

Reflections on Wallerstein: The Modern World-System, Four Decades on

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Abstract

Nearly four decades have passed since the publication of Immanuel Wallerstein's first volume of *The Modern World-System*. Wallerstein and world-systems analysis are frequently viewed, on the one hand, as successful and firmly established, and, on the other, as of largely historical interest, surpassed by a number of new realities and theoretical paradigms. This article seeks to restate the contemporary importance of Wallerstein's project. It begins by recounting the key conceptual and historical claims of world-systems analysis, and subsequently surveys the broad varieties of critique across questions of economics, politics, and culture. It is argued that Wallerstein's contentions have travelled well over time, still contenders for attention amidst the globalization literature, and still defensible against post-modern, post-colonial and complexity theory claims. In particular, the strong metanarrative, generative hypotheses, and the still productive research programme of world-systems analysis appear even more compelling in the face of current global turmoil.

Keywords

Marxism, radical social theory, historical sociology, world systems, historical materialism, globalization

Introduction

Almost four decades have passed since the 1974 publication of Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy*. In many ways, the startlingly ambitious project launched by this book, world-systems analysis, must surely be deemed a thoroughgoing success story. *The Modern World-System I* was instantly recognized as pressing, challenging, even game-changing – so that a critic as apparently resolute as Theda Skocpol (1977: 1075, 1089) still described it as 'a splendid undertaking', concluding that there was 'no intellectual project in the social sciences ... of greater interest and importance'.

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World-systems analysis was institutionalized as a section of the American Sociological Association, at Binghamton from 1976 with the establishment of the Fernand Braudel Centre, since the mid-1990s in the *Journal of World-Systems Research*, and through the disciplined and creative work of a cohort of talented researchers, taking the world-systems approach in an array of new and interesting directions.¹ On this score, Therborn (2008: 104) comments that Wallerstein's 'academic entrepreneurial acumen and achievements have had only one comparable Marxist parallel – Max Horkheimer'. And Wallerstein was president of the ISA from 1994–8, has been a senior research scholar at Yale since 2000, and is an altogether obvious inclusion in the recent *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists, Vol. II* (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2011), alongside the likes of Elias, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas.

This success, I think, is clear and well merited, but, at the same time, there is perhaps also a strong sense of world-systems analysis and of Wallerstein himself as a figure of largely *historical* importance and interest in the world of social theory, as overtaken by new realities and more fashionable theoretical paradigms. For some, already in the 1970s, Wallerstein's modernist 'sins' (McLennan, 1996) – functionalism, teleology, determinism, and so on – were revealed by critics such as Skocpol; and as post-modern thought exercised ever more influence from the 1980s, world-systems thinking could appear increasingly antiquated, a totalizing modernist metanarrative unable to compete in a new knowledge environment. In related fashion, as Marxism and Third Worldism, which provided the foundational co-ordinates for world-systems thinking, came unstuck from the late 1970s, the stubborn continuation of a basically unaltered Marxian development sociology could look more and more out of time. And, in more recent years, as globalization and post-colonial thinking gained traction in the 1990s, world-systems thought seemed, to many, less a still relevant forerunner and competitor than a now entirely replaceable relic of a lost world, confined to nostalgic Marxian intellectuals refusing to acknowledge that things had moved on.

It is timely, I think, to offer a broad-ranging reconsideration of the origins, trajectory, and discontents of Wallerstein's world-systems analysis. Beginning with a broad characterization of the background to and major theoretical-historical axioms of Wallerstein's project, I will move to consider issues that have been debated in the fields of economy, politics, and culture – or, what Wallerstein would characteristically parse into three as the international division of labour, the interstate system, and the geoculture. Here, at each point, I want to argue the continuing relevance, despite some pressing issues, of Wallerstein and of world-systems theory – its scope, boldness, and still lively and important research programme. Above all, I suggest that, after the post-modern and globalization moments, and in the face of current global turmoil, it is worth returning to Wallerstein, admitting that we must now renew 'our tolerance of what Lyotard called "grands recits" ... to learn once again to tell large stories, and to tell them better' (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011: 9).

Theorizing the World-System – Formation, Concepts, Substantive Claims

Before treating the basic conceptual moves of world-systems analysis, it seems important, in line with Wallerstein's own constant efforts at historicization, to situate world-systems thinking. There are a number of relevant and enlightening efforts at this. For a start, Bergesen (2000) places Wallerstein's enterprise firmly within the tradition of the 'Columbia social essayists' – thinkers such as Daniel Bell, Lionel Trilling, and C. Wright Mills (one of Wallerstein's teachers at Columbia). In particular, Bergesen (2000: 212) underscores the 'triple hegemony' in operation during Wallerstein's crucial period at Columbia (1947–71) – America, New York, and Columbia University. This, he suggests, underpinned Wallerstein's confident moral authority, the daring to offer absolute judgements about the essence of things – 'the sense of intellectual entitlement to conceptualize the

world as a singular system, and to pleas for its democratic and egalitarian transformation'. Wallerstein, in common with his fellow Columbia intellectuals, Bergeson (2000: 211) points out, excelled at the essay form as 'mid-wife' to 'concept formation' through a wide historical scope of enquiry. In another contribution from the same festshrift, Goldfrank (2000) emphasizes three *places* as formative for Wallerstein's thought: sub-Saharan Africa, with Wallerstein's work of the early 1960s dealing with African independence movements and his encounter with Franz Fanon in 1960 (Wallerstein, 2009); the cosmopolitanism, radicalism, diversity, and very visible power structures of New York; and Paris (the influence of and interchange with Braudel, his French rather than English political leanings – Rousseau over Mill, Wallerstein's preference for 'vigorous' politics over compromise).

Further, we can see in the development of world-systems analysis the intertwining of a number of important influences and events: the core-periphery conceptualizations coming out of the Economic Commission for Latin America from the late 1940s and developed by the dependistas – erected in opposition to modernization theory's internalist approach to the problem of development – built around an emphasis on the constitutive importance of colonialism and imperialism, and developed against a backdrop of Third World rebellion against the First World; the Annales School's insistence on total history and the *longue duree*, against event-focused historiography; German historical economy – for instance, the existence of business cycles, the role of status groups; and Marxism – the central role of conflict between social groups, totality as crucial optic, the importance of accumulation, the dialectical insistence on the priority of contradiction in social change (Chase-Dunn and Inoue, 2011; Goldfrank, 2000; Wallerstein, 2005a).² Above all, perhaps, Martin (2000; Goldfrank, 2000) is right to insist on the structuring role of what Wallerstein has called the 'world-revolution of '68'. This moment signals both the high water mark in the power of the 'anti-systemic movements' (social democracy, communism, and national liberation) and the appearance of fundamental challenges to them (and to American domination of the world-system) – decolonization, the student movement (in which Wallerstein participated at Columbia), opposition to the Vietnam War, the flowering of movements on behalf of those 'left out'.

Much of this background can be read into two major contributions of 1974 – the first volume of *The Modern World-System* and the long article, 'The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: Concepts for comparative analysis', originally published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. In these texts, Wallerstein (1974, 1980b) begins with a critique of ahistorical and reifying social sciences, of the modernization attempt to outline a series of universal stages of development and, of particular importance, of the assumption that national societies are the appropriate unit of sociological analysis. Wallerstein's alternative unit of analysis is that of totalities, especially the 'world-system' (Goldfrank, 2000). Wallerstein suggested, here, the existence of three historical types of totalities: mini-systems (simple agricultural or hunter-gatherer orders); world-empires (characterized by political centralization and the forcible extraction of tribute); and world-economies (multiple cultures joined primarily by trade and a division of labour). The focus of the first volume of *The Modern World-System*, of course, is the origins of the modern capitalist world-economy. Here, Wallerstein challenges the characteristic sociological narrative of modernity's emergence in a 'long nineteenth century' by way of intertwining industrial, intellectual, and political revolutions (Pitts, 2012). Instead, he contends that capitalism emerges in Europe from around 1450, in the wake of the crisis of Western feudalism, a crisis that is pinned to a number of explanatory factors, including population decline, disease, peasant rebellions (Wallerstein, 1974, 2010b [1976]). This capitalist world-economy appropriated surplus on 'a more efficient and expanded productivity ... by means of a world market mechanism ... and with the ... assistance of state machineries' (Wallerstein, 1974: 38).

