



World-Systems at Fifty A Provisional Balance-Sheet¹

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Fifty years after it was first formulated, how are we to assess the ways in which a world-systems perspective has shaped the way we see the world, and its limits and challenges as we stand in the midst of a neoliberal restructuring of universities and the rise of a reactionary ethnic populism across the world? What follows is what C. Wright Mills called the sociological imagination: part intellectual and institutional history, part political economy and inevitably part autobiographical.

I will first chart the intellectual and geopolitical origins of a world-systems perspective² and then look at its institutional and intellectual career in Binghamton. In a sense, the declining salience of a world-systems perspective is due to the necessary obsolescence of its success: who else in the 1970s was talking about the world-economy? Today, talk of the world-economy is so commonplace that it is unremarkable. Since intellectual challenges to existing perspectives arise

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² For some assessments of a world-systems perspective, see el-Ojeili (2015) and Palumbo-Liu (2011)



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from wider social movements, the decreasing salience of radical scholarship in the academy must also be traced to the rise of the neoliberal university, as well as to the rightward shift of many national liberation movements. Precisely because a world-systems analysis insists that world scale relational concepts to analyze empirical phenomena need to be continuously forged in the course of investigation rather than merely applying already formed concepts and methodologies (Martin 1994; Wallerstein 2005: 83–108), it remains perhaps the only approach capable of analyzing the emergence of important centers of accumulation outside Euro-North America for the first time in the history of capitalism. Indeed, there is a revival today of interest in the works of Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Polanyi, and Antonio Gramsci—all of whom provided intellectual inspiration for a world-systems analysis. How might this expand, modify, and/or change dominant theoretical frameworks for understanding the contemporary globe? And we must also look at the shortcomings of a world-systems analysis as well: why was the rise of right-wing forces ranging from Hindutva in India to Brexit and Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Viktor Orbán, and Rodrigo Duterte not foreseen? How are we to understand new labor regimes in China?

I

The radical social movements of the 1960s—Black Power, national liberation and socialist movements, protests over the Vietnam War, Maoism, the women’s movements, and student protests—all fundamentally ruptured dominant narratives of capitalist modernity and changed the way we see the world today. But geopolitical locations determined how these questionings of capitalist modernity were differently accented. The European New Left revisited the post-war debate between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy on the origins of capitalism in the 1970s, in what became known as the debate on the transition from feudalism to capitalism (Dobb 1946; Hilton 1978), and it was followed by another on agrarian class struggles and the emergence of capitalism (Ashton and Phipps 1985). These intra-European disputations (even if Kohachiro Takahashi was allowed in) remained within the straitjacket of nation-states with little reference to the extra-European world. Even in E. P. Thompson’s (1966) magisterial account of the formation of the first English industrial proletariat, there is no reference at all to decimation of the textile industry in India on which it was predicated. Indeed, the Mode of Production debate in India, from the late 1960s to the 1980s—discussing whether production relations in agriculture were “semi-feudal,” capitalist, or “colonial” (Alavi 1975; Patnaik 1990; Nadkarni 1991)—“absurdly” took the English experience of working-class formation as the ideal-typical case and “search[ed] for its analogues in the very place upon whose ruin its formation depended” (Satia 2020: 265).

More generally, the anchoring of historical change within national frameworks dominated studies on Asia and perhaps stemmed from an Orientalist attention to civilizations—Brahmanic Hinduism, Chinese, Islamic, Buddhist. The much larger scalar magnitudes of populations in Asia than in other continents meant that despite establishment of European-style universities, there was very little circulation of scholars between colonies even within the same colonial empires. Education in the languages of Europe remained confined to a tiny, colonized elite and set largely

apart from native populations. Most of these scholars, while comfortable in a language of Europe, rarely knew another Asian language and in the absence of a complex grid of scholarly exchanges—translations, commentaries, conferences, collaborative research—looked to European debates on large-scale social change rather than chart out patterns of historical evolution within the continent (Palat 1996: 287–88).³ Indeed, the intra-European debate on the transition from feudalism even stimulated a sterile debate on whether there had been feudalism in India (Byres and Mukhia 1985), as anything other than a linear conception of history remained virtually unthinkable.

