

6. Debate on the Geoculture of the World-System

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In different publications,² I. Wallerstein insistently states, in diverse ways, the following four thesis: a) There was no 'geoculture' during the first three centuries of the world-system, that is to say, before the French Revolution; b) With the French Revolution, we finally found a 'geoculture', but as a tension established by three ideologies: conservatism (right), liberalism (center) and socialism (left); c) Liberalism was the prevailing ideology during two centuries (1789-1989), nonetheless, it collapsed at the same time that real socialism dissolved in 1989 (the 1968 Revolution, that coincides with a Kondratieff B-phase); d) The American hegemony has come to its end, just as the Modern Age, which started 500 years ago, so we are open to a New chaos Age, a 'Dark Age' which will continue until a new civilizing system (between 2025 to 2050) is established.

I would like to discuss these four theses in the light of a different diagnosis taking into consideration and affirming the proposal of a world-system, which began at the end of 15th century. In this light it appears then that: a) There were modern 'geocultures' before the French Revolution. b) The historical juncture where the configuration of the three ideologies (conservatism, liberalism, and socialism) takes place cannot be restricted to the events of the French Revolution. c) During 1989 the liberalism in crisis gives way first to a conservative neo-liberalism, and then to an economy of liberalized markets linked to the hegemony of the global power of transnational companies and also to the financial capital being in the hands of a worldwide private technocratic bureaucracy. d) The American hegemony, far from having decreased, does not cease to grow, especially after the Gulf War and that of Serbia, where it exhibits a military (as well as political and economic) preeminence over Japan and Europe. The Serbian War is the first reaction of dollar against euro. Unfortunately, in contrast to what Wallerstein seems to believe, perhaps the coming years do not foresee a New Age, but an increase of the economic and ecological polarization under the U.S.-hegemony.

In addition, all this takes another meaning when looked at from the South (from below), from a non-Eurocentric position.

Renaissance, Humanism and Baroque Culture

We coincide with I. Wallerstein that the world-system begins to unfold from the 'invasion of the autochthonous cultures', from what will be called Latin America (1492). But, there are two issues connected to this thesis: a) We talk of the 'first' world-system, because there were indeed interregional Asia-Afro-Mediterranean systems before,³ but not 'world' systems properly speaking (because what will be called America was not

included). A. Gunder Frank well noted that the system's background is at least 5000 years old.⁴ The last system was centered in the Baghdad region (founded in 762 and destroyed by the Turks in 1258: 500 years of non-interrupted hegemony), Samarkand, Kabul, extended throughout the Moslem world from the Atlantic in Morocco to the Philippines in the Pacific. The 'first' world-system starts with the Hispanic hegemony (Wallerstein forgets this and starts the hegemony with the United Provinces), during which the Genoese financial capital acted as an internal moment (an issue misleadingly treated by Arrighi).⁵ The Renaissance is not the beginning of modernity (Arrighi) but only its prehistory. The Renaissance belongs to the Mediterranean history and to the connection between the old system (Moslem) and the Latin Christianity (peripheral). Seville faces towards the Atlantic; it becomes the 'center' of modernity of the world-system.

b) Thus, the first modernity -and with it the first 'geoculture' -is the Hispanic Renaissance humanism of the *Castilian Grammar* of Nebrija (dated 1492), of the Indies Chroniclers, of *Don Quijote de la Mancha* of Miguel Cervantes, maimed during the Battle of Lepanto, when Spain gets hold of the Mediterranean over the Turks in 1572. It could not be any other way. Carlos V's Empire (the first frustrated try of a world-system) is a first stage of modernity already distinguishable from the old system (Moslem). Ginés de Sepúlveda is a modern thinker; he justifies the conquest by saying that the barbarians had no private property nor did they know about inheritance, nor had they fortified cities or any writing (as was believed at the time). The Inquisition is the first modern intelligence service, which 'homogenizes' the participants of the political body (still based on a religious criterion: to be a Catholic). The Archive of the Indies will become the first demonstration of the existence of a modern bureaucracy at the service of a state. Mercantilism is the first stage of capitalism. In addition, colonialism plays its first role, and Latin America is the first periphery of the world-system. Thus, in 1492 four phenomena arise at the same time: 1) World-System; 2) Capitalism (still mercantile); 3) Colonialism, 4) Modernity (as a cultural phenomena of the 'management' of the Europe's 'Centrality' within the world-system).

