

## **DEPENDENCY THEORY AND THE WORLD-SYSTEM**

Author: Claudio Katz<sup>1</sup>

World system theory has influenced many areas of contemporary social science. It was elaborated by Immanuel Wallerstein from a wide study of contemporary history and a detailed critique of global capitalism. His approach has many convergences with the Marxist dependency theory. He gathered ideas of that conception and influenced the dependence theorists' debates. Several authors have explored the relationships between both visions: In what areas do they converge, diverge and complement each other?

### **CYCLES AND HEGEMONIES**

Wallerstein estimates that capitalism emerged in Europe 500 years ago with a direct physiognomy of a world-economy. It emerged from the exhaustion of a previous world-empire regime that had succeeded the mini-subsistence systems.

The North American scholar considers that the most primitive formations operated around the extensive division of labor, in very diverse cultural settings. He believes that the later scheme developed in extensive geographies with centralized political regimes and that the third model is still in force today. Globalized capitalism is based on multiple political structures, geographical division of labor and a great variety of national states (Wallerstein, 1979: 489-492).

This system appeared with the crisis of feudalism (1300-1450) and spread worldwide. It quickly distanced itself from other regions such as China, which had reached very similar levels of population, territory and technology. The engine of this push was the prevailing economic-military rivalry between absolute monarchies. The clash between those states encouraged the association of new bourgeoisies with old aristocracies, reinforced accumulation and paved the way for global trade (Wallerstein, 1979: 182-230, 426-502).

Since then, the world system has ruled on the planet through four secular cycles that are distinctive of capitalism. The initial phase of large expansion (1450-1620 / 40) was succeeded by a long crisis (1600-1730 / 50), which led to a phase of exceptional development (1730-1850). The fourth period persists to the present day and would be the last in this modern universe (Wallerstein, 2005: chapter 2).

The systemic thinker estimated that expansive and contractive cycles of 50-60 years have regulated these phases. Kondratieff fluctuations, operating as predictable sequences within processes of longer duration, determine the course of the world system (Wallerstein, 1984: 5).

The American theorist estimates that an interstate structure has functioned on an international scale with changing hegemonies. Each supremacy emerges as a result of bloody wars that secure the dominance of the winning power. Eventually the economic superiority of the victor is undermined by rivals, themselves copying

---

<sup>1</sup> Economist, CONICET researcher, UBA professor, member of the EDI. His website is: [www.lahaine.org/katz](http://www.lahaine.org/katz)

innovations and avoiding war expenses incurred by the dominator. This same sequence is repeated by the winner of the next stage (Wallerstein, 1999 to: 279).

After the Iberian predecessor, the Netherlands commanded the first significant leadership, leveraging its advantages in trade, intensive agriculture and textile manufacturing. That supremacy was challenged when England and France had reached a certain parity of development. Overseas control was the key to British success. It allowed to establish colonies than offset the inferiority in terms of population and internal resources. Those implantations facilitated the accumulation of currency and the control of a large international market (Wallerstein, 1984: 50-98, 102-174; 1999: 83-99).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the hegemony of the United States was also the result of victories at the international level. For Wallerstein, the rudder/tiller of the world-economy is always defined on this external terrain. It was there that the American superiority over its competitors (Germany and Japan) and subordinates (England and France) was settled.

This succession of hegemonies is explained by the competitive nature of the system, which prevents the consolidation of totally dominant imperial centers. That is why the three attempts to achieve absolute control failed (Carlos V, Napoleon and Hitler). The world economy is recycled through the self-destructive dynamics that generate the proper exercise of hegemony.

## **ORDERS AND HIERARCHIES**

Wallerstein explains various operating principles of the world system. He underlines the continuing expansion of that very circuit, by incorporating external areas to a segmented structure between central countries and suppliers of raw materials. As the world-economy expands, all regions of the planet are incorporated into this device (Wallerstein, 1979: 426-502).

America was incorporated during the Spanish conquest and Eastern Europe when it consolidated its food exports. India, the Ottoman empire, Russia and West Africa entered by being subjected to the demands of the international division of labor.

This subordination strengthened the labor and productive specializations of each zone. The early industrialization of England, France, and the Netherlands determined the primacy of free labor. In North America slavery prevailed to ensure the provision of inputs to the Old Continent. In Eastern Europe servitude was imposed to guarantee grain supplies, and in intermediate zones - like Italy - mixtures of wage and forced labor predominated (Wallerstein, 1979: 93-177).

With this approach, it is considered that capitalism debuted as a globalized system and consolidated with the inclusion of countries at the top, middle and bottom of its structure. The central, peripheral or semiperipheral location of each country determined the prevalent type of labor exploitation.

The exported product was also crucial. Those that were incorporated in a subordinate manner contributed with goods required for the production of more elaborated commodities. When the integration was completed, some replaced their old role as sellers of secondary (or luxury) goods with a new role as suppliers of specific inputs (Wallerstein, 1999 a: 183-207).

This mutation determined the specialization the Indian subcontinent in the production of indigo, silk, opium or cotton and the transformations of the Ottoman

empire to a cereal exporter. West Africa strengthened its specialization as producers of palm oil and groundnuts and Russia consolidated its sales of hemp, flax and wheat.