Additionally, as the European presence in their Asian colonies was a thin layer overlaid on top of a thick strata of local elites and collaborators, the civilizational encounter with Europe never had the same primacy it had in the Caribbean or in the settler colonies of the Americas. Urdu novels over the past 200 years, Aijaz Ahmad (1992: 118), wrote were multifaceted critiques of “our class structures, our familial ideologies, our management of bodies and sexualities, our idealisms, our silences” and while interactions with Europeans were woven into them, they never had the same salience they had in English novels like E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*. With the exception of a few short stories, Urdu novels were mainly concerned with “the barbarity of feudal landowners, rapes and murders in the houses of religious ‘mystics,’ the stranglehold of moneylenders over the lives of peasants and the lower petty bourgeoisie, the social and sexual frustrations of schoolgirls” (Ahmad 1992: 118).

Thus, though Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), a founder and several times president of the Indian National Congress, was perhaps the first non-European to write about the colonial “drain of wealth” and the deepening poverty of India (Patnaik 2017), it was Raúl Prebisch and his colleagues in the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America who first conceptualized core and periphery in a critique of David Ricardo’s Comparative Advantage. Prebisch and Hans Singer (Prebisch 1950), a German economist, argued that the terms of trade steadily move against peripheral states which increasingly specialized in the production of primary products in their trade with core states which produce industrial goods.

Scholars of Latin America and Africa were able to break out of the straitjacket of nation-states and seek to recuperate Karl Marx’s (1977: 247) insight that that capitalism was born on a global stage—that “world market and world trade date from the sixteenth century and from then on the modern history of capital starts to unfold”—because closer contact between colonies and shared languages of scholarship facilitated cross-national comparisons. Rather than setting up provincial universities as in India—Bombay, Calcutta, Madras—the British set up pan-regional universities in Africa as constituent colleges of English universities, drawing their students from the region and faculties from across the world: Makerere, for instance, was set up not as a

³ Interestingly, after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o decided to stop writing in English in favor of his native Kikuyu, a new pan-African authors’ collective, Jalada Africa, has begun publishing translations of literary work in the languages of Africa and Ngũgĩ’s fable *Itũĩka Rĩa Mũrũngarũ: Kana Kĩrĩa Gĩtũmaga Andũ Mathĩ Marũngĩĩ* (*The Upright Revolution: Or Why Humans Walk Upright*) to over 28 African languages. And in Ngũgĩ’s words, such translations “empower Africa by making Africans own their resources from languages—making dreams with our languages—to other natural resources—making things with them, consuming some, exchanging some” (quoted in Flood 2016).

university for Uganda but the flagship campus for British East Africa (Mamdani 2005). Recruitment of faculty at Makerere and at Dar es Salam in the 1960s was conducted through the British Ministry of Overseas Development, which recruited a whole host of scholars including at various times David Apter, Giovanni Arrighi, Immanuel Wallerstein, Walter Rodney, Sol Picciotto, John Saul, Jim Mello, Catherine Hoskins, Luisa Passerini, and others; and where André Gunder Frank and Samir Amin often lectured (Hill 1990; Arrighi 2009).⁴ Wallerstein's first two books were on Africa and he said that his encounter with the continent was "responsible for undoing the more stultifying parts of my educational heritage" (quoted in Tsika 2019).⁵ Academic training in colonial universities and the transnational circulation of intellectuals created a continent-wide consciousness of the impact of colonial rule, especially since the major languages of scholarship were shared widely across the continent—as in Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa. Similarly, in Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese provided a common language for scholarly communications. In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, there was no mediating layer of native elites between the colonizers and the peasants and descendants of slaves, and thus the colonial relationship took on a fierce agency that was blunted in Asia.