The ideology of this age already gives expression to the centrality of the individual; the 'I, the King' extends to each conqueror, to each colonist, to each European before the 'barbarians'; the self- assessment of European superiority over all other cultures; the invasion and the political and economic dominance carried out by means of the best technology (in shipping, military, agriculture, transport and communication: the compass, the cannon, the iron tools: the axe, the plough, the pick and the shovel, the horse and written document, etc.).

The second geoculture was the baroque culture (the 'fold' culture), in Latin America and in Spain, Flanders, Germany, Italy, etc., a hybrid culture, of the exuberant, of the golden color (the Latin American precious metals), of hierarchies, of interiority, of chiaroscuro. These are the light and shadow paintings of Velázquez (and later on the Flemish Rembrandt). Its artistic architectural culmination is found in the Jesuit temple in Quito, in Tepozotlán (Mexico) in the 17th century and in the Gesù Church in Rome.

The First Bourgeois Geoculture

The second modernity, still mercantile, that of the United Provinces (Holland) (starting approximately in the 1630s), which is an extension and modification of the baroque culture (the Flemish art), but characterized by a properly bourgeois cultural structure of cities such as Amsterdam, Bruges, Antwerp, and supported by a modern manifesto of *Discours de la Méthode* of René Descartes (who studied in La Flèche with the Jesuits of Southern France) or the later political rationalist philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (from a Jewish family of Hispanic-Portuguese origin, as can be imagined).

The third modernity, now under French and English hegemony (and since 1815 the exclusive English hegemony after Napoleon's defeat) is marked for example by John Locke (in the English empirical tradition) and by the Calvinist Presbyterian reform of John Knox (with respect to the Scottish Edinburgh of Adam Smith, among many others). This could be seen as the beginning of liberalism, which was at first a revolutionary movement against the landlord's power and the Anglican tradition of the monarchy.⁶ It is evident that during the English Revolution of 1688 all this is already present, but not with the ideological clarity of the second bourgeois revolution of 1789.⁷ Wallerstein shows how the central thesis of the French Revolution marks the expansion of liberal ideology. This liberal ideology opposes conservatism ideology -from works such as those of J. de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France* (1789) or those of E. Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) -and already in 1794 with the 'Revolution of Equals' it is clearly differentiated from the ideology of the first socialists.

For Wallerstein the two-century-period (1789-1989) of hegemony of the liberal geoculture takes place, obviously, at the 'centre' of the world-system. It would be interesting to ask here what was happening during this time at the 'periphery' of the world-system. How was Latin America, Asia, or Africa processing modernity, and this in relation to their own evolution and to their 'pre-modern' cultural assumptions? Samir Amin spoke of a 'blockade'⁸ in the development of the peripheral world.

From Latin America's point of view, the process of the French Revolution was lived as a starting point -together with the American colonial emancipation, the previous Indian rebellions of Peru and the 'comuneros' of Colombia -of the colonial emancipation. Liberalism will acquire an autochthonous physiognomy of struggle against the metropolitan and colonial state; it will be the base of the assertion and the justification for the creation of a state of popular sovereignty, this time for the first time without bothering, but on the contrary defending the rights of the bourgeois citizen against an absolute, not yet existent state. This will determine a Latin American process, which is completely different from the European-U.S. State (with a classic liberalism from the 18th century onwards), and different from the African and the Asian process -which will only live the experience of colonial emancipation during the second part of the 20th century - while Latin America began its emancipation at the beginning of the 19th century.

However, the most interesting contrast appears in the midst of the 20th century, when, fully struggling for hegemony in the capitalist world (1914-1945) before the English decadence and the development of Germany and Japan, the U.S. bursts into the world geopolitical scene. The economic crisis of 1929- which does not play a central role in Wallerstein's interpretation -will, on the contrary, be central for some peripheral countries such as those of Latin America.