These incorporations into the world-system, in turn, caused the destruction of old local manufacturers. In India, textile production was demolished and in the Ottoman empire the productive centers of Anatolia, Syria and Egypt crumbled. In Africa, the embryonic manufacturing modalities were pulverized. Only Russia resisted the buffeting because of the relative strength of its army (Wallerstein, 1999 to: 207-212).

The systemic theorist understands that the locations and hierarchies of each region are reproduced through a chain of products, which assembles all the participants in the same world circuit. Through unequal exchange and the polarized flux of commerce, the connections reinforces the predominance of certain central zones. The system includes, therefore, the constant recreation of underdevelopment.

The same global hierarchy is also reproduced with industrial transformations that modify the location of the different branches. The presence of the textile industry portrayed a central economy in the 16th century. But that same activity was in the nineteenth century representative of a semiperipheral country and became characteristic of a periphery at the end of the twentieth century. The chain of products adjusts to the periodic reorganization of the stable hierarchy of world capitalism (Wallerstein, 1986).

This analysis also considers that the world system works through a political structure which reaffirms the central, peripheral or semiperipheral location of each country in the global hierarchy. This localization is coherent with the preeminence of strong, weak and intermediate states. The various state formations coexist through mutual recognition, which ensures the international legitimacy of each country (Wallerstein, 2004: cap. 18-19).

These states are indispensable for commodifying the labor force, for ensuring the collection of taxes, guaranteeing profits and socialize risks. Capitalism needs territorial jurisdictions and defined borders to externalize the costs of large investments and sustain policies of protection or trade liberalization (Wallerstein, 1988: 36-48).

The decisive gravitation that the American theorist assigns to the state contrasts with the secondary role he attributes to the nation. He considers that these last entities were formed as simple derivations of the states and have served to unite individuals around patriotism, the school system and military service (Wallerstein, 2005: chapter 3).

With similar reasoning, it is argued that race emerged as an entity adapted to the place that each human group occupies, in the international division of labor.

Free white-skinned workers, black slaves, and mestizo serfs were separated by the prevailing pattern of exploitation in each segment. The ethnic group was in turn used to assign specific jobs to the different communities in each country. Therefore, the genetic notion of race, the socio-political concept of the nation and the cultural category of ethnicity were defined by their role in the world-economy (Wallerstein, 2004: chapter 1).

## **RELATIVES WITH DEPENDENCY**

Wallerstein elaborated his conception by adopting several postulates of Dependency Theory. He shared criticism of liberal theories of development and positivist conceptions of modernization. He questioned the presentation of the West

as a model to imitate and argued against the myth of achieving welfare through the simple expansion of capitalism.

But he objected to these concepts without accepting the developmental alternative and rejected the perspective centered in the nation-state. The American thinker emphasized the desirability of adopting to the world economy as the starting point for all studies.

With that gaze, he placed himself on the opposite path of institutionalism. He debated Weberian approaches that explain development by contrasting different pathways of national development. He developed that approach with the same vehemence that postwar Marxists displayed in their controversies with the Keynesians.

By stressing on the impact of unequal exchange and describing income transfers to the metropolis, this vision of capitalism converge with dependency theory. It characterizes that system as a regime of exploitation subject to growing imbalances and insurmountable contradictions. It remarks the polarizing dynamics of a structure that reinforces the separation between advanced and backward economies.

The affinity with *dependentismo* is also verified in the evaluation of the fate of those underdeveloped countries that provide inputs to the metropolitan industry. This specialization obstructs the internal development of the periphery.

Wallerstein also tuned with Latin American Marxist theorists, in interpreting accumulation on a world scale as a process that compensates declines of profits with cheaper wage costs. That is why he studied how the exploitation of workers in the periphery counteracts the retraction of profits in the center (Wallerstein, 1988: 24-30).

The coincidence with dependency is also verified in the critique of evolutionary political strategies and national capitalism projects in underdeveloped countries. Wallerstein used that foundation to reject the rigid historical scheme of successive modes of production and to postulate the international character of the passage from one system to another.

## **TUNES [SINTONÍAS] AND DISTANCES**

The positive reception of world systems theory among dependency thinkers included certain differentiations. Dos Santos distinguished three similar strands/approaches to the center-periphery relationship.

On the one hand Dos Santos estimated that Wallerstein placed the issue in the conceptualization of historical capitalism, of a structure that expanded in conflict with other systems. He then considered that Amin investigated the same problem from the Asian-African universe, placing greater emphasis on the evolution of the Third World.

Finally, he showed that his look (alongside Marini and Bamberra) addressed the issue from the Latin-American situation, distinguishing central capitalism, dependent countries and socialism (Dos Santos, 1998).

These general coincidences were ratified by Amin, who highlighted the preeminence of complementary formulations of the same problem. The Egyptian economist highlighted the confluences in the characterization of the origin and polarized functioning of capitalism (Amin, 2005).

He also stressed the usefulness of Wallerstein's approach to record the international dynamics of the law of value and the gravitation of processes of transfer of surplus value. He considered that the world-system allows observing the unity of these phenomena, overcoming the conceptualization of the world market as a mixture of juxtaposed components (Amin, 2008: 234-236).