From these interactions, a whole series of books emerged challenging reigning narratives of capitalist modernity: Frank's (1967) *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*; Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Amin's (1974) *Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment*; and Wallerstein's (1974) *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. Unlike the debate in Europe on the transition from feudalism to capitalism, this corpus situated the emergence of capitalism on a global stage. If an analogy may be made to contemporary controversies, it is akin to whether the history of the United States begins in 1619 or in 1776 (Hannah-Jones 2019).⁶

The *dependentistas*, though, could not recuperate Marx's insight wholly or in full measure because they posited "metropolitan" and "peripheral" societies as separate entities linked through the world market; and for them it followed, as the night the day, if the links to the world market were severed—"delinking" as it was termed—peripheral states could achieve autonomous development.⁷ The radical break with this formulation that a world-systems perspective made was that core and periphery were relational constructs: no cores without peripheries and *vice-versa* (Martin 1994). Wallerstein derived this relational construct from the work of Marian Malowist and other east European historians of the so-called "second feudalism." Unlike the "first" feudalism with which it shared a "common descriptor" and where production was oriented towards the

⁴ Recruitment of overseas scholars was partly by offering better salaries than in Europe or the UK (Arrighi 2009)

⁵ Interestingly, Wallerstein was president of the African Studies Association (1972–1973) and the International Sociological Association (1994–1998) but not of the American Sociological Association.

⁶ I owe this analogy to Reşat Kasaba.

⁷ The history of Haiti—the first place where the slaves overthrew slavery—should have indicated that severing ties from the world-economy did not lead to autonomous development (Porter et al. 2022).

manor, production in estates of the “second” feudalism looked to distant markets. When production was linked to capitalist markets it followed that wage-labor was not the *differentia specifica* of capitalism, but central to capital accumulation (Wallerstein 2002).

Though early formulations of a world-systems framework had been anchored in concepts of unequal exchange and modes of labor control, it was soon evident that these were inadequate to trace world-embracing networks. Consequently, the concept of commodity chains—the inputs, including wage-goods for labor, that go into the production of commodities—was devised to trace the emerging and shifting contours of the world-economy as profits accumulate in core zones leading to the further peripheralization of zones from where surplus is extracted (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986; Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994). This shift from unequal exchange and modes of labor control implied that the origins of capitalism could no longer be traced to northwestern Europe as had been done in virtually all historical studies including, Wallerstein’s (1974) volume I of the *Modern World-System*, but in the interaction of European *conquistadors*, native Americans, and enslaved Africans in the Americas (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992).

This reformulation of the origins of the capitalist world-economy from northwestern Europe to the world stage and its subsequent expansion is a fundamental watershed in social analysis. No longer is capitalism seen as having originated specifically in Europe. Nor were there “transitions to capitalism” in individual countries. By tracing the origins of capitalism to the “long sixteenth century” (1450–1640), the English Industrial Revolution is seen as just one of several processes in which there was a marked increase in the mechanization of production. Similarly, if capitalism had existed for several centuries prior to the French Revolution, then the upheavals in France could not be thought of as a “bourgeois revolution” but as a last attempt to challenge England for hegemony and as a failed anticapitalist (“antisystemic”) revolution. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are seen, then, not as the beginnings of capitalism, or modernity, but as the spread of certain metastrategic values throughout the system: its “geoculture.” This implied the creation of “liberal states” in the core, the transformation of citizenship from being an inclusive category to an exclusive one—excluding women, the working class and the poor, and ethnic/racial minorities—and “the emergence of the historical social sciences as reflections of liberal ideology and modes of enabling the dominant groups to control the dominated strata” (Wallerstein 2011: 277). Challenges to this centralist liberal ideology, finally world-systems analysts argue emerged in the “world revolution of 1968” when the excluded strata fundamentally questioned the governing liberal ideology (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989) and prepared the ground for a world-systems perspective.

Conceived as a trans-disciplinary scholarly project, Political Economy of the World-System (PEWS) was constituted as a section within the American Sociological Association and held sessions during its annual meetings as well as organizing annual meetings in the Spring in different campuses so that it could attract scholars from disciplines other than sociology—alumni of the

Binghamton Sociology program organized and hosted many of these annual gatherings.⁸ An Institute for Research on the World-System was established at the University of California in the 1990s by Christopher Chase-Dunn, and since 1995, Chase-Dunn and Wally Goldfrank started the online *Journal of World-Systems Research*. Outside the United States, several International Colloquia on the World-Economy were also organized⁹; and since 2007, the Brazilian Research Group on Political Economy of World-Systems has organized an annual colloquium.