A number of points, then, to remark upon at this juncture. First, Wallerstein, in common with the structural-functionalist thought that, in other respects, he so vehemently seeks to break from, is deploying systems language, a social system defined by the existence within it of a division of labour (Wallerstein, 1980b: 5), its dynamics of development being largely internal (Wallerstein, 1974: 347). At numerous points, here, Wallerstein (1980b: 23) is clearly and unabashedly deploying functionalist explanation – for instance, in terms of the role of the semi-periphery in preventing polarization between core and periphery. Second, Wallerstein (1974: 15) is clearly positing the world-system as above all a world-*economy*, contending that the ‘basic linkage between the parts of the system is economic’. He is later to emphasize, in particular, the systemic imperative of the endless accumulation of capital (for instance, Wallerstein, 2005a). Third, as noted, Wallerstein is challenging the common story of the advent of modernity – Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, French Revolution – and pushing the modern break back from the 18th century to locate the origins of *capitalist* modernity in the Iberian expansion of the 15th century. In some part, he is emphasizing, in making this claim, the shift from trade in luxuries to ‘basic bulk goods’ (Wallerstein, 1974: 20), as well as the emergence of capitalism as a means of dealing with the crisis of feudalism (Wallerstein, 1980b: 25).

In Wallerstein’s view, capitalism emerges in a first phase that he calls ‘the long sixteenth century’, 1450–1640, and we should reject parsing capitalism into merchant and industrial phases, Wallerstein (1980b: 16) instead characterizing the first phase as ‘agricultural capitalism’ – a single division of labour, a world market, and production for sale and profit. The world-economy in this long 16th century encompassed north-west Europe, the Christian Mediterranean, Central Europe, the Baltic region, certain regions of America, and some enclaves of Africa (Wallerstein, 1974: 68). Within this world-economy, crucially, certain tiers can be identified and are of decisive importance. Here, Wallerstein develops the dependista focus into a threefold division: the core (north-west Europe – strong states, increasing variety and specialization in production, profitable production processes, monopolization); the periphery (Eastern Europe and Hispanic America – weak states, tending to monoculture, producing lower ranking, less profitable goods); and the semi-periphery, Mediterranean Europe for instance – in-between forms, such as sharecropping (Wallerstein, 1974, 2005a). And Wallerstein (1974, 2005a; see also Goldfrank, 2000) is insisting, unlike the dependistas, on the relational and dialectical aspects of the core-periphery pairing, and on a sort of circulation of elites between these different tiers.

One central point to raise, here, is that Wallerstein (1980b) shifts from the Marxian focus on industrial labour as a defining feature of capitalism and insists instead on a range of modes of labour within capitalism – tenancy, slavery, coerced cash-cropping – with different modes characteristic of different tiers or geographic units in the overall division of labour. On this note, still placed within the Marxist tradition, Wallerstein emphasizes the important role of class (exploitation and inequality) within the division of labour (Boli and Lechner, 2009), but status groups are, right from the beginning, given significant weight as ‘elements’ in the system (Wallerstein, 1974: 351), connected to the struggle within the world-economy for power, wealth, and status. It is important to note that, for Wallerstein (1989), the working class is not ‘liberated’ as an actor until around the 1830s in Europe, but that for him, classes and status groups are not, in any case, ‘eternal essences’ but are social creations constantly forming, dissolving, and re-forming (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Wallerstein, 2011a: 166), in ‘constant movement’ (Wallerstein, 1980b: 224), and that, contrary to many Marxian analysts, status groups are not seen as in decline but, in fact, as of growing importance within the world-economy (Wallerstein, 2005a). Another point of note is the Marxian focus on the extraction of surplus, not only from the labourer, but also across the tiers of the system by core states and through unequal exchange, with Wallerstein looking to the work of Arghiri Emmanuel. Further, and connected to this Marxian thrust, the state is read as a ‘means

of assuring certain terms of trade in economic transactions' (Wallerstein, 1974: 16) in the battle between different owner-producers in the world-economy (Wallerstein, 1980a: 114), despite being lent a 'certain autonomy' (Wallerstein, 1980b: 20). And Wallerstein (1974: 136, 1999a) charges that we see the growth of state power from this long 16th century – bureaucratization, protection of private property, monopolization of the means of violence, the creation of legitimacy, and the homogenization and keeping in check of subject populations.

Vitally, within this system of states, Wallerstein (1980b: 31) is, from the beginning, mentioning the pivotal importance of hegemony. Hegemony, which is key for the stability of the system, is later glossed by Wallerstein as follows: the hegemonic state is

able to establish the rules of the game in the interstate system, to dominate the world-economy (in production, commerce, and finance), to get their way politically with a minimal use of military force (which, however, they had in goodly strength), and to formulate the cultural language in which one discussed the world. (2005a: 58)

This hegemony, while necessary, is temporary – because it is expensive and abrasive, because others tend to catch up (innovations and monopolies do not last), and because of struggles within a fundamentally conflictual system (Wallerstein, 2005a). Historically, for Wallerstein (1974, 1980a), there have been three hegemonies within the world-economy: first the United Provinces, rising in the last half of the 16th century, and dominant from about 1625–75; then, after a struggle for hegemony between Britain and France, Britain, decisively from 1815; then, after a further struggle between America and Germany, America from 1945.

At the start of the second volume of *The Modern World-System*, Wallerstein (1980a: 26) notes the importance of secular trends and cyclical rhythms in approaching the question of social change within the system. He notes that in this next overlapping period, 1600–1750, which is characterized as one of 'calming down and cooling off', of slowdown and consolidation in the world-economy, the boundaries changed little, with a B-phase of contraction felt across the system. Here, Wallerstein (1980a, 2005a) draws on work around Kondratieff waves of expansion and contraction of around 50 years in length, and on Simiand's notion of longer periods/waves of approximately 250 years, which are bound up with transformations in hegemony.³ In the next volume, covering the period 1730–1840s, Wallerstein (1989) notes the incorporation of a range of 'external' zones (such as the Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman Empire), which are peripheralized, until, by the close of the 19th century, the entire globe is inside the world-economy. From 1873, we see the slow decline of Britain and the rise of new contenders for hegemonic status within the world-system, and, eventually, America arrives at a position of unquestioned dominance following the Second World War.