Other researchers highlighted the affinities between the three visions (Martins, 2011: 265-266), highlighted the enrichment that their encounter generated (Herrera: 2001: 201-220) and presented the systemic vision as a continuity of dependency (Blomstrom; Hettne, 1990: 243-244, 247-248).

A few others, in turn, pondered the influence of Wallerstein on Dos Santos, considering that it contributed to overcoming the *identitarian* ingredients of the old dependency. With the comprehensive vision of the world systems, the unilateral approach to underdevelopment as a "Latin American thought" was dissolved and the concept of dependency was revised, as a mutable relationship within the world-economy (Niemeyer, 2005).

These diagnoses of confluence have coexisted with characterizations that highlight the differences. They emphasize that the systemic approach favors global logics, in front of the *dependentista perspective* that enhances the dialectical interaction between the center and the periphery (Sotelo, 2005). They also estimate that Wallerstein fails to perceive the specific significance of Latin American dependent capitalism (Osorio, 2009: 41-44). These problems can be clarified by specifying what are the notions that approximate and separate the two theories.

## CONVERGING CONCEPTS

Wallerstein introduced several notions that expanded a shared view of contemporary capitalism. He illustrated how the industrialization of *medium* economies studied by Marini is intertwined with integrated global manufacturing processes.

In this way, he placed the dynamics of dependent reproduction in the trends of world accumulation. He explained how underdeveloped economies participate in international product [commodity] chains and why only certain countries on the periphery develop a manufacturing profile.

The American thinker stressed that capitalism recreates a stable global stratification. It demonstrated the preeminence of a hierarchy that reproduces non-elective situations of dependency and perpetuates the center-periphery polarization (Schwartzman, 2006).

This vision reinforces all the postulates of dependency, which underline the strict limits that capitalism imposes on any transformation in the international status of countries.

Like Latin American Marxists, Wallerstein deduced this stability from the rigidity of the international division of labor. He highlighted the existence of a stable architecture in changing geographical settings. He observed that the alterations in the center-periphery pyramid unfold mostly within each segment. Only in a few historical circumstances do some central economies degrade to the peripheral level and the same exceptionality applies in the opposite direction (Aguirre Rojas, 2007).

Wallerstein postulates a zero-sum principle in the internal mobility of each section of the world system. It considers that the rise of a component tends to be compensated by the fall of an equivalent portion.

In these same terms, the thinkers of dependency reasoned underdevelopment. The world-system theory provided new arguments to support shared theories of structural recreation of global inequality.

But the American author also introduced a concept of semi-periphery, to illustrate the existence of intermediate situations, which historically operated as rise or fall links in the world system. He pointed out that along with the hegemonic powers

there were always intermediate formations that cushioned global inequality. The semi-peripheral situation expressed the decline of old powers to medium-sized situations (Spain) or the transition to positions of world domination (United States, Germany) (Wallerstein, 1984: 248-267, 313-329).

This logic of trimodal development was exposed to overcome the simplifications of the dual scheme bequeathed by Prebisch (center-periphery) and recreated by the most rudimentary anti-imperialist approaches (empire-colony).

The new model not only clarified how income transfer works on an international scale. He also renewed studies on the alliances between hegemonic centers with subaltern partners, to guarantee the stability of capitalism and incorporate new areas into the world-system (Chase Dunn, 2012).

The same scheme was suggested but not made explicit by dependency theorists. Marini investigated the peculiarities of the industrialized Latin American economies and distinguished them from the purely exporting countries of raw materials. Bambirra exposed the differentiation between models with different degrees of underdevelopment. The notion of semi-periphery is in fact present in these approaches and that familiarity was recognized by dependency theorists (Dos Santos, 2009).

Wallerstein also used an approach very similar to the dependent cycle theorized by Marini, to underline the place occupied by each economy in the world productive circuit. This view distanced itself from Prebisch's initial model, which only studied the insertion of the periphery in networks of exchange.

Therefore, there are many thematic coincidences between the world system and dependency. What are the areas of divergence?

## **SYSTEMS OR MODES OF PRODUCTION?**

Dependency theorists pointed out that Marxism has been a terrain separating them from the world-systems driven approach (Dos Santos, 1998; 2000: 456-470). Wallerstein only accepts the Marxist typification when that characterization implies a generic identification with radical thoughts or attitudes. It does not share the usual application of that theory (Wallerstein, 2013: 202-210).

Some interpreters of their approach emphasize its compatibility with Marxism (Penston, Busekese, 2010). Others even consider that it reformulates Trotsky's presentation of the world economy, as a totality structured around the division of labor (Doronenko, 2005).

But what is being discussed is not the author's labels, but the meaning of his concept of system. This notion articulates his entire viewpoint. Wallerstein recalls that he began by studying social conflicts and then investigated how the consensus of values operates in African reality and European history. From this research, he deduced the need to prioritize the world context understood as a system (Wallerstein, 1979: 7-18).

He developed the latter category as an analytical perspective or a paradigm and left further [theorizations] of the concept to a more complete theory as an open [question] (Wallerstein, 2011).

The system contains many proximities with the Marxist notion of mode of production that Latin American *dependentismo* used. But both notions presuppose different [reasoning/explanations of] social development.