II

Five years after Harpur College at Binghamton became a university center of the State University of New York system in 1965, the decision to make it the system's liberal arts flagship led to the hiring of Professors Terence K. Hopkins, James Geschwender, Philip Kraft, and Bob Rhodes to start a doctoral program in sociology. The timing was fortuitous as it coincided with the self-destruction of the graduate sociology program at the New School for Social Research in New York and a number of politically conscious graduate students from there came to Binghamton and helped set the tone. A few years later, as the then Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Norman Cantor, was watching Monday Night football with Hopkins, he asked what it would take to lure Wallerstein who had just published volume I of the *Modern World-System* (1975) to Binghamton and listed some of the terms he should demand. Hopkins then contacted Wallerstein who accepted those terms, but also wanted a Distinguished Professorship for its political cachet within the university system. He arrived in Binghamton in 1976 along with two assistant professors, Cedric Robinson and Dale Tomich, and established the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations.

Collaborative research working groups (RWG) at the Fernand Braudel Center between faculty and graduate students, not only from Sociology but also from other departments, were crucial to the forging of new analytical tools necessary to study world-embracing networks (Wallerstein 2002: 367–68).¹⁰ Key to this was the recuperation of Marx's focus on production

⁸ Robert Schaeffer at Emory University (1988); William G. Martin at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (1989); Reşat Kasaba at the University of Washington, Seattle (1990); Ravi Palat at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (1991); Philip McMichael at Cornell (1993); Roberto Korzeniewicz at the University of Miami (1995) and at the University of Maryland, College Park (1999); Georgi Derlugian at Northwestern (1998); Faruk Tabak at Georgetown (2003); Agustin Lao-Montes at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (2005); Khaldoun Samman at Macalester College (2006); Eric Mielants at Fairfield University (2008 and 2018) and Thomas Reifer at the University of San Diego (2009). For a full list of PEWS conferences, see <http://www.asapews.org/annuals.html>

⁹ These were co-sponsored with the Maison des Sciences de l'homme, the Max Planck Institute, and a local sponsor and were held in Starnberg (Germany) in 1978, 1980, and 1991; Cetraro (Italy) in 1979; New Delhi in 1982; Caracas in 1983; Paris in 1984; Dakar in 1985; Modena in 1986; Cairo in 1988; Brasilia in 1989; Tokyo and Nagoya in 1993; and Vienna in 1995.

¹⁰ Among the more prominent RWGs were the Cyclical Rhythms and Secular Trends of the Capitalist World-Economy (from 1977 to 1988) after which it changed to Commodity Chains, 1590–1790 (1988–1991); Households, Labor Force Formation and the World-Economy, (1978–1988) after which it changed to Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

rather than on exchange relations. Here, however, there was a contradiction in Marx's work that he never resolved: on the one hand, the increasing immiseration of workers as a result of their weakening bargaining power in the labor market, and on the other, the increasing strengthening of labor in the workplace. Rather than resolving this contradiction, Marx had retreated into the very political economy of Adam Smith that he had criticized, reviving instead of critiquing classical political economy. Thus, not only were gender and generational antinomies subsumed by Marx's determination of wages by "historical and moral elements," but his contention that the proletariat had to first settle accounts with its national bourgeoisie led to a retreat to the Smithian political economy of the nation-state rather than to the world as the unit of analysis. This retreat not only posited a false dichotomy between productive and "unproductive" labor but also largely ignored domestic labor and the so-called "informal" sector—which incidentally accounted for a disproportionately large proportion of the workforce in low-income economies.

