Marxism to Neo-Marxism (Gosh, p. 2011). Regarding Amin, there are those who consider him a Marxist *dependentista* (Katz 2019, Chapter 3), a

statement that received some criticism given Amin's extended scope of investigation, ranging economics and history (Katz 2019. XIV), and his positive project of uniting revolutionary nationalism with socialism in different parts of the Third World. The Deleuzoguattarian reading of Amin's work seems to be more aligned with this last point (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005, p. 566).

^{viii} This long examination of unequal exchange is relevant since, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it is an axiom "indispensable to capitalism's functioning" (Deleuze; Guattari, 2005, p. 468). It is possible to affirm that, while using development/underdevelopment and braudelien world-economy in *A Thousand Plateaus*, there is a "global history" framework of analysis. On the contrary, in *Anti-Oedipus*, their comprehension of history is more focused on criticizing ironically teleological tendencies in a "universal history" perspective. We can grasp their clear preference regarding this subject: "Less from Condorcet, Comte, or Hegel, than from Fernand Braudel, Andre Gunder Frank, and Samir Amin" (Sibertin-Blanc, 2016, p. 47).