As well as emphases on secular trends (geographical expansion, commodification, mechanization of production, proletarianization and bureaucratization) and cyclical rhythms (caused by over-production) (Goldfrank, 2000), and attached to these closely, Wallerstein notes a series of contradictions in operation within the system, which, as well, push in the direction of systemic transformation. These contradictions, other than supply and demand, are given more weight in Wallerstein's analysis of the late 18th century onwards, with the French Revolution given important pride of place as a symbolic opening. Again, Wallerstein (1989, 2011a) rejects the common interpretation of the French Revolution as a bourgeois revolution, insisting that this was simply the moment when the ideological-political superstructure caught up with an already transformed base, and arguing that the revolution was less important solely for France than is often imagined (having vital global implications). It is at this point that we see the creation of a geoculture (broadly shared and dominant ideas, values and norms) across the world system – the third major part, alongside the international division of labour and the interstate system, of the world-economy, and the focus

of Wallerstein's recent fourth volume of *The Modern World-System*. From the French Revolution, we see, first, the emergence of the three big ideologies – conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism/socialism. Centrist liberalism – conscious, intelligent reformism, with a strong state as the instrument of this reform, clothed, though, in the language of individualism; themes of rationalism, science, and economic progress (Wallerstein, 1995, 2005a: 61, 2011a: 6, 9) – emerges triumphant, the defining feature of the geoculture, so that both conservatives and radicals become, over time, variants on the centrist liberal theme. We see, second, the revolution stimulating the emergence of the historical social sciences. These sciences sought to comprehend 'what generated normal social change in order to be able to limit the impact of popular preferences' (Wallerstein, 2011a: 220), they split into 'two cultures' (science and humanities), and the social sciences, pulled between these cultures, divided into disciplines – economics (the market), political science (the state), and sociology (civil society). Finally, the French Revolution, releasing 'the genie out of the bottle' (Wallerstein, 2005a: 51), sets in motion the anti-systemic movements – social democracy, communism, and national liberation – which come onto the political stage with the 'world-revolution of 1848'.⁴

Outside of the four volumes comprising his major contribution to historical sociology, Wallerstein has focused particular attention on the changes within the world-system since the 1960s and the prospects that might lie ahead, and I will spend a moment here outlining, again, in broad brushstrokes, his major theses. First, Wallerstein (2000c) charges that the world-economy has, since the late 1960s, entered into another B-phase of stagnation and chaos, an 'age of transition'. A central part of this is that, from around this point, we have been witnessing the unstoppable demise of America as world hegemon, and the jockeying for position of a number of core and semi-peripheral countries – ours, then, is a time of relative destructuring and multipolarity within the world-system (Wallerstein, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, 2006a). Even the demise of America's Cold War rival is viewed by Wallerstein (2006a) as only hastening this decline. In this period, we have also seen the demise of the anti-systemic movements, especially after a period of their remarkable success (construction of welfare states, decolonization and indigenization of personnel, and socialization of the means of production and planned economies) from 1945–68 (Arrighi et al., 1989). In particular, the world-revolution of 1968 offered these movements a number of fundamental challenges from which they have not recovered: charges that they had not transformed life as they had promised, that they had been co-opted and themselves become agents of oppression and exploitation, and that they had left certain crucial people out (Amin et al., 1990; Arrighi et al., 1989; Wallerstein, 1991a, 1991b, 2002a, 2010a). In a similar vein, from that second world-revolution, we have also seen the steady decline of liberalism as governing geoculture – the end of developmentalism, the rise of neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus, a loss of faith in the state and, for the first time since the arrival of the world-economy, a decline in state power (Wallerstein, 1995, 2005a).⁵ Alongside and connected to this, we see fundamental shifts in the realm of knowledge structures, with a number of crucial challenges to science in general and to the social sciences in particular, a veritable 'crisis in the sciences' (Wallerstein, 1991a: 113): complexity analyses, cultural studies, post-modern thought, feminism; questioning of the ideas of 'laws' of science, linearity, rationality, progress, inevitability, and Eurocentrism; interrogations of our common assumptions about time (Wallerstein, 1991a, 1991b, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999b, 2000b, 2004b). Here, for some time, Wallerstein (1999b, 2000a, 2000b) has been calling for a re-organization of the sciences, and urging an acknowledgement of and commitment to the ineradicable intertwining of reflections on the good, the true, and the beautiful. In terms of the future prospects of the world-system, Wallerstein has tended to be, as Chase-Dunn and Inoue (2011: 407) suggest, 'apocalyptic and ... millenarian', boldly predicting that a number of secular trends are reaching asymptotes that are exacerbating the crisis tendencies of the system. These include the deruralization of the world, and the impossibility

of running away from growing workers' power; the growing cost of inputs – for instance, ecological exhaustion, with Wallerstein (2011c) emphasizing present environmental chaos and the possibility of future 'supercalamities'; the rising infrastructure bill; and the burdensome costs associated with growing democratization (health, education, and guaranteed life-time income) (Wallerstein, 2000a, 2005a). In a number of articles, Wallerstein (2000c) has suggested that a bifurcation out of our transitional age is likely in the next 25–50 years, demanding a species of reflection he designates 'utopistics'.⁶ The likely paths into the future are designated 'the spirit of Davos' or 'the spirit of Porto Alegre'. Wallerstein suggests as strategic measures along the way to the latter an updated emancipatory socialist alternative, the establishment of de-commodified economic structures, defensive electoral tactics, a move beyond the old two-step strategy and democratic centralism as modes of oppositional organization, towards open debate, anti-racism, and 'forcing the pace of liberalism' (1998, 2000c, 2002a, 2002b: 20, 2004a).

Evaluating Wallerstein I – the International Division of Labour

Obviously, one of the still very striking things about Wallerstein's work – perhaps even more striking today, given the pervasive sense of limits installed by the post-modern moment (Beilharz, 1994) – is the enormous scope and ambition in play (a framework, that is, for the understanding of nearly everything), which can be, variously, for commentators, a major strength and a profound weakness. Here, I want to begin turning to the broad types of critical commentary raised in challenge to world-systems thinking, crudely moving from questions of economics or the international division of labour, to politics or the interstate system, and, finally, to culture or, as Wallerstein would have it, questions of the geoculture. While a number of these assessments raise important questions, none of them, I believe, proves fatally damaging to the research agenda and basic postulates of world-systems analysis. In this section, I focus on central contentions around capitalism, class, global inequality, and the challenge offered by globalization discourse.

A first stop, given Wallerstein's prioritization of economics, is the international division of labour, and, here, an early and predictable objection was made to Wallerstein's dating of the genesis of the capitalist world-economy and to the terms of his comprehension of capitalism. Robert Brenner's 1977 article in *New Left Review* was an early and comprehensive salvo fired from the more orthodox Marxian camp. Brenner's basic complaint was that evidence of barriers to capitalist expansion (persisting underdevelopment, that is) had led a number of Marxists such as Wallerstein to abandon a focus on class relations and follow Adam Smith's 'individualistic-mechanist presuppositions' (1977: 27). For Brenner, Wallerstein focuses incorrectly, and in un-Marxian fashion, on the trade-based division of labour and exchange relations, thereby excluding an adequate explanation of the unique dynamism of capitalism. Proper explanation demands analysis of class, commodification, and exploitation – the real sources of the exchange relations that Wallerstein attends to – and such an analysis would also have the effect of undermining Wallerstein's periodization of capitalism. That is, the more standard Marxian focus on the qualitative break represented by the Industrial Revolution correctly foregrounds the generalized separation of labour from means of production, the appearance of capital and labour as commodities.

There are a number of significant issues here, and a first has to do with Wallerstein's dating of capitalism and/or the construction of a world-economy. As mentioned, Wallerstein (1989: 33, 2010b [1976], 2011a) is profoundly sceptical of the notion of an Industrial Revolution, viewing it as 'misleading', suggesting that we should focus on the world-economy developing over time rather than on sub-units within, and insisting on the continuity of ruling families in the transition to capitalism, rather than the appearance of a new bourgeois class.⁷ This is, unsurprisingly, a vastly complicated debate,⁸ and, even within the field of world-systems thinking, there are significant

differences of opinion here. Thus, Arrighi (1997) contends that the how and why of transformation is the ‘missing link’ in Wallerstein’s schema, and that his own world-systemic insistence on the earlier period of Italian city state activity provides the answer. Here, the suggestion is that we need to break from Wallerstein’s surprisingly state-centric focus and look at the interstices that connected larger territorial organizations to each other and other worlds – the growth of capitalism between worlds – as well as giving more weight to the military factor. I will come back to some of this in the following section.