Wallerstein points out a difference in the gravitation assigned to exploitation of labor as a pillar of different social regimes. Mini-systems, the world empire and the world-economy are not conceived around that foundation. This is why the American theorist contrasts his models with the old scheme that attributed to Marxism the

succession of modes of production (primitive collectivism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism).

The divergence does not lie in the existence of a successive order, since the systemic thesis also contains phases [escalonamientos]. The inexorable passage from one scheme to another is not central either, since this simplification was only characteristic of the most dogmatic forms of Marxism.

Not even Wallerstein's method is the source of controversy. It adopts the notion of system with a multidisciplinary approach, which breaks the tradition of fragmented studies in separate subjects. He rejects the division between economics, political science or sociology and constructs his concepts by sponsoring the reunification of the social sciences (Wallerstein, 2005: chapter 1). This attitude is very similar to Marxism.

With this approach, he vindicates Marx, historical materialism and the primacy of the economy in the study of capitalism. He approves of the holistic view of this tradition and the interest in capturing the contradictions that undermined the process of accumulation.

But Wallerstein moves away from that matrix by supporting his notion of system in three other theoretical foundations. From Braudel he recollects the location of these structures in long temporalities and extended *spatialities*. From Polanyi, he takes the classification of specific forms of social organization, around the principles of reciprocity, redistribution and commercial exchange.

Finally, from Prigogine he absorbs the characterization of systems as organisms with limited lives and existence marked by periods of balance and chaos. At certain stages these structures survive by assimilating the disturbances and at other times they are affected by chaotic whirlwinds. These systems are studied with the same optics that astronomers use to investigate the universe (Wallerstein, 1979: 7-18, 2002: 69-80).

This transfer of criteria from the natural sciences to social thought distances him from the Marxist vision of the modes of production. The contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the social property relations that this approach postulates supposes other transformation patterns. It favors the combination of productive variables and class confrontations.

This difference in approach is greater with the historicist aspect of Marxism, which enhances the role of subjects [agents] in the passage from one system to another. This trend more categorically rejects analogies with the natural sciences.

The world-system does not resort to class reasoning which - with different degrees of centrality - inspire all variants of Marxism. The primacy assigned to the social struggle for this conception contrasts with the structuralist view of the systemic vision. Wallerstein evaluates each event as a functional requirement of the course of history (Robinson, 2011).

Some critics consider that when presenting successive systems as the only engines of social evolution, this approach imposes a harmful "tyranny of totality". They estimate that Wallerstein builds *forced* universes, assuming that the whole is always more gravitating than the parts. With this vision, the autonomy of the components is unknown, which are seen as simple transmitters of a dynamic already presupposed by the world system (Smith, 1979). Other analysts maintain that this view dilutes the particularities and loses sight of the processes that operate in short periods (Osorio, 2009: 48-50).

Wallerstein synthesizes his differences with the Marxist view, contrasting his concept of totality with that of totalization attributed to Perry Anderson. He uses the first notion to conceive mutations of closed systems, with predefined beginning or end

and rigorous internal mechanisms of change. The opposite approach works on open courses, uncertain flows and a wide variety of transformation mechanisms (Wallerstein, 2013: 202-210).

Wallerstein's totality and Anderson's totalization illustrate the discrepancies between two forms of reasoning, which inspire different views on the current course of capitalism.

## **TERMINAL CRISIS AND SOCIAL SUBJECTS**

Wallerstein considers that the beginning and end dates of the world system are predictable. He deduces a rigorous chronology of the self-destructive behavior of that structure. He estimates that the exhaustion of the current cycle will mean the end of the world-economy. It will not be a secular movement followed by another, but the last fluctuation of the system. In a very chaotic setting, this closure will end a period of 500 years (Wallerstein, 2005: chapter 5).

The American thinker points out three determining causes of this outcome. First, he believes that the greater power of unionized workers has led to a sharp reduction in profits. Capitalists have tried to counter that pressure by shifting production to regions with cheaper labor force. But they cannot counterbalance the sustained urbanization process that increases the cost of labor.

Secondly, he highlights the widespread rise in production as a result of the ecological crisis, the depletion of raw materials and waste accumulation. Finally, he highlights that the tax system cannot cope with the political democratization that workers have imposed (Wallerstein, 2002).

These three processes precipitate the terminal crisis of the world-system. It is no longer possible to regenerate a world empire, nor to recreate another hegemonic succession.

With this diagnosis Wallerstein describes several contradictions that Marxists presented as historical limits of capitalism. But his perspective incorporates precise dates of a terminal outlet. He states that the decline began in 1960-70 and will culminate in the 2030 -2050. At that time, a great turbulence will end five centuries of modernity and a more egalitarian form of social organization will emerge (Wallerstein, 2011; 2005: chapter 2).

This characterization has points of contact with the theories of the collapse that the Marxists discussed in 1920-40, to elucidate what would be the determining factor in the outbreak of capitalism (retraction of consumption, fall in the rate of profit, financial collapse).

The later maturation of this debate allowed us to understand that a final crisis is unpredictable and should not be conceived with the automaticity of purely economic mechanisms. Only popular majorities acting on the political plane can end capitalism and replace it with a more progressive social regime.