Conversely, the world-systems perspectives' insistence on the world as the unit of analysis, and its focus on commodity flows in determining the evolving boundaries of the world, placed networks of capital accumulation at the center of the inquiry, even in places without wage-labor. Here, households as income-pooling units, combining gender and generational antinomies, emerged as a key theoretical construct. Leaving aside a subsistence redoubt with little contact with the market, world-systems analysts identify two types of household structures that vary across time and space. Most are part lifetime proletarians, laborers who depend on non-market sources for part of their livelihood rather than solely on wages. Since their wages are supplemented by non-market sources for part of their lives, and perhaps in some measure for all their lives, they reduce capitalists' wage-bill considerably and form the vast majority of the working people at all times. Full lifetime proletarians who depend almost exclusively on wages and the market are proportionately more expensive and more likely to be in the core zones though pockets exist in the peripheral and semiperipheral zones as well. In all locations, as economies expand, more people become full lifetime proletarians and in times of economic downturns, the ranks of part lifetime proletarians grow substantially (Smith and Wallerstein 1992). This formulation enables analysts to encompass gender and generational inequalities as well as domestic labor and the "informal" sector within world-embracing networks of production and circulation.

One of the earliest collaborative research projects was on cycles and trends in the world-economy (Research Working Group on Cyclical Rhythms and Secular Trends 1979). I must confess, however, that I never found Kondratieff Cycles and Secular Trends in analyzing the evolution of the world-economy compelling. Far more persuasive was a formulation devised by Arrighi, drawing on Antonio Gramsci, Joseph Schumpeter, and Fernand Braudel. Braudel (1984)

in the Capitalist World-Economy (1989–1991); World Labor (1978–1991); Semiperipheral States in the World-Economy (1982–1988); Southern Africa and the World-Economy (1982–1991); Ottoman Empire and the World-Economy (1983–1989). In 1989, with a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, a project titled "Hegemony and Rivalry in the World-System: Trends and Prospective Consequences of Geopolitical Realignment, 1500–2025" was launched in 1989 and it was divided into two RWGs: Comparative Hegemonies and Trajectory of the World-System (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1996; Arrighi and Silver 1999).

had argued that a crisis of accumulation occurs periodically because competitive pressures lead to the amassing of more capital than could be invested in the production and sale of commodities without sharply driving down profit rates. Hence a period of material expansion of the economy was followed by a phase of financial expansion which could be seen as “a sign of autumn” of a system of accumulation. Taking his cue from this observation, Arrighi (1994) argued that the recurrent tendency for capital to withdraw from production and trade to financial speculation has been a means both to redistribute income and wealth from workers, peasants, and other strata to agencies that control mobile capital—exacerbating thereby the process of financial expansion—and to transfer surplus capital from declining to rising centers of capital accumulation. Hence, as Dutch power declined, capital from Amsterdam flowed towards London, and as British power waned, New York was the beneficiary of capital flows from London.

Underpinning these structural changes in world accumulation were the multiple organizational, technological, financial, and political innovations required for a progressive increase in the scale of production. As raw materials are not evenly distributed across the world, and as producers tend to utilize conveniently located sources first, emerging powers have to access raw materials from further away and as the size of transportation technologies evolved, it required more extensive infrastructures, the harnessing of more energy, and the employment of more labor. While this eventually increased economies of scale and reduced unit costs to expand markets and make ever-larger projects lucrative, it has historically required new combinations of state and enterprise partnerships. The Marshallian industrial districts that had transformed England to become the “workshop of the world,” were no match for the multi-unit, vertically-integrated, large-scale enterprises of the United States. Hence, rising centers became magnets for mobile capital as older centers of production become less competitive (Bunker and Ciccantell 2005).

A key characteristic of the world-systems perspective—and one which also set it apart from dependency theory—was its conception of a semiperipheral zone. Conceptually cast as a layer that insulated the core from pressures emanating from the periphery, its determination remained amorphous with an early listing including well over 70 percent of the global population (Wallerstein 1979). The Semiperipheral States Research Working Group, directed by Arrighi, used the GNP per capita of each territorial jurisdiction as a percentage of the GNP per capita of the “organic core” to show that between 1938 and 1988 there was indeed a trimodal distribution (Arrighi and Drangel 1986; Arrighi 1990).