Another major argument within the world-systems school concerning the dating of the emergence of the world-economy led to a growing separation between Wallerstein and Andre Gunder Frank. Frank’s (2000) contention was that his earlier dating of the world-system to 1492 and Wallerstein’s continued deployment of 1450 needed to be pushed back some 5000 years. We find a world-system and capital accumulation far beyond and before these dates, and this necessitates, argues Frank, both a break with the feudalism-capitalism-socialism sequence (on this last term, Frank increasingly finds the notion of future systemic transformation unlikely), and from what he charges is Wallerstein’s Eurocentric neglect of Afro-Eurasia. A robust research programme has emerged around such contentions within the broad world-systems school.⁹

A second, connected set of issues relates to the problem of class. We have, here, not only questions about the emergence of the capitalist class, but, very crucially for any analysis within the Marxian field, questions of working class designation, struggle, and unity. Brenner’s charge was, of course, that Wallerstein ‘displaces’ class relations and structures, and others (for instance, Martin, 2000) have insisted that class struggle does not really play an important enough role in Wallerstein’s work, given the emphasis on system dynamics and the prioritization of First World-Third World exploitative relations.¹⁰ And, indeed, it can reasonably be suggested that a close attention to class structures is largely non-existent in Wallerstein’s work – for instance, the almost total absence of this variety of conflict until volume four of *The Modern World-System*. Here, though, Wallerstein’s flexible model of classes as constantly in formation rather than as permanent, static, and unchanging categories, as well as his insistence on the diversity of labour forms, could be deemed an advantage against static conceptualizations that fail, in any case, to attend closely to troublesome but urgent problems of class consciousness and class action. It seems advantageous, too, to be focusing, as Wallerstein does, both on interstate and intra-state processes of class domination and struggle (So, 1990; So and Hikam, 1989). These are underscored, for instance, in Chase-Dunn’s (1998: 41) consideration of the historic achievement of a situation of relatively protected labour by core workers, forcing a certain socialization of the state by way of their skills and organizational capacity, on ‘relative harmonies’ between classes, while also insisting on emphasizing the global and historical dimensions to these achievements. And, within the field of world-systems analysis, Arrighi and Silver have sought to pay more attention to class, offering large scale but still nuanced accounts of transformations and ambiguities of class formation, conflict and dissolution.¹¹

It is, in the end, I think, quite misplaced to accuse Wallerstein of ignoring class, even if he has leant in a less than orthodox division of labour-centred direction and has not focused in detail on such dynamics. In fact, it is more reasonable to seriously consider suggestions that class remains too prominent and the analysis is too reductive on this front. Thus, Wallerstein (1980b: 230) calls class struggle the ‘fundamental political reality’ of the world-economy, though this is softened by his contention that this constantly changes form and that objective class status only becomes a reality when it becomes a subjective phenomenon. It could, that is, be charged that while giving status groups an important place (equal?) as elements or institutions within the world-economy, these status groups are, in the end, reduced to class realities. Sanderson (2005: 185), for instance, contends that conceptualizations of racism and sexism within world-systems analysis are reduced

largely to ‘epiphenomena of the capitalist world-economy’. Thus, Wallerstein (1980b: 224) says that class and status are ‘two sets of clothing for the same basic realities’ – classes as ‘objective categories’, but status groups as ‘constructed peoples’ (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991: 84). Here, status groups are understood as modalities of the struggle to alter the distribution of goods and privileges by way of organizational cohesion and the manipulation of cultural symbols, with racism on one side and the struggle by disadvantaged groups to equalize their life-chances on the other (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Wallerstein, 1980b).

These objections, I believe, are misplaced. Despite a sense one gets at times of a ‘capitalocentrism’ at work in Wallerstein’s analyses, where the only real actor is the capitalist world-system and its imperatives and objective contradictions, he has consistently underscored the successful and system-transforming role of the anti-systemic movements, understood in terms of class, that is, the capitalist world-economy, even if he has been equally insistent on the systemic constraints facing them.¹² And he has steadily emphasized status groups as a continually vital set of dynamics, which should not be, he maintains, considered outside of the antagonisms within the international division of labour. Overall, then, here, I think it is fair to say that an orientation to the ‘processes by which groups (and institutions) are constantly recreated, remoulded, and eliminated in the ongoing operations of the capitalist world-economy’ (Arrighi et al., 1989: 22) remains a justifiable orientation, provided this is, at some point, backed by more nuanced analyses of the dynamics and contradictions in play across different spatial and temporal moments. This approach is perhaps particularly pertinent in a period that has witnessed such dramatic reconfigurations of the international division of labour (for instance, de-industrialization in the former industrial centres and the creation of industrial working classes outside of the core), especially when set against attempts to map out static class structures and then assume consciousness and action as consequent upon these objective class co-ordinates, or, on the other side of this, the more common trajectory of abandoning the still pressing question of class.¹³

I will return to the question of class and socialism in a later section, and will now turn to further questions around economic issues in Wallerstein, primarily what we might label problems of the post-dependista moment. Right from the start, a number of Marxian critics found the dependency sociology of development field too rigid in dealing with the failure of certain expectations stemming from Manifesto-Marxism. Was underdevelopment really indispensable to capitalist development (Brenner, 1977)? Were the categories core, periphery, semi-periphery really adequate to the job of thinking world-capitalism? Here, Sanderson (2005) charges that these tiers induce very reified forms of analysis, and a focus on global inequalities would do a much better job, as analytical starting point. Did these dependency thinkers not provide too static and pessimistic an account of the transformations of the capitalist mode of production? By 1973, and within the Marxian field, Bill Warren, for instance, was already asking some very sharp questions here, noting a number of significant cases in which capitalism had not permanently developed underdevelopment. The implication of these sorts of questions was that more nuanced conceptual tools and detailed empirical work were needed to determine causes of stagnation and backwardness and possibilities for modernization and growth, against the undifferentiated and reified contentions of dependency sociology. The obvious anomalous cases early on were the NICs, and, clearly, in the past four decades, since the beginnings of Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis, a number of countries have changed tiers. Did these developments, then, not significantly limit the purchase of world-systems thinking?

A significant part of this question often touches on the degree to which exogenous factors are given too much weight in world-systems analyses. However, as Chase-Dunn and Inoue (2011) affirm, Wallerstein’s point is not to deny the importance of endogenous features and unevenness or specificities within national spaces, but to question this very

exogenous-endogenous distinction, and to urge analysts to move beyond the nation-state as unquestioned unit of analysis, as independent, self-contained system. That Wallerstein (1974) is attentive to unevenness within nations and to different path possibilities and movement within those broad tiers is clear from the start, in the notion of a circulation of elites between categories. Nevertheless, these questions raise the rather counter-intuitive question of whether, in fact, world-systems analysis is too state-centric and has been left behind by the post-1970s thickening and extension of world connectedness and by the globalization literature that has attended to these apparently novel processes. For a start, does a category as large and internally heterogeneous as 'semi-periphery' do any justice to the empirical variants on the ground, when this concept encompasses such varying capitalisms as, say, Pakistan, Brazil, Egypt, South Africa, and New Zealand? This is the old charge that this category, particularly, is simply residual, lacking any real specificity (see Snyder and Kick, 1979, for instance), but that the heterogeneity here has become even more marked in the contemporary globalizing period. Here, newer work on multiple capitalisms, modernities, or civilizational analysis might be deemed a more adequate starting point (see, for instance, Therborn, 2000). Moreover, but connected, Sanderson (2005: 189) charges that much of the capitalist periphery has been disappearing over the last 30 or so years, and that those nations that have remained peripheral, with Sub-Saharan Africa as the prime example, are much better approached in terms of endogenous factors – such as 'predatory' state structures – than through world-systems analysis with its external bias. What we have in the case of Africa, says Sanderson, is growing marginalization in terms of the world-economy, and we have to question the idea that capitalist penetration continues to produce underdevelopment. In addition, charges Sanderson, China's recent growth seems to favour a more straightforward modernization reading than the one pioneered by Wallerstein. These sorts of assertions also intertwine with objections to Wallerstein's persistent immiseration thesis (see, for instance, Wallerstein, 1980a, 1980b, 1990, 2005b), which Sanderson (2005: 196) argues should be buried 'in shame' – whether we judge according to per capita GDP, life expectancy, or a range of other measures of global inequality, those at the bottom have, over time, been lifted up.