But in any case, the most important thing is not the magnitude of the crises, but the popular perception of the anti-capitalist potential of these convulsions. And that level of consciousness is much lower today than that prevailing in the 70s or 30s of the last century (Therborn, 2000: 284-266).

This latter problem requires more attention than all speculation about the date of the announced collapse. The consistency of this forecast is as doubtful as the different reflections on the ending time of the system. This closure is conditioned by political-social actions that are totally unpredictable. Certainly, the current regime



faces historical limits, but that border does not presuppose the temporality predicted by Wallerstein.

## TWO OUTLOOKS AT THE LONG CYCLES

The systemic thinker conceives a process of decline similar to that recorded in Europe during the passage from feudalism to capitalism (Wallerstein, 1986). That analogy has been as debated as the parallels between the decline of the United States and the Roman Empire.

In these cases, social regimes with functioning, economic mechanisms and very different types of crises are usually contrasted. The extension of these comparisons to state structures or types of political-popular intervention is even more controversial.

In fact, these analogies only suggest long transitions, which in turn contradict the anticipation of a pre-defined moment of collapse. Wallerstein's descriptions of the current chaos illustrate reorganizations of capitalism, changes in power relations or alterations in the hegemonic leadership (Wallerstein, 2012 a).

These processes include very turbulent situations, but they do not entail a closure that can be anticipated. This type of closure is a necessary ingredient of the systemic view, but it does not constitute a corollary of the Marxist vision sponsored by Latin American dependency theorists.

Dos Santos, Marini and Bambirra always conceived the future of capitalism in close connection with the advancement of an alternative socialist project. The lapses they envisioned for that change were associated with the course of that battle. They never assumed intrinsic or self-inflicted collapses by capitalism itself.

This difference in approach is also verified in two treatments of the Kondratieff cycles. Wallerstein incorporates them in the Schumpeter tradition, as mechanisms with fixed temporalities that renew technology and expand markets.

That is why it presupposes its predictability and cyclical recurrence every five or six decades. It introduces the validity of these movements for 500 years and predicts that the current stagnation phase will converge with the collapse of the world system. A descending Kondratieff will *intertwine/splice* with the exhaustion of the last secular cycle (Wallerstein, 2016; 2012c; 2011: chapter 1)

Dos Santos' application of these cycles is located in another tradition. It is more akin to the Marxist theories of long waves that developed authors like Mandel. It registers prolonged economic movements only since the XIX century and observes its development in close relation with the dynamics of the class struggle.

Dos Santos sought to unravel how a Kondratieff period operates in the contemporary scenario of technological-productive reorganization of capitalism. He did not locate these cycles in secular temporalities, nor in sequences of collapses of the world-system (Dos Santos, 1983).

The differences between Wallerstein and Latin American *dependentistas* also include discordant views on stagnation and absolute impoverishment. For the American theorist, these two features portray the presence of a terminal crisis of modernity.

It considers that the majority of workers face greater adversities than 500 years ago in terms of food, working conditions and life expectancies (after the first year of existence). He attributes this regression to the elimination of community structures and estimates that the improvement in consumption has only benefited 10-15% of the world population that reached middle class status (Wallerstein, 1988: 92-96).

The numerous controversies that Marini developed to demonstrate that his theory did not involve stagnation, nor increasing misery illustrate his discrepancy with Wallerstein's vision.

The thesis of superexploitation -which concentrated the bulk of these questions- was formulated in opposition to the diagnoses of generalized pauperization, at any stage of capitalism.

Marini theorized the existence of higher exploitation rates in the periphery compared to the center. In this counterpoint, he highlighted that Fordism and the welfare state had improved the living conditions of metropolitan workers (Marini, 1973: 81-101). With this contrast in the situation of workers in advanced and backward economies, he recognized a more significant improvement in developed countries. He also distanced from the more generalized deterioration thesis postulated by the world-system theorist.

## **DISCORDANCES ON SOCIALISM**

In the period of the elaboration of his conception, Wallerstein included the former Soviet Union, China, and the so-called socialist bloc within the world system. He understood that these regions were integrated into that circuit and would face the same decline. He considered the world-economy to be a dominant whole on the planet.

The American scholar also stressed that the socialist project had an initial revolutionary impulse and was later diluted in the networks of world capitalism. It could not escape the dynamics and destiny of that regime.

For this reason, Wallerstein did not ascribed importance to the implosion of the USSR and placed that collapse in the general crisis of the current era. He contrasted Hobsbawm's definition of the "brief twentieth century" - marked by the debut and fall of the USSR - with a "long twentieth century" determined by other circumstances such as the rise and decline of the United States (Wallerstein, 1992).

But by including the former socialist bloc within the world system, it must also have assumed that this segment operated with the same principles of profitability, competition and ownership as the capitalist economies.

In this characterization, he omitted the internal analysis of those countries. He deduced its similarity to the rest of the world from a simple external connection with the Western powers. He applied the same reasoning that he used to enroll within the world-system, to all the regions that throughout 500 years were absorbed by that circuit.

But he never explained the analogy between the former USSR, China and Eastern Europe and what happened several centuries before with India or the Ottoman empire (Chen, 2010). He did not demonstrate how, when and in what way there was either an invariable permanence or an exit and immediate reintroduction of these countries to capitalism. This re-entry has only been confirmed after the collapse of the socialist bloc.