Labor was another early focus of research at the Fernand Braudel Center. The Research Working Group on World Labor sought to chart labor movements from the 1870s to the 1980s; and since there was no standardized way in which labor movements were measured across the world for this period, and in many cases governments preferred not to record such movements, the group devised elaborate procedures to create data from the indexes of the *Times* (London) and the *New York Times*, which were then supplemented by case studies of several key states (World Labor Group 1995). The World Labor RWG also participated in the Binational (United States and USSR) Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences and hosted a meeting in Binghamton and participated in meetings in the USSR.

There were also regionally-focused research working groups at the Fernand Braudel Center: on the Ottoman Empire, on the Mediterranean and southern Europe; on southern Africa, and on South Asia.¹¹ The southern Africa group charted how regions—geographically interlinked production processes across state boundaries—emerge in the world-economy (Martin 1986). The Ottoman group held a series of eight biennial conferences and also worked on a project on port-cities in the eastern Mediterranean.¹² My own work developed within this context. In one of my very early meetings with Terence Hopkins as a graduate student, he had asked me something to the effect that everyone says a lot of gold and silver from the Americas in the early modern period went to Asia, but where did it go? In attempting to answer this question, I was to construct the dynamics of an Indian Ocean world-economy based on the peculiarities of wet-rice agriculture. This refuted several propositions that had been advanced by Wallerstein: for him, an interstate system was a peculiar characteristic of the capitalist world-economy, but I was able to excavate evidence of the operation of an interstate system in the Indian Ocean. Wallerstein (1974: 41) had argued that bullion from the Americas were used “to decorate the temples, palaces, and clothing of the Asian aristocratic classes.” But I was able to show that in a continent starved of coinable metals, gold and silver from the Americas was vital for the expansion of intra-Asian trade networks, and botanical bounties from the Americas was vital for a three-fold increase in the population of China between 1600 and 1800 (Maddison 1998; Sugihara Kaoru 2003; Palat 2015). This challenged Wallerstein’s contention that relations between world-systems is merely an exchange of preciosities irrelevant to the reproduction of relational dependencies within each world-system. It also opens up the question of the differential impact of the European conquest of the Americas on early modern Asia—an issue that has yet to be researched.

The work of the Fernand Braudel Center was sustained and supported by the graduate program in sociology and its international character. Hopkins’ fundamental premise was that serious students know what courses are appropriate for them and that it was his job as Director of Graduate Studies to find out what was appropriate for that student, because each student was different. So, he spent a lot of time talking with each student during their graduate career. There were no required courses per se, though some were strongly suggested. The key innovation was the “demonstrations of competence” in two areas—only one of which could be temporally or

¹¹ Perhaps it is telling that many of the students who worked at the Fernand Braudel Center got their first academic jobs at area studies centers: William G. Martin in Sociology and African Studies at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; Reşat Kasaba in Middle Eastern Studies at the Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington, Seattle; Roberto Korzeniewicz in Latin American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park; and myself in Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

¹² These were co-sponsored with the Southwest Asian and North Africa (SWANA) program at Binghamton and often with the Institute of Turkish Studies: “Ottoman Empire and World Capitalism” (1984); “Large-Scale Commercial Agriculture in the Ottoman Empire” (1986); “Impact of 1838: Anatolia and Egypt Compared” (1988); “Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1500–1980” (1990); “Population and Nationalism during the Dissolution of an Empire: The Formation of Nation-States on the Ottoman Fringes” (1992); “Histographies of the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1923” (1994); “Consumption in the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1923” (1996); and “Law and Legitimation in the Ottoman Empire” (1998).

geographically specific. It was the student's task to invent a field of study which did not exist independently of the inquiry. This was innovative because it was predicated on the idea that graduate students who invented a field had something to teach the faculty: that learning was a collaborative process and we all had something to learn (Wallerstein 1998). Students came from all over the world, and another key feature of the program were the International Adjunct Professors, scholars from other parts of the world who brought perspectives often unfamiliar to the U.S. academy: scholars like Georges Haupt and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch from France; Bernard Magubane from South Africa and Rodney from Guyana; Anna Davin and Perry Anderson from the UK; Muto Ichiyo from Japan and Anibal Quijano from Peru, among others. Indeed, Arrighi and Çağlar Keyder first came to Binghamton as international adjuncts before they joined the regular faculty.

