

## **Doyen of ‘Dependency Theory’\***

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Theotonio dos Santos (1936–2018), who passed away on 27 February in Rio de Janeiro, has been one of the major proponents of dependecia or dependency theory, along with Andre Gunder Frank, Giovanni Arrighi, Samir Amin and, to some extent, Immanuel M Wallerstein. Continuing to provide inspiration to large sections of people, including social scientists and activists in different parts of the world, dependency theory has been important for those interpreting the growing disparities between the advanced and the developing world.

Santos had a particularly marked presence in Latin America, both through his writings and in his active involvement in political struggles against authoritarian rule. Exiled from his homeland, Brazil, because of his opposition to authoritarian rule during the late 1960s, Santos went to Chile where he developed his new theoretical ideas while assuming a militant role in the socialist party of Chile. At the same time, he continued to be involved in activities of the revolutionary organisations in Brazil. With Augusto Pinochet’s military coup in 1973, Santos was expelled from Chile. His next exile in Mexico, from 1974, led to the publication of *Imperialism and Dependency* (1980). The book addresses the sociopolitical and socio-economic history of developing countries from the point of view of the dependency theory, particularly in the context of the Brazilian crisis of developmentalism.

Santos finally returned to Brazil in the early years of the democratic transition in the country and has continued to be engaged since then in activities seeking a progressive and democratic state of economy and social order. In his book, *Brasil, la Evolución Histórica y la Crisis del Milagro Económico* (1978) (*Brazil: The historical evolution and the crisis of economic miracle*), he analyses the sociopolitical and socio-economic history of the country from the approach of dependency theory, and the crisis of Brazilian developmentalism and [Brazilian “economic miracle.”](#) He published a trilogy, including *To Teoria da Dependência: Balanço e Perspectivas* (2000) (*Theory of dependency: Balance sheets and perspectives*), *Economia Mundial: Integração Regional e Desenvolvimento Sustentável* (*World economy: Regional integration, and sustainable development*), and *Del Terror a la Esperanza: Auge y Decadencia del Neliberalismo* (*From terror to hope: The peak and decline of neo-liberalism*).

The theory of dependency as developed by Santos had a wide influence in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While in Chile, he had already published, in [1969](#), a book titled *Socialismo o fascismo: Dilema Latinoamericano* (*Socialism fascism: The Latin American dilemma*), which made dependency theory emerge in the ongoing debates in the social sciences. By then, it was already evident that economic development does not take place in stages, but that the “backward” state of a large number of economies originates from the relation underlying world capitalism between “centre” and “peripheral” countries. Thus, the fight against dependence implied a break from imperialism and even with capitalism itself.

Santos was also actively involved in a number of organisations, bearing testimony to the formulation of the dependency theory and its relevance. Among other things, Santos was the coordinator of the UNESCO/UNU Chair and Network on Global

Economy and Sustainable Development or REGGEN. REGGEN meetings were attended by scholars from developing countries beyond Latin America as well. Santos had also been a professor at the state university of Rio de Janeiro (Uerj), [the Federal University of Minas Gerais](#) and [Fluminense Federal University](#), where he was professor emeritus.

Time will bear testimony to the contributions of Santos, as a scholar, a theoretician, and an activist who spent his life in articulating the demands for development and spelling out the injustices in the present world order under globalisation.

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