In fact, the war between the European metropolis and the United States will give rise to a certain hegemonic nationalism amongst a growing industrial bourgeoisie (in Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, China, still colonial India, etc.), which will see the war as an opportunity for economic, political and cultural independence. The bourgeois project of national autonomy will set forth the phenomenon of 'populism' (with Vargas in Brasil, Cárdenas in México, Perón in Argentina, Arbenz in Guatemala, Nasser in Egypt, Sukarno in Indonesia, etc.) This 'populism' of the periphery had a certain resemblance with the Nazism or the Fascism (German, Italian or Japanese), which also rebelled against the English or French hegemony. Projects of a national independent capitalism (hegemonic in the Nazism, simply autonomous in the Cardenism in México) appeared at that time. They were not liberals; they had more of a conservative ideology, but they were modernizing industrialists, nationalists and anti-imperialists. It is an ideological phenomenon, which does not enter into the scheme of Wallerstein, but it continues to be highly important throughout the peripheral world (85% of the current humanity). The failure of the populism movements and the appearance of neo-liberalism, the 'liberalization of the national markets' by the transnational industrial capital, or more specifically by the financial speculative capital following the 'privatizations' (as an ideology of the IMF), cannot be exclusively explained by the ideological crisis of liberalism, which stands in the 'center' of the world-system, as Wallerstein tries to do.

Neo-Liberalism and Liberalization of the National Markets

The disappearance of the Soviet Union led to the end of the 'Cold War' existing since Yalta. Traditional thought returned to power. With Reagan, republicanism passes on to an aggressive phase. The ideology, which had been practiced -since the Chilean *coup d'état* of A. Pinochet in 1973- was the neo-liberalism of F. Hayek or M. Friedman. This ideology grew out of the Cold War and whose opponent, of course, was the real Soviet Socialism, replaces, at least 'to the outside', liberalism. It had democratic pretensions and a certain progressiveness at the social level -carrying out the necessary reforms in order to avoid the social explosion. Neo-liberalism, both under the dictatorships as well as later when the Soviet Union ceased to be a permanent threat (prior to 1989), then becomes aggressively orthodox and places the market as a last reference of rationality and possibility of modernization and economic development. The market as an utopia is way beyond liberalism; it represents a centrist ideology with democratic pretensions.

Neo-liberalism has no other demand than the freedom of competing in the market without monopolies (not even the state, which must be reduced to a minimum, nor the unions, which exercise a monopoly in the environment of fixing the salaries, etc.).

This economic ideology operates in favor of the expansion of the hegemony of the 'center' of the world-system, especially the hegemony of the United States dominating Latin America, which has been submerged since the beginning of the B-phase of Kondratieff's cycle by an external artificial debt that grows day by day.⁹

Slowly, ideologically conservative neo-liberalism gives way to a new more 'economistic' ideology: the theory of the liberalization of the national markets linked to privatization, as a form of hegemonic presence of the global power of the transnational companies, and of financial capital in the hands of a worldwide private technocratic bureaucracy.

All these steps are no longer of a liberal cut. They do not require a democratic process of respect of the individual rights; instead they demand efficiency in the competence of running the world market in which we must know how to participate if we do not want to be punished by remaining 'out of the game'. Thus, a perverse argument for the liberalization of the national market arises when -as a demand for modernization -the transnational capital (industrial or financial) demands from the national state (a) to create free infrastructure as a condition for possible investment; (b) it also requests tax privileges, under threat of investing in another more 'profitable' country; (c) to pay minimum salaries using the same excuse (of investing in another country with a lower salary mean); (d) and lastly it also requests privileges to repatriate the profits (always with the same argument). The national state becomes increasingly weakened,¹⁰ because of being deprived of the taxes of its citizens, and at the end it profits little from that 'passage' through the national territory of those 'short term' capitals. Even though the transnational companies need the national state -to create the infrastructure as was mentioned, to ensure and restrain social conflicts and, especially to retain within its borders the impoverished masses, which would otherwise emigrate to the 'central' countries of the world-system -they weaken it to achieve larger profit margins. Of course, we are speaking of a peripheral state -not the G8, until recently the G7 -because the central states of the world-system are home-countries of those transnational capitals.