In this field, the consequences of overvaluing totalities are verified, to the detriment of the specific dynamics of each component of the world system. Wallerstein forced the classification of the USSR and China within the same bloc that the United States *hegemonized* since the postwar period.

This assimilation was another area of divergence with dependency. Latin American Marxists did not treat the USSR as a subsystem of capitalism and were attentive to that country's role in the battle against imperialism.

Dos Santos, Marini and Bambirra disagreed with the laudatory vision of the socialist bloc propagated by the communist parties, but highlighted the conflict in that sector with the western powers. They were betting on a socialist renewal in those countries in the heat of that dispute.

All *dependentistas'* reasoning was guided by an expectation in the socialist project. Wallerstein only conceived that course as an immediately global leap, by underlining the existence of a single world totality. The Latin American group did not presuppose victorious results, but it was located on a battlefield for socialism. The systemic thesis disregarded that perspective because it understood that capitalism would collapse by itself on a foreseeable date.

## ANTI-IMPERIALISM AND NATIONAL TRADITIONS

Marxist dependency theory conceived anti-capitalist triumphs as a result of popular insurgencies on the periphery that would project to the center. That hope was shaped by the Cuban revolution, which did not occupy significant spaces in Wallerstein's conceptualization.

His approach was nurtured from other political experience, from its formation in the American left with radical, libertarians and anti-Stalinists movements. He then worked in Africa in contact with leading currents of the anti-colonial struggle and was greatly shocked by Fanon's thinking (Wallerstein, 2012 b).

In this maturation, the criticism of the evolutionary vision promoted by the communist parties was processed in a different way. He especially assimilated the historiographic consequences of this questioning and drew conclusions to elaborate his model of systemic mutations.

Instead *dependentismo* concentrated its darts at the political level and objected the proposals for national capitalism sponsored by the communist parties (Chilcote, 2009). *Dependency* criticism had an immediate purpose that was not present in Wallerstein's gaze.

This differentiated register extended to the meaning of the national struggle in the periphery. The systemic vision rejected that action and instead of anti-imperialist strategies promoted critical policies towards oppression with cosmopolitan biases. He identified any claim in favor of the national dimension with the developmentalist project.

Nor does Wallerstein's approach share the mediations between anti-imperialist action on the periphery and anti-capitalist dynamics on a global scale, proposed by Amin in his model of disconnection (Goldfrank, 2000). It assumes that the collapse of the world-system will illuminate a global post-capitalist scenario, without the need for those links.

This is why the American thinker sponsors direct social transformations in the world arena through anti-systemic actions. It does not include the convergence of socialism with the revolutionary nationalism that *dependentismo* advocated.

This rejection is inspired by its characterization of the nation, as an entity derived from the way each state inserted itself into the international division of labor.

But he omits that this molding was a very convulsive process, which included progressive and democratic projects conditioned by popular irruption. *Dependentismo* picked up precisely that national legacy and tried to merge it with the socialist perspective.

Both views are verified in the evaluation of the war that led to the independence of Latin America. Wallerstein does not assign revolutionary relevance to this rupture and highlights the Creole fear of slaves and Indians. He saw what happened in that period as an example of a region's passive and subordinate adaptation to the world-economy (Wallerstein, 1999: 354, 306-317).

On the contrary, dependency was akin to the claim of *independence wars* as a precedent of contemporary anti-imperialism. With this view, they encouraged thinking about socialism from Latin American traditions. These divergences over the past are projected into future emancipation strategies.

### **ONLY NOW IS IT POSSIBLE?**

In the process of objective collapse of the world system, Wallerstein assigns a major role to the anti-systemic movements forged during decolonization and the transgressions of 1968. He believes that these uprisings inaugurated the revolutionary rejection of American hegemony and the cultures of oppression.

He also thinks that these uprisings initiated the substitution of the old left by new social movements, which broaden democratization, challenge Euro-centrism and introduce multiculturalism.

Wallerstein estimates that for the first time in history a scenario of real emancipation emerges. He considers that in the last five centuries the system could not be modified and the revolutionaries ended up adapting to the world order. They faced unsolvable dilemmas when trying to modify structures that could not be removed (Wallerstein, 1999b: 127-176).

With this assumption, he estimates that a great nightmare affected socialist experiences, social democracy and nationalist movements, which unsuccessfully struggled between 1870 and 1968 for another course of social evolution (Wallerstein, 1989).

This same thesis of infeasibility of transformations in the past and feasibility in the present has been very common in other historians. Many argued that the powerlessness suffered by insurrectionary slaves in antiquity, by peasant rebels in the Middle Ages, or by squashed workers in the Paris Commune, obeyed the rigid framework of those times. They considered that the immaturity of the productive forces made it impossible in all cases to specify other alternatives.

But that perspective presupposes that only at the stage that one has to live are real transformations possible. Wallerstein exposes this approach with two considerations. On the one hand, he is critical of the adaptability to the status quo of all the rebel movements of the past. On the other hand, he declares that another evolution has been feasible since 1968, in the face of the appearance of a new subjectivity without precedent (Wallerstein, 2004: chapter 23).