For some, the main issue here is that globalization as a distinctive phase needs to be acknowledged as marking a necessary break from dependency perspectives. In contrast, Wallerstein has absolutely refused to acknowledge its distinctiveness, charging that globalization is an essentially meaningless term, better situated in the realm of ideology,¹⁴ and that such globalization has, in fact, been a persistent tendency of the world-economy since its 15th century inception, a periodic cyclical trend. In a sustained and compelling analysis, Robinson (2011a, 2011b) charges that this 'traditionalist' line will just not do, given novel contemporary phenomena: the wild expansion of financial flows; new productive processes (networks, 'spaces of flows') that render a territorial conception outdated (see also McMichael, 2000); other transnational processes that complicate a simple international division of labour-interstate system analysis (for instance, what some have called the pluralization of power today); and the emergence of transnational rather than primarily nationally based class divides (a transnational capitalist class, the denationalization of elites). In short, globalization is a new epoch, characterized by the liberation of capital from the nation state, an 'incipient transnational state apparatus', the erosion of the core-periphery distinction, especially an increasingly social rather than national polarization process (Robinson, 2011b: 349).

In defending Wallerstein in the face of these contentions, a number of points are in order. Again, world-systems analysis does not in the least rule out the importance of national specificities and structures in thinking about paths and prospects, but insists that a global political economy focus always be present in analyses. The analysis of the dramatic upward mobility of a

number of Asian nations, for instance, is unthinkable by way of a focus on endogenous factors alone (Therborn, 2011). The world-system approach does not, either, deny movement within and across the different tiers of the world-economy: obviously, America represents a particularly remarkable example of upward mobility (Chase-Dunn and Grimes, 1995). And both Chase-Dunn (1998) and Arrighi, for instance, have attempted to address the rise of East Asia, on the one side, and the ‘African tragedy’, on the other – the ‘bifurcation of Third World destinies’ (Arrighi, 2002: 5). Further, against some of the wild globalist rhetoric that imagines a flattening of the world, a completely transformed, transnational economy, and the demise of sovereign nation states, it is well to remain sceptical. As Michael Mann (2013: 357, 410) – no great supporter of world-systems thinking – has recently noted, nation states and transnational capitalism have expanded together. States remain ‘entrenched regulators’, ‘transnational institutionality’ in the shape of the IMF or the WTO continues to look like economic imperialism, led by Northern states, and a transnational capitalist class is nowhere (outside of finance) a plausible contention. And, still, says Mann (2013: 410), the vast bulk of life chances (60% plus) are dependent on ‘[t]he luck of where you were born’. Further to the charge of the very static quality of world-systems analysis, Wallerstein’s vocabulary after the mid-1980s of commodity chains encourages more detailed attention to transnational processes, and he, of course, recognizes historical transformations in terms of leading products within the world-economy – textiles, for example, were once but are no longer a monopolized core product (Wallerstein, 2005a). Finally, on the question of immiseration/polarization, clearly, this is a hugely complex debate (see Held and Kaya, 2007). An immiseration and polarization argument, though, still holds ground in such debates (for instance, Pieterse, 2005; Wade, 2007), especially as the relative rise of two profoundly populous nations – China and India – has skewed income distributions. Here, in support of world-systems’ contentions, we could note the following: that the richest, almost exclusively Northern, 10 percent have gained distance on the poorest 10 percent (Mann, 2013); that there were growing inequalities between and within many countries, 1980–2000; that recent rises in the fortunes of the BRICS nations, development across Asia and even Sub-Saharan Africa, and equalization measures in Latin America are plausibly connected to the growing multipolarity characteristic of a phase of hegemonic decline and restructuring (Mann, 2013; Therborn, 2011, 2012) and are not, in any case, necessarily permanent trends, given the possible impact of the recent recession; that there is good evidence for a major concentration of capital to the advantage of Northern companies from the period of the Washington Consensus to the present (for instance, Nolan and Zhang, 2010); and that there continue to be massive gaps between nations, however we choose to measure this. That is, the core-periphery schema as problem and hypothesis (Jameson, 1989) and polarization contentions continue to make sense, in terms of older and more recent work within (Chase-Dunn and Grimes, 1995; Snyder and Kick, 1979) and beyond the world-systems’ camp.

Frequently, what we have in many of the objections raised against world-systems analysis is something of the order of the often repeated post-modern-inflected assertion about the grey of theory versus the green of the world, although as McLennan (2006) notes, such gestures to particularity and contingency are incoherent: when can we ever be particular enough? We cannot, that is, escape a certain abstraction – this is what theory is: tools that guide and organize research that would otherwise be faced simply with a mess of unorganized and infinite empirical phenomena (Mann, 1993). And there is, in fact, no way to theorize contingency (McLennan, 1996). On a related note, the turn to the language of multiple modernities, civilizational analysis, and the like can be read as having had the effect of returning us to the language of modernization, of obscuring the still driving effects of capitalism (Jameson, 2002), of contesting discourses of cultural inferiority at the expense of disguising ‘the severe political, social, and economic hierarchies that continue to structure the world’ (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011: 9). In short, there is nothing – including

assertions about the new shift to finance¹⁵ or complexified networks of production and distribution – about contemporary ‘globalization’ that seems resistant to incorporation within and treatment by world-systems thinking. World-systems analysis, though, has the advantage of keeping before us not just a warning against chronocentrism, but also the structuring fact of capitalist imperatives of accumulation, class and inequality, of the priority given to profit, growth and competition, which today, arguably more than ever, must remain central to sociological thought that seeks to say something about the configuration of the world.

Evaluating Wallerstein II – the Interstate System

Rather similar counter arguments are often in order when we turn to questions of the interstate system. Here, I will focus, in particular, on issues around the autonomy of the political realm, the question of hegemony, the role of the military in the capitalist world-system, and contemporary state power. Again, these issues are seminal and stem from the 1970s, very clearly articulated, for instance, in Skocpol’s early critique of Wallerstein. Alongside Skocpol’s queries about capitalism’s origins and sources of dynamism, she raised questions about Wallerstein’s treatment of the political realm. A number of Skocpol’s objections trace a familiar Weberian versus Marxian arc of debate around issues of economic determinism and teleology, including her contention that Wallerstein neglected geopolitical and military factors, and had trouble dealing with the relationship between state structures and status within the different tiers of the world-economy. On this last question, Skocpol, in common with other critics, suggests Wallerstein is circular and inaccurate in his assessments of the strength of core states. There is undoubtedly some substance to this objection, given Wallerstein’s initially sketchy formulations, but, arguably, over time, Wallerstein’s (2011c) efforts to tighten his conceptualization and the emphasis on the core states as those able to prevent internal fragmentation and outside interference have travelled rather well. In terms of her charge of Wallerstein’s disregard of political factors, Arrighi (1997) suggests that Skocpol may get things the wrong way round here, in that there is perhaps an over-emphasis on states, given that the United Provinces, imperial Britain, and continental America cannot easily be characterized in the same way. The military question, meanwhile, is an important one too, and as Arrighi (1997) notes, well within the potential ambit of world-systemic reflection, which he and more Weberian thinkers such as Skocpol and Mann (1988) have underscored as an intermeshed and central dynamic in the modern world-system.