The American Military Hegemony. Modernity and Post-Modernity

Among the home-countries of the transnational capital (industrial and financial) there is one state that -compared with the European States, Japan, Canada, etc. -holds a particular position. I wish to bring to your attention an aspect frequently left aside: the aspect of military power. Since 1989, and considering the crisis of the old Soviet Union, the military hegemony of the United States today has no counterpart. The other members of the G8 cannot counterbalance this, only perhaps Russia could with its nuclear missiles, which are at risk of shortly being 'out of service'.¹¹ That military

primacy is of utmost importance in the world-system -at the economic (the dollar is still the world currency) and the political level (its ability to impose its will at all levels, including the economic level, as could be seen during the Japanese crisis), and the military structure is the last instance for monopolistic coercion of an international power. The United States itself practices this since the end of the Gulf War in the person of G. Bush. The Gulf War -contrary to what Wallerstein seems to believe -has allowed the United States to physically occupy the center of the most important oil reserve in the world. The United States had been unable to do this before because of the presence of the Soviet Union in the area and considering the military balance at the time of the 'Cold War' -Israel was the security for American interests in the Middle East -that is to say with respect to the strategic oil reserves for the 21st century. Once the United States is firmly installed (not the European Union or Japan which, nonetheless, paid the war 'expenses', which represented to the American weapon industry an enormous profit, only surpassed by the current war in Serbia), Israel loses its geopolitical importance and will slowly transform itself into just another country of the Middle East.

Faced with the acceleration of the European Union and the rising of the euro as a currency which could become a shadow for the dollar, the United States encourages a war against Serbia, which generates a crisis for all social-democrat Europe, for the pacifist and green groups (which must contradict their already diminished ideological criticism), and specially to their economies -because, as already pointed out, a large portion of the war 'consumables' are manufactured in the United States -and thus, the large weapon-producing transnational companies once again 'sell' their latest novelties at a good price. The United States will emerge strengthened from this war and Europe highly weakened (economically, politically, culturally and ethically).

If the American hegemony has not come to its end, the next half-century will not be one of radical changes with respect to the last 500 years. What is more, it is the culmination of a process begun in 1492 and now under global hegemony for the first time in world history (which not even Spain, the United Provinces, France or the United Kingdom ever exerted in such a universal way).

In this context I would like to consider one last issue. An overview seems to emerge from our analysis. In brief:

a) In the first place a transnational power appears (industrial and financial, the latter increasingly growing), handled by a technocratic private bureaucracy, located at the 'center' of the world-system, which possesses a globalization 'strategy' (which uses to its own benefit the globality of history at this point of development). The United States, being the home-country of the most developed corporations (for example, in computer technology and communications), and the dollar still being the world currency, holds the last real and concrete guarantee, the last instance, the military power which may coerce its competitors to comply with their obligations (or to fulfill the obligations which the United States unilaterally and, at its convenience, may impose).

b) Faced with this global power the states (mono- or multi-ethnic such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland or India), which are the last political instances for the defense of citizens (the people of the Earth), are weakened, reduced 'to their minimum' (Nozick), pressed to comply with the demands of the transnational power. However - and as George Soros predicted in his last work¹² -either the national states regulate politically and economically the global capital, or chaos will predominate on the world capital market. Thus, the paradox is that the national state, although weakened, is placed as a 'last hope' for that same world capital market.

c) In this situation the citizens are transformed into consumers of an anonymous market without inter-subjective structures, which may link their subjectivity to the global society. The isolated consumer, the seer of the communication means, is cornered to a depoliticized life. A certain depoliticization without ethics makes a change from a cult to modern individuality, which paradoxically is expressed under the name of 'post-modernism'. This is criticism of modern rationality in the name of the latter cultural situation of modernity itself. Post-modernism may be considered as a last expression, a 'geoculture' of the world-system in the current stage of capitalism which uses an aggressive globalization strategy, specially through the means of communication, specifically electronics.

d) In the meantime, the vast majority of humanity -which the Human Development Report 1997¹³ declares is about 80 percent impoverished -mostly lives in rural areas or in marginal urban areas, and continues a traditional life within the structures of ancestral cultures, modified at times superficially by the 'geoculture' of the 'center' of the world-system, but far from eliminating those ancestral structures. The problem of a world-system culture and its clash with the multiple cultures existing in Africa, Asia, Latin America and in various regions of Eastern Europe (and even in Western Europe), reflects that at the end of 500 years of modernity the majority of the human population is either excluded from the supposed progress of modern civilization, or else it is confronted with a progress against its own culture, against its own way of life, a process of alienation of its own personality.

