

# The relevance of the concept of imperialism in contemporary capitalism

Claude Serfati, CEMOTEV (University of Versailles-St-Quentin) and IRES

Eighth Annual Conference in Political Economy

Berlin School of Economics and Law

September 13 - 15, 2017

# Lay-out of the talk

- *KEY IDEAS IN IMPERIALISM THEORIES*
- *THEORIES OF IMPELIARISM CHALLENGED FOR DIFFERENT REASONS*
- *IMPERIALISM AND UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT*
- *WHAT DETERMINES THE POSITION OF A COUNTRY IN THE WORLD SPACE*
- *THE '2008 MOMENT'*

# Three key ideas in imperialism theories

- There are a few key concepts threading all marxist theories of imperialism, they include :
- The **world** as the relevant level of analysis of capitalist dynamics
- Domination of **financial monopoly capital**
- The world space as **structured by economic and political forces**

# Theories of imperialism challenged for different reasons

- 1) Description of a closed historical period, and centrally a) the ‘merger’ of industrial capital and banks , b) the end of inter-imperialist wars as a result of economic rivalries.
- 2) Theories flawed from the very beginning :
  - *“I would go much further than Wood and argue that the theories they produced were not adequate to their time either”* (Harvey, 2007)
  - *« The classical theories were defective in their historical reading of imperialism, in their treatment of the dynamics of capital accumulation, and in their elevation of a conjunctural moment of inter-imperial rivalry to an immutable law of capitalist globalization”* (Panitch, Gindin, 2004)

# *IMPERIALISM AND UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT*

- Two dimensions in *Imperialism*
  - a) a specific and changing configuration of world capitalism since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and
  - b) the status of specific countries.
- They are related with each other : the concrete characteristics of a country reflect the general trends of the global dynamics :
  - they are an “ original combination of the basic features of the world process” (Trotsky,1931)
  - *the world market is [...] the domestic market of all foreign markets* (Marx, 1857-58).
- There is nothing like a ‘Global capitalism’ because capitalist social relations are politically built and territorially defined

# *WHAT DETERMINES THE POSITION OF A COUNTRY IN THE WORLD SPACE*

- The international status of a country is determined by both its *economic* and *military* power.
- The way economics and military interact concretely *within* individual countries is determined by :
  - The (economic and political-military) transformation of the world space.
  - their individual position in the world space

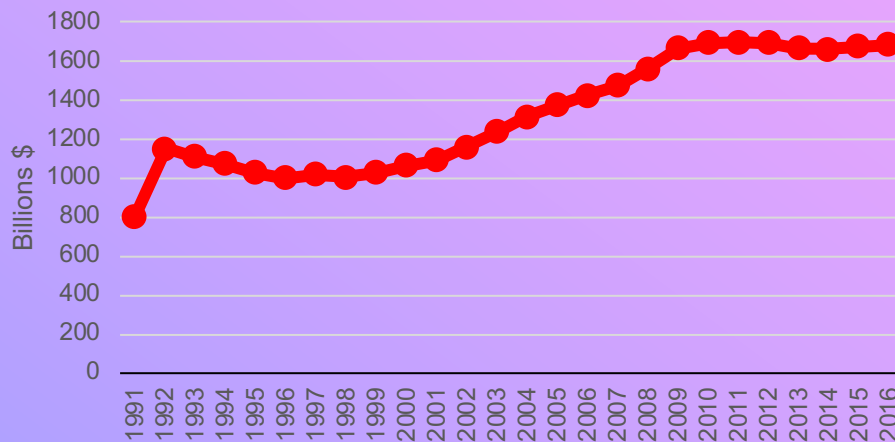
# *Post WWII: new configuration of imperialism*

- The US have combined an extraordinary economic might with an overwhelming military power.
- This international military role has been ‘*internalised*’ in domestic social and political relations (before WWII, the MIC did not exist, as milexp were under 1% of GDP vs 5/6% in the 50/60%, and 3,6% in 2017)
- Not an *Empire*, but a ‘Hierarchical transatlantic bloc of states’

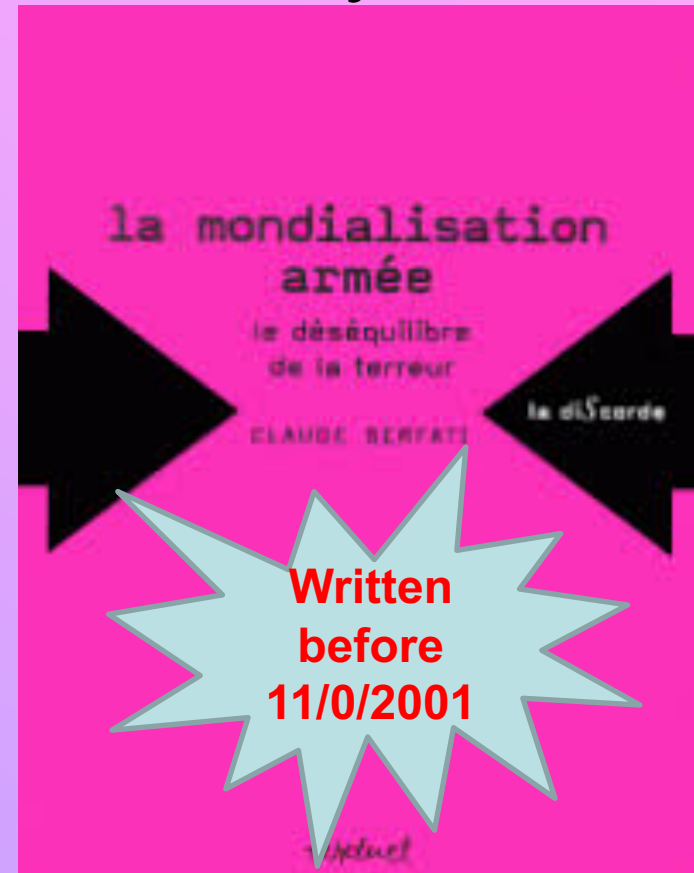
# *Post WWII: new configuration of imperialism*

- 1990-2017 : An armed globalisation, not a PDF- format one (Peace-Democracy-Free markets)

The armed globalisation : World military spending



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# *THE '2008 MOMENT'*

- Applying this framework to the contemporary context : dramatic changes in the economic and geopolitical setting ( 'the 2008 moment')
  - financial crisis morphing into a ' great recession' (M. Roberts) reflecting the internal limits to capitalist accumulation finance-dominated
  - Revolutionary movements shaking state apparatus in Maghreb and Middle-East ('Arab spring')
  - US and the world : The cumulative effects of unwinnable wars, financial crisis and the inability and unwillingness of the US Administration to rule the 'world disorder'

# *THE '2008 MOMENT'*

- France is a major capitalist country
- An unique role for the military because of :
  - The ubiquitous presence of state in *social* and *economic* relations,
  - The core role of military institutions in the state
- France's military surge in the late 2000s : a leverage to compensate for the steady decline of its economic 'competitiveness', in

particular in Europe (growing asymmetric relations in the French-German 'couple')

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Thank you for attention