Here, Chase-Dunn (1998) and Chase-Dunn and Grimes (1995), in particular, have sought to incorporate military competition as a consequential dynamic within the world-systems paradigm, with ebbs and flows that are intelligible in terms of the cycles of capitalism, such as moments of K-wave upswings and periods of transforming hegemony. In a like manner, Galtung (1971) and Snyder and Kick (1979) provide support for a world-systems approach, though by deploying more multifactorial contentions, with Galtung considering five types of imperialism (economic, political, military, communication, and cultural), and – backed by both rigorous argumentation and empirical support – exploring the various intertwinings and multiple spin offs and spill overs, along with the impact of a ‘feudal interaction structure’ between peripheral nations. While this sort of work adds to the broad variety of world-systems research, it nevertheless moves from the problematic of ‘relative autonomy’ towards a model that starts to eclipse the distinctions between Marxian and Weberian models. That is, it is not at all clear that Wallerstein is unable to lend political and military factors, say, a genuine level of relative autonomy. For instance, in his commentaries on contemporary affairs, say, the neo-conservative-led US military interventions of the past decade or so, Wallerstein (2006a) is obviously suggesting a significant degree of causal power for political, ideological, and military factors – though these are never fully detachable from questions

of accumulation. We have a similar autonomy lent to political factors in Wallerstein's insistence on the significant concessions achieved by the anti-systemic movements, 1945–68 (the relative social re-embedding of the economy). This, of course, will not satisfy more Weberian thinkers like Mann, who are unlikely to find the notion of relative autonomy convincing, but surely it is incorrect to accuse Wallerstein of pure and simple economic determinism, of necessitarian, pure-system logic argumentation.

In terms of the charge of state-centrism, we might respond positively to Wallerstein's continuing insistence on the importance of states in the face of globalist rhetoric – national boundaries and states still matter, and we might appreciate world-systems analysis as a still productive and open research paradigm, able to innovate in the face of challenge to incorporate thinking, say, on the at times leading role of military competition and its intertwinement with the international division of labour. Wallerstein (1995, 1999a), as noted, has suggested a first-time reversal of the trend of growing state power.¹⁶ However, it seems right not to go with the flattening approach that imagines an irreversible movement in the direction of a transnational state apparatus, beyond the 'Westphalian' system, as articulated, say, by Hardt and Negri (2000), by McMichael (2000: 687) who suggests we are seeing a shift from citizen-states to global-states, geared to 'securing global credit, and circuits of money and commodities, and usually legitimated by "consumer citizens"', or by Robinson (2011a, 2011b). Here, again, Wallerstein's emphases are supported by thinkers outside of the world-systems camp who argue that states remain the hegemonic political form in the world, that Northern states (despite significant attacks on social citizenship) have only increased their levels of spending and have maintained welfare states, that these states – along with East Asian development states – have not been wide open to global forces at all, that public employment remains high (10–12% of world employment), and that many weaker states lack sovereignty not because of novel global forces but as a long-standing trend in peripheral areas (Mann, 2013; Therborn, 2011).

Last, we might take up questions around hegemony. Wallerstein has tirelessly insisted that we are witnessing the secular decline of the current hegemon, America, and Arrighi (2010: 384) seems to go even further in claiming that we have already arrived at a situation of 'domination without hegemony'. But critics will, of course, contest this. For instance, with respect to the globalist contention about declining state power and globalization, Therborn (2011) asks rhetorically whether the present is not, in fact, a moment presided over by the most powerful state in human history, America. Similarly, Marxists such as Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) read the period of globalization as a renewed surge of American imperialism, and Harvey (2005) and others have convincing claims to make on this theme, as part of a wider turn back to the language of empire (Therborn, 2008). In a somewhat similar vein, fellow-travelling world-systems thinker Samir Amin (1994) sees the contemporary period as distinctive in terms of the question of hegemony, as true hegemony in the cases of the United Provinces and even Britain is questionable, whereas American hegemony after the Second World War is completely distinctive. And, also from within the field of world-systems thought, Arrighi (2010), while adding the hegemony of Genoa to Wallerstein's list, foresees a rather different future scenario ahead, with the possible succession of China as hegemon unlikely to be unaccompanied by military dominance, which America may continue to exercise. In Arrighi's reading, the likely future prospects are quite different from those suggested by Wallerstein (2010a) who speaks of the coming end of the world-system, which will issue in something like socialism or something like barbarism. Clearly, there are no easy answers to such questions, other than to suggest that, at the very least, Wallerstein's version of continuing state power, declining hegemony,¹⁷ and possible bifurcated futures remains a very arguable, supportable set of propositions – that it is still a contender for serious attention in interpreting our moment, against a

globalization literature that often issues in repeated cliched paradoxes, explanatory unclarity, and inconclusive or weak empirical substantiation.

Evaluating Wallerstein III – the Geoculture

Once more, we have some significant argumentative congruencies as we move from political to cultural questions. Here, I will explore questions around the structures of knowledge – ideologies, science, world culture, and socialism – before bringing some of my assessments together in conclusion. Again, central objections revolve around the alleged determinism of the world-systems schema, this time against the tide of a cultural turn, or what might be called the post-modernization of knowledge, that has washed across the human sciences in the last couple of decades and that looks relentlessly unaccommodating to thinking of the scale proposed by Wallerstein and company. In these objections, the usual charges against the various ‘sins’ of modernist thinking – universalism, functionalism, determinism, teleology – are again raised (McLennan, 1996), either as long-standing problems we have finally got wise to or as no longer defensible given the extensive changes that have taken place within the richest countries.

While this is not in any way a new complaint, it is well to begin to approach this issue by way of a fascinating recent collection, in which a number of distinguished humanities scholars ‘committed in one way or another’ to ‘the study of culture’ (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011: 11) lucidly draw together a number of familiar criticisms, in order to reflect on the contemporary relevance of Wallerstein’s work – published, interestingly enough, in the same year as Wallerstein’s fourth volume of *The Modern World-System*, which deals explicitly with such cultural questions. The problems with world-systems analysis for humanities-centred scholars seem clear enough – above all, perhaps, a ‘bigness’ problem in Wallerstein’s work, which is, to say the least, ‘somewhat unfriendly to the humanities’ (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011: 4). That is, the world and long historical scope, theorized in a way which can appear to lend the system ‘almost theological omnipotence’ (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011: 10), would seem obviously incompatible with characteristic humanities’ emphases on culture, subjectivity, difference, agency, the local, and so on. More generally, has not everything that has been happening across the human sciences since the beginning of the post-modern turn been in completely the opposite direction to the path taken by Wallerstein? For instance, as Robbins (2011: 57) notes, in the last couple of decades, humanities scholars have often asserted that ‘what must be blamed is, precisely, thinking systematically’, that perhaps, today, there is, after all, no system at all, just a disorganized tangle of multiple processes and events with unpredictable consequences. Here, as Balakrishnan (2011: 227) comments, only a few years after the end of the Cold War, ‘world-systems theory already seemed to belong to a bygone era of upheaval’, part of a now largely eroded rhetoric of denunciation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) – not only in terms of changing theoretical emphases, but also with respect to the apparent distance separating the 1970s from a post-communist ‘modernity of liberal democracy, markets, and human rights’.