This reasoning of situations with no way out in the past introduces a tragic element in the analysis of history. It assumes that in past times revolutionaries were doomed to fail, sacrifice, or capitulate, and that only now are the options for victory open.

This approach explains Wallerstein's attitude towards the Spanish American wars of independence. He underlines that this confrontation led to the formation of oppressive states under British tutelage, as a consequence of the place that this region should occupy in the world system (Wallerstein, 1999a: 356-357).

But he takes that end result as an unchangeable event, ignoring the potential of a revolutionary confrontation. Furthermore, it does not record the legacy of experiences and traditions that this struggle left for the oppressed classes.

It is very arbitrary to assume that history grants the keys to the future only to living subjects at a certain juncture, assuming that they have the dubious privilege of acting in a terminal scenario of capitalism.

Historicist Marxism reasons the problem in other terms. It enhances the role of popular subjects, pointing out that progressive projects have been feasible at all times. For this reason, it does not qualify contemporaries to the detriment of their predecessors, knowing that this hierarchy could be denied in the future or used to rule out the gravitation of what is currently happening.

In Wallerstein, the role of subjects is an enigma. It assumes that popular actions have been irrelevant until today due to their inability to distort the dynamics of the world system. But it attributes a central function to them in the construction of the society that will emerge in the middle of the 21st century.

Some analysts attribute these oscillations to extreme determinism in the conceptualization of world systems. They point out that this gaze prevents him from registering the multiplicity of paths that the gestation of modernity had. That outflow was a result of various rebellions that followed the French revolution and not a corollary of the world-economy (Therborn, 2000: 284-266).

## **POLITICAL STRATEGIES**

Wallerstein attributes the popular failures of the past to the preeminence of political projects tied to the capture of power. He considers that this policy allowed the achievement of some reforms in the 20th century, but it did not serve to modify the status quo. He believes that it could hardly have been achieved more than what was obtained and highlights the negative consequences of many experiences, which generalized the disappointment among the popular sectors (Wallerstein, 1989; 1992).

Based on this characterization, he maintains that emancipation will now be feasible, under the impulse of anti-systemic movements that do not seek to take power. He celebrates the abandonment of that goal by pointing out that governing within the world-system is equivalent to giving up the goals of justice and equality. It highlights the existence of new political paths that introduce non-hierarchical forms of action, with greater horizontality and decentralization (Wallerstein, 2002: 41-48).

This thesis is closely related to the autonomist strategy of sidestepping the control of the state to prepare for emancipation in the pores of society. It is in tune with the theory of “changing the world without taking power”, which during the last decade was debated intensely in Latin America. What happened in this period indicates that this approach did not offer viable alternatives for building popular power.

Wallerstein proposes a three-stage strategy. He maintains that in the long term, the utopia of a democratic and egalitarian world must be favored, without postulating predefined institutional forms of that future. In the medium term, he proposes to work for libertarian alternatives that ignore managing the state and in the short term, he favors opting for the “lesser evil”, both in elections and in direct action (Wallerstein, 2008).

Its first objective has similarities with the communist ideal, but it omits the need for socialist transitions that allow building that future, through a state controlled by the popular majorities.

Wallerstein dismisses that instrument and does not offer suggestions on how to achieve his proposals in the medium term. In the absence of an alternative state project,

his short-term view is more problematic. It leaves the doors open to walk on trails of all kinds.

In these terrains, the differences with the dependency tradition are more significant. This approach always hierarchized the socialist goal and favored different ways to access the government, manage the state and transform society.

The world system view shares with the Marxist dependency theory many characterizations of the center-periphery relationship. It also provides fruitful ideas for adapting dependency to the transformations registered under current capitalism. But both conceptions are distanced in other key areas of the economy, politics and historiography.

To what extent do these convergences and divergences extend to the metropolis-satellite vision? We will address that topic in our next text

10-14-2016.

## SUMMARY

Wallerstein's conception intersects with dependency. He posits a five-century world system model with competitive pillars, secular cycles, and changing hegemonies. It portrays central, peripheral and intermediate insertions based on productive modalities and commercialized products. It describes the same polarization, stable stratification, and recreation of underdevelopment that diagnoses the Marxist theory of dependency.

But the two approaches diverge in several areas. Closed systems differ from contradictory modes of production. The exact forecast of terminal crises contrasts with the *hierarchization* of the political-social dimension. The automaticity of long cycles is contrasted with attention to class confrontation and the theories of absolute pauperization distance themselves from the gravitation assigned to social conquests.

There are also discrepancies in the inclusion of the former socialist bloc within the world system and in the assessment of anti-imperialist mediations and national revolutionary traditions. The record of emancipation as an episode that is only contemporary and unrealizable in the past is highly controversial and controversy persists regarding political strategies that disregard the state.