It would seem that there will still be for some decades: a) an American hegemony; b) that modernity will attempt to redouble its efforts in a capitalist globalization strategy; c) that it will continue to produce the negative unintentional effects already known: ecological destruction of the planet and an increasing poverty of the world's population.

Who could change this historical route? Who could imagine a future trans-modern, post-capitalist, egalitarian society? Maybe only the contradictions of the system itself, which we have not analyzed in this paper; the reevaluation and beginning of a clearer politics of the states to regulate the transnational power and, thus, a strengthening of the democratic and popular state; the organization of new social movements (in the national states and internationally) to create an ethical consciousness

against the collective suicide towards which humanity is heading; the slow emergence of a project to replace the void left by liberalism and socialism -maybe even including the best of both.¹⁴

Faced with the skeptic 'disenchantment' of many, it will be necessary to hear the voice of the oppressed -such as that of the Mayan Indians of Chiapas -who suggest that life does not surrender so easily in the face of death.¹⁵

Notes

1. E-mail dussamb@servidor.unam.mx; Page-Internet <http://www.laneta.apc.org/afyl>
2. See *After Liberalism*, The New Press, New York, 1995, and in 'Discussion Notes' by Immanuel Wallerstein, written for the conference 4-5 June 1999.
3. See 'Historia Mundial de las Ernicidades', my *Ethic of Liberation on the globalisation and exclusion age*, Trotta, Madrid, 1998, pp 24-89 (to be published in English by Duke University Press, Durham),
4. See André Gunder Frank, 'A Theoretical Introduction to 5000 years of World-System history', in *Review* (Binghamton), 13 (2), 1990, pp. 155-248,
5. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, Verso, London, 1994, On the other hand, the research carried out by Arrighi and his students on Far Eastern cities, sufficiently (such as those of the Renaissance) developed to give birth to a capitalist system, is extremely interesting. The whole process collapses when Europe -by the concrete fact of the incorporation of Latin America as periphery of the first world-system - arrives at the southeastern coast of Asia, and creates a 'central' hegemony of such a world-system, The world-system destroys in other regions its autonomous process.
6. Read the revolutionary élan from Locke, Chapter 19 of the II Treaty of the Civil Government, wherein he justifies the use of weapons against the tyranny which tortures oppressed people,
7. I believe that the first bourgeois revolution failed in 1521, when Charles V, arriving from Flanders suppressed the rising of the 'comuneros' in Valladar, who were fighting for the rights of the cities and bourgeois privileges. Medina del Campo was the centre of the growing Castilian bourgeoisie with respect to the exploitation of wool and a textile pre-industry. That defeated bourgeois revolution of the 16th century defines the history of Spain, Portugal and Latin America until our times. The 'Conquest' was not carried out by the bourgeoisie, but by the lesser nobility in decadence ('Hidalgos').
8. For example: 'The blockade of the commercial formation: the Arab World and the Negro Africa' (El desarrollo desigual, Editorial Fontanellas, Barcelona, 1974, pp. 34ss),
9. In truth, Latin America did not need any credits. Before the production crisis the United States 'sold' leftover production money, initially to private companies, which when being insolvent used the state as guarantor, Afterwards the debt is endorsed to the state, and it is the people with its taxes who must pay a debt it did not contract and did not need. A new mechanism -even more ill-fated than slavery -is the transfer of surplus value from the periphery to the centre. It is a sort of colonialism and industrial property dependency, The value is directly transferred as interest on a fictitious loan but which is paid with oil, agricultural products, mining, etc., by the 'peripheral' country.
10. Wallerstein declares that the transnational corporations are not the cause of the weakening of the states, because they truly need the states. The contradiction is in that double standard: they weaken the state and, nonetheless, they need it.
11. Regarding those old missiles, Russia still has a certain power, which it has not known how to use due to the weakness of its less intelligent, decadent political bureaucracy, With those missiles, maybe Europe could, in the near future, recover some autonomy from the American hegemony.
12. *The Crisis of Global Capitalism*, Perseus Books Group, 1998,
13. UNDP, Oxford University Press, New York, 1997.
14. A question we have dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6 of *Ethics of Liberation* (1998) already cited,
15. Ibid.