For those underscoring the ‘irreducibility of culture’, there seems an immediate and obvious ‘resistance to Wallerstein’ (Robbins, 2011: 46). As Moretti (2011: 70) notes, world-systems thinking ‘brusquely reduces the many independent spaces ... to just three positions’, a challenge to the drive for specificity and nuance so often found, say, in literature studies. And, of course, compounding this, is that in Wallerstein’s now less than fashionable emphasis on system, priority is given to the economic dimension (Robbins, 2011: 45). This systemic and economically reductionist optic seems to threaten an automatic blindness to struggle, the active making of history, contingency (Palumbo-Liu et al., 2011; Robbins, 2011): events, actions, and movements, says Robbins (2011: 54, 55), ‘tend not to appear on Wallerstein’s screen as more than blips’; ‘Everything is (or threatens to become) system’. And, of course, this sort of issue has been commonly registered from

within sociology. Thus, in the aforementioned festschrift, Touraine (2000; see also Therborn, 2000) appears to take an oblique swipe at world-systems thinking by emphasizing the need today to reach actors as autonomous beings and agents of transformation, and creators of imaginary worlds more effectively – a return to the subject to be found in other important contemporary sociological thinkers such as Michel Wieviorka and Luc Boltanski. This return to the subject, a more culturally leaning sociology, multiple modernities contributions, a complexity-influenced globalization discourse seeking to attend to contradictory deterritorializing and reterritorializing processes (Brenner, 2011: 130), or pluralistic and pragmatic borrowings from a range of theoretical and empirical approaches (Moretti, 2011; Wigen, 2011) – all of these seem, today, much more sociologically in vogue.

Another important dimension to Wallerstein's cultural analyses involves his explicit commentary on the disciplines. In a gently probing piece on Wallerstein's reflections on the social sciences, Lee (2011), for instance, focuses on Wallerstein's embrace of the scholarly signs of the collapse of the liberal consensus (the questioning of rationality, determinism, progress, objectivism, modernity, linear explanations, Eurocentrism, and so on). The implicit question obviously consists of the compatibility of Wallerstein's enthusiasm with the thrust of the entirety of world-systems theory. All of these 'problems' seem integral to everything Wallerstein has done over the past four decades, making his welcoming of complexity and post-modern talk seem, to say the least, awkward. Therborn (2000: 270) levels a similar charge in noting Wallerstein's attempt to combine a sympathy for the post-modern with a modernist orientation to the future. In a quite antithetical reading, meanwhile, Robbins (2011: 56) notes a central commonality between Wallerstein and the humanities, in an 'anti-progressive impulse' – a compelling issue about which more could be said.¹⁸ A related issue is that of Wallerstein's commitment to anti-Eurocentrism. For instance, taking on Wallerstein and the mainstream of post-colonial thinking, Gregor McLennan (1998, 2006) contends that a number of problems appear in the charge of Eurocentrism, one significant effect of which has been to create a moralistic and irrationalist climate of debate: the genetic fallacy; the impossibility of separating ourselves from universalist aspirations, from the quest for truer, more objective knowledge (the need to keep questions of the true and good somewhat separate), from secular humanism and progressivist politics, if we are to have the type of politics and also theory that are indispensable to Wallerstein's enterprise. In short, Wallerstein's strictures here are just not compatible with the intent of world-systems thinking, and his characteristically subsumptionary moves issue simply in antinomies.

Despite the presence of the above-mentioned varieties of question and reservations in the Palumbo-Liu et al. collection, the predominant attitude across the contributions is warm towards the potential contribution of the world-systems approach. Wallerstein (2011b: 225) himself is less receptive in his chapter, towards the end of the book. In a pointed anecdote, he notes the typical anthropological seminar response to broad treatments of the situation of the South – 'But not in Pago Pago!'; and he restates the need to *explain* the *capitalist* world-system: 'It has its history, its structure, its contradictions, its prospects. I try to study this directly. Others study it implicitly. I think it might help us all if the latter reflected more openly on what it is they are really doing' (Wallerstein, 2011b: 226).

Wallerstein's obduracy, here, will be seen as matched by his own treatment of culture in the same year in that fourth volume of *The Modern World-System*, which is likely, again, to be interpreted as rather too schematic and broad-brushed. Undoubtedly, many readers will be quickly dissatisfied with the characteristic three-way divisions and grand generalizations in play in terms of ideologies (reducing conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism down to 'centrist liberalism'), with his congruent reading of the social sciences, and with his treatment of the rich variety encompassed within the label 'anti-systemic movements'. And even in a world-system thinker more oriented towards the study of culture such as Jonathan Friedman (1995, 2000), the analysis flies very high.

There is something to displease just about everyone in these cases, but, once again, one important line of defence is to remind ourselves about the function of social theory in the first place – as a set of tools that enables us to organize our inquiries (Mann, 1993), rather than as an aspiration to create to-scale maps of the territory we seek to cover. As McLennan (1996, 2006) notes, explanation requires those various ‘sins’ of modernism, and the social sciences are indispensably in the business of explanation, something whose importance is downgraded in much of the human scientific work of the past few decades, work that is subject-centred and influenced by complexity thinking and post-modernism (McLennan, 2006). Rough and ready though Wallerstein’s judgements can appear, these are not only bold and striking hypotheses, but provide the scaffolding around which more nuanced, elaborative arguments can and have been built. This is social theoretical abstraction as cognitive map, a point I will return to in conclusion.

A last stop – and perhaps one that runs best across the three substantive sections I have divided this essay into, rather than being located narrowly within the cultural field – is the question of socialism, undoubtedly, the central political-moral nodal point of Wallerstein’s entire intellectual career. There are a number of ways into these issues. A first problem concerns Wallerstein’s treatment of the anti-systemic movements and of liberalism. For a start, as Pitts (2012) has argued in a recent review of the latest volume of *The Modern World-System*, one could contest Wallerstein’s portrait of liberalism as incomplete (restricted to France and Britain, devoid of attention to its global character) and coarse, missing liberalism’s own liberatory and frankly contradictory moments. In like fashion, subsuming the entirety and variety of strong anti-systemic movements as mere variants of this liberal centre is likely to raise strong objections from thinkers of the Left still attached to the achievements and impulses of these movements.

Here, Wallerstein (1991a) appears attached to a more ultra-Leftist political tradition, in line with non-Leninist, anti-statist (councillist, syndicalist, anarcho-communist, etc.) positions, than some of those other world-systems and dependency thinkers, such as (early) Frank or Samir Amin. Wallerstein, that is, critically reads social democracy as a kind of social capitalism in the advanced economies, Real Socialism as a strategy of national development in the semi-peripheries, and national liberation as a catching up effort in peripheries and in semi-peripheral areas. At the same time, there is also a sense in Wallerstein that the way in which these movements played themselves out was the only feasible option on the Left agenda at this point (see, for instance, Wallerstein, 1991a: 96), and those achievements are still deemed considerable – ‘magnificently successful’ (Arrighi et al., 1989: 56). However, it is clear, in Wallerstein (1991b, 1995, 2002b), that we are now in an era beyond the statism, nationalization and developmentalism, democratic centralist modes of organization, and naive scientism of these movements, and, looking into the future, we are the better for it. Here, we could again expect robust replies from a still trenchant Leninist Left, including recent defences of the real achievements of socialism in the 20th century by the likes of Badiou and Žižek (see, for instance, Budgen et al., 2007). In related fashion, Sanderson (2005) contests the world-systems reading of ‘really existing socialism’ as truly part of the world-economy or as market-based, arguing that these orders cannot be conceptualized as state capitalist.¹⁹

From another angle, though, Wallerstein’s continuing attachment to socialism is itself a major problem, and, as mentioned, within certain of those world-systems thinkers – Frank and to a degree Arrighi – this attachment or hope had already waned significantly in their later years. One forceful version of what is at stake here is put forward by Sanderson (2005: 204) who argues that it is well time to put away such ‘foolish things’. Incorrectly criticizing Wallerstein for defending unrealistic autarchy, Sanderson (2005: 184) charges that a replacement socialist global system would ‘likely descend into rent-seeking and become the most repressive and authoritarian state known to history’, socialism now, on the balance of evidence, discredited – Sanderson citing *The Black Book of Communism* as evidence, and raising the familiar argument about human nature presenting an

unassailable barrier to socialist dreams (Darwin trumps Marx, human beings as by nature status, wealth, and power seekers). We are, of course, in the realm of endless warring gods and substantive rationality here, and while this is irresolvable, again, Wallerstein has grounds on which to stand, given, say, the appearance of the anti-globalization movement, the variegated and successful movements and parties of Latin America in the last two decades, and the Occupy Movement, among other signs of the reappearance of, at times, vigorous Left contestation in the face of the many problems of 'really existing capitalism'.