## REFERENCES

- Aguirre Rojas, Carlos Antonio, (2007). Immanuel Wallerstein y la perspectiva crítica del Análisis de los Sistemas-Mundo, *Textos de Economía*, v.10, n.2, jul/dez, Florianópolis.
- Amin, Samir (2005). "He sido y sigo siendo un comunista", Roffinelli, Gabriela, *La teoría del sistema capitalista mundial. Una aproximación al pensamiento de Samir Amin*, Ruth Casa Editorial, Panamá.
- Amin, Samir (2008). *Modernité, religion et démocratie. Critique de l'eurocentrisme*, Parangon, Lyon.
- Blomstrom, Magnus; Hettne, Bjorn (1990). *La teoría del desarrollo económico en transición*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México.
- Chase Dunn, Christopher (2012). The Emergence of Predominant Capitalism: *Contemporary Sociology* 41, 1, ASA, January 18.
- Chen, Kathy (2010). Wallerstein's World Economic System Theory, February 1, [es.slideshare.net/.../wallersteins-world-systems-analys](http://es.slideshare.net/.../wallersteins-world-systems-analys).

- Chilcote, Ronald (2009). Influencias trostkistas sobre a teoria do desenvolvimento da America Latina, *Revista de Ciencias Sociais*, vol v. 40 n. 1.
- Doronenko, M (2005). "Boris Kagarlitsky's plagiarism", 14/10/2005, [india.indymedia.org/en](http://india.indymedia.org/en)
- Dos Santos, Theotonio (1983). *Revolução científico-técnica e capitalismo contemporâneo*, Voces, Río.
- Dos Santos, Theotonio (1998). La teoría de la dependencia y el sistema mundial, *Herramienta*, nº 8, Octubre, Buenos Aires.
- Dos Santos, Theotonio (2000). World Economic System: On the Genesis of a Concept, *Journal of World-Systems Research*. Vol. XI, n 2 Summer/Fall.
- Dos Santos Theotonio, (2009). Rui Mauro Marini: un pensador latino-americano, *América Latina e os desafios da globalização*, Boitempo, Rio.
- Goldfrank, Walter L (2000). Paradigm Regained? The Rules Of Wallerstein's World-System Method, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Vol. xi, Number 2 Summer/Fall.
- Herrera, Remy (2001). Les theories du systeme mondial capitaliste, *Dictionnaire Marx Contemporain*, PUF, Paris,
- Marini, Ruy Mauro, (1973). *Dialéctica de la dependencia*, ERA, México.
- Martins, Carlos Eduardo (2011). *Globalización, Dependencia e Neoliberalismo na América Latina*, Boitempo, Sao Paulo.
- Niemeyer, Almeida Filho (2005). O debate atual sobre a dependencia. *Revista da Sociedade Brasileira de Economia Política*, n 16, junho.
- Osorio, Jaime (2009). *Explotación redoblada y actualidad de la revolución*. ITACA-UAM, México.
- Penston, Kilembe; Busekese, Matthews (2010). *Re-visioning marxism in world politics*, elitepdf.com/re-visioning-marxism-in-world-politics.
- Robinson, William I, (2011). Globalization and the sociology of Immanuel Wallerstein: A critical appraisal, *International Sociology*, I-23.
- Schwartzman, Kathleen (2006). Globalization from a World-System Perspective, *Journal of world-system research*, XII, II.
- Smith, Tony, (1979). The underdevelopment of development literature: the case of dependency theory, *World Politics*, Vol 31, n 2, January.
- Sotelo Valencia, Adrián (2005). Dependencia y sistema mundial: ¿convergencia o divergencia?, *Rebelión*, [www.rebellion.org/noticia](http://www.rebellion.org/noticia), 4-9.
- Therborn, Göran (2000). Time, space, and their knowledge, *Journal of World-Systems Research*. Vol. xi Number 2 Summer/Fall.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1979). *El moderno sistema mundial*, tomo I, Siglo XXI, México.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1984). *El moderno sistema mundial*, Volumen II, Siglo XXI, México.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1986). Marx y el subdesarrollo, *Zona Abierta*, n 38, Madrid.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1988). *El capitalismo histórico*, Siglo XXI, México.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1989). Marx, Marxism-Leninism, and Socialist experiences in Modern World System, *Fernand Braudel Center*, 25-10, Seúl.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1992). Revolution as strategy and tactics of transformation, , *Fernand Braudel Center*, 12/11, Amherst.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1999a). *El moderno sistema mundial*, Volumen III, Siglo XXI, Madrid.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1999b). Chiapas y la historia de los movimientos anti-sistémicos. *El Viejo Topo*, Madrid.

- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2002). Los intelectuales en una era de transición, *Un mundo incierto*, Del Zorzal, Buenos Aires.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2004). *Capitalismo histórico y movimientos anti-sistémicos: un análisis de sistemas-mundo*, Akal, Madrid.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2005). *Análisis de sistemas-mundo, una introducción*, Siglo XXI, México.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2008), Remembering Andre Gunder Frank, *Monthly Review*, vol 60, n 2, June.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2011). Prologue, *The Modern World-System*, Vol. I: University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2012a). Nenhum sistema é para sempre, [www.outraspalavras.net](http://www.outraspalavras.net), 12/11.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2012b). Reflections on an Intellectual Adventure, *Contemporary Sociology* 41, 1, ASA, January 18.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel, (2012c). E se nao houver saida alguma? [www.outraspalavras.net](http://www.outraspalavras.net), 17/08.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2013). Retrospective on the Origins of World-Systems Analysis, Interview, *American Sociological Association*, V 19, n 2.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel (2016), Estancamiento secular, *La Jornada*, [www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/09/25](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/09/25)

## **KEY WORDS**

World System. Dependency Theory. Marxism.