Conclusion

Contemporary judgements, then, of Wallerstein and world-systems analysis can be read as rather mixed. On the one hand, a range of contemporary researchers continue on with the world-systems programme, producing a wealth of rich analyses, and Wallerstein is widely and firmly positioned as a grand old figure in the world of social theory. On the other hand, world-systems can be read as a paradigm largely surpassed by globalization, post-colonial and complexity-oriented analyses, or as a theoretical project, in the very least, in need of 'prompt medical attention' (Sanderson, 2005: 206).

As I have noted throughout this essay, my own sense is that much of the hesitation around world-systems analysis can be viewed as motored by an opposition to its broad-ranging and definitive statements, within a period that has been marked by deep hostility to totalizing thought and determinism of any stripe. But it is this very quality, I think, that is remarkable and will last beyond the post-modern moment, what Therborn (2000: 266) names as the 'daring questions and provocative statements' characteristic of Wallerstein. Here, it is good perhaps to follow Jameson (1989) and ask why it is that at certain moments the category of 'totality', once thought fundamental for any analysis seeking to liberate us from the immediacy of common sense, suddenly becomes prohibited, connecting this, paradoxically, to a moment at which capitalism has become more totalizing than ever. Following Jameson (1984) once again, we can see this totalizing in Wallerstein as a powerful modality of 'cognitive mapping', a way of not being overwhelmed by the apparent complexity and detail that contemporary perspectives on 'global transformations' often foreground. There are undoubtedly a number of areas in which world-systems thinking could be thickened – for instance, the exploration of the periods in which military or ideological factors appear to lead; or questioned – for example, the compatibility between Wallerstein's project and post-modern modes of thought. But there is not, I have insisted, any reason why the broad conceptual tools forged by Wallerstein and other world-systems analysts cannot incorporate many of the observations of apparently novel processes and complexities in play in the present. Many of the trends suggested by Wallerstein – commodification, proletarianization, acceleration of technical change, growth of firms, for instance – are confirmed in the contemporary period (Chase-Dunn and Grimes, 1995), while other contentions remain respectable, arguable against much of the globalization literature. I would suggest that, today, it is most productive to read these contentions and conceptual contributions as problems and hypotheses rather than as complete solutions (Jameson, 1989), as spurs to further elaboration, argumentation, and research. Finally, there is a sense in which, at this moment of intensified global chaos and suffering, Wallerstein is even more significant for us, as a break appears to be occurring in the history of the world-system, as new anti-systemic movements seem to be emerging, and as mounting contradictions lean on more and more people. In this line, Balakrishnan (2011) suggests that the shift from something like a 1990s end of history moment to the current moment of world turmoil vindicates the global and *longue durée* lenses that Wallerstein has so stubbornly worn. On this issue, Wallerstein (2004b: 189) has admitted that, in the end, there is no escaping macronarratives, and that the 'only question is whether we are putting forward a

defensible macronarrative'. Armed with a strong set of concepts and theses, in possession of a lively research agenda, and equipped with an enormous scope of inquiry and weighty normative force (Anderson, 1983), Wallerstein's own macronarrative is arguably almost alone on the Left in being in a position to compete for attention with those fluent and encompassing narratives of reaction – triumphant globalism, the end of history, and the clash of civilizations.

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Notes

1. See Chase-Dunn and Grimes (1995) for a good survey.
2. For further detail on the influence of the ECLA, Annales, and dependency theory, see Wallerstein (2005a: 11–22).
3. For further information on A/B, expansion/stagnation phases and other long term trends, see Chase-Dunn (1998), Kleinknecht et al. (1992) and Wallerstein (2005a).
4. The crucial lesson, for Wallerstein (Amin et al., 1990), from the defeat of the 1848 world-revolution was the need for long term political organization to achieve movement objectives. Eventually, this issued in a triumph across the movements of a two-step strategy of capturing state power and then transforming life.
5. Or, as Wallerstein (2000a: 7) summarizes this elsewhere, the collapse of the myths of the free market, the sovereign state, the equal rights of citizens, and the value-neutral scholar.
6. The 'serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgement as to the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems' (Wallerstein, 1998: 1). See the further development of this in Tamdgidi (2007).
7. The so-called Industrial Revolution should be seen, says Wallerstein (1989: 78), 'as the reurbanization and reconcentration of the leading industries alongside an effort to increase scale'.
8. Skocpol (1977: 1078), too, focuses in on the explanatory problem in Wallerstein's account of the origins of capitalism, with respect to its unprecedented dynamism, arguing that, in Wallerstein, market processes are the only visible dynamics and once established 'everything reinforces everything else', the analysis flawed by teleology and functionalism.
9. For more detail on this issue, see Chase-Dunn and Anderson (2005), Frank (1998), Friedman and Chase-Dunn (2005), and Wallerstein's (1999c) critique of Frank. The same issue of *Review* in which Wallerstein's critique appears also contains responses to Frank by Amin and Arrighi.
10. On this score, Brenner (1977) criticizes the Third Worldist/'socialism in one country' politics that displaces socialism among the neo-Smithian Marxists.
11. See, for instance, Arrighi (1990) for a broad analysis of the shifts of proletarian organization, in conversation with Marxian expectations; or Silver and Arrighi (2001) on the ambiguities of the labour movement with respect to issues of national protection and imperialism; or Silver (2005) on the question over the long term of labour and globalization. See also Arrighi and Silver (1999).
12. For instance, that control of the state in the context of the international division of labour and the interstate system affords less power than was expected (Arrighi et al., 1989: 57).
13. And, on this issue, Wallerstein clearly refuses an obdurate Marxism that denies transformations in class structures. For instance, Wallerstein (1990) rejects the leading role of the industrial proletariat, and acknowledges the growing occupational complexity of labour in core countries after the 1960s. See also Arrighi et al. (1989).
14. As 'a term of political exhortation' (Wallerstein, 2000b: 28).

15. Wallerstein (1998, 2003a), for instance, drawing from Arrighi, notes the fluctuations across the life and times of the capitalist world-economy of periods of accumulation centred on production and phases centred on financial speculation. For Arrighi (2009), this financial phase is a sign of the ‘Autumn’ of a particular hegemonic cycle, though he insists that this is compatible with acknowledging the peculiarities of each cycle of accumulation and is not a narrative of merely the “return of the same” across capitalism’s life-span.
16. Which he mostly attributes to changes in the geoculture (Wallerstein, 1999a), thus reading it in a very different way to many globalization thinkers, as another signal of the crisis of the system as a whole rather than attributable to merely the thickening of world interconnectedness.
17. A fairly common argument in historical and political sociology (for example, Mann, 2013), evidenced, say, in the American consequences of the recent recession, military quagmires, growing criticism of and rebellion against transnational institutions, or the rise of Tea Party Republicanism, ‘the gangrene of imperial decline’ (Davis, 2013: 52).
18. For instance, Wallerstein (1997) will at times draw a very negative balance-sheet of modernity, while at others committing himself seemingly to at least science and scientific progress (2004b). See McLennan (1998). This ties in with Wallerstein’s (2006b) critique of Eurocentrism, which turns out to be a quest for a more universal universalism, rather than a rejection of universalism as such.
19. This very difficult debate cannot be adequately treated here, but, again, there is plenty to back a world-systems, state-capitalism interpretation of the countries of ‘really existing socialism’. For more on this, see, for instance, Fernandez (1997).

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