Deaths, resignations, and retirements of faculty, as well as the tendency for small radical groups to splinter through schisms eventually led to a decline of collaborative work in the department and to even to a substantive split in the department in the 1990s. After this schism began to close with the retirements of the American and Comparative section faculty, there was an attempt to relaunch the Fernand Braudel Center with the hiring of new world-systems oriented faculty and the launch of three inter-related research working groups on Structural Trends in the Capitalist World-Economy, Categories of Social Knowledge, and Waves of Anti-Systemic Movements (Martin 2008).¹³ Unlike the Research Working Groups of the 1980s, when Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein worked closely together, the coordinators of the new working groups—Wallerstein, Richard Lee, and William Martin—did not collaborate outside these groups nor did their students.

In their new institutions, alumni of the department were unable to create the collaborative research environments of the 1970s and 1980s at the Fernand Braudel Center. All went as assistant professors to universities across the country and overseas, without much access to research funds or resources. As untenured assistant professors, they were very low down on the pecking order. Arrighi and Beverly Silver at Johns Hopkins may have been an exception but Arrighi went there as a tenured full professor. The rest could at best organize one of the PEWS conferences but otherwise functioned in relative isolation.

Generally, the university administration was supportive of the department till the end of President Lois de Fleur's term. In 2001, for instance, when a full professorship with a focus on Asia was announced, the department was permitted to make offers to all three candidates who came for on-campus interviews and they were allowed the hire at least two other full professors without the normal process of prior advertisements. All that, however, came to an end with de Fleur's resignation; and the current university administration eventually shut down the Fernand Braudel Center when its last director retired rather than let other faculty members resuscitate it.

¹³ <https://conifer.rhizome.org/binglibraries/fernand-braudel-center-for-the-study-of-economies-historical-systems-and-civilizations-2/list/fbc/b1/20200514022418/https://www.binghamton.edu/fbc/scholarly-activities/research/crisis-world.html>

III

Just as the radical energies of the social movements of the 1960s were being institutionalized in new programs in universities—women’s and gender studies, black and ethnic studies, dependency theory and world-systems—the economic crisis brought about by the collapse of the Bretton Woods system and the oil price hikes began to undermine university funding. To compensate for the loss of government grants, universities turned to corporations for funding, at a time when industry was cutting back on its own basic research. If critics saw a partnership with industry as distorting research agendas, its proponents contended that universities could have a real-world impact and should reward scientists who make this possible. The alliance between universities and corporations were facilitated by a number of regulatory changes, especially the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which allowed universities to patent government funded inventions; the Supreme Court decision in the *Diamond v. Chakrabarty* case the same year that permitted microorganisms to be patented; and the creation of a specialized patent court that strengthened intellectual property rights (Berman 2012). As Benjamin Johnson, Patrick Kavanagh, and Kevin Mattson (2003: 13) nicely put it: “What is new about today’s university is not that it serves the corporation—for it has always done that—but that it *emulates* it.”

Fearing continued electoral losses, the Labour Party in the United Kingdom and the Democrats in the United States tacked firmly to the right: in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Democratic Leadership Council in the United States adopted the “Third Way,” arguing that the party cannot be seen as a captive to “special interests,” and especially to organized labor. It jettisoned its adherence to affirmative action and social welfare, and promoted mass incarceration, arguing that crime should be punished and solutions should not be sought in “material conditions.” Tony Blair won his first election in 1997 for “New Labour” by claiming that the distinction between management and workers no longer applied, and that his government will be the most “restrictive” on trade unions in the Western world (Atkins 2016; Palat 2019; Geismer 2022)! Within the sphere of education, what this meant was to treat education as creating human capital rather than forming citizens who are trained in understanding the broader problems of power and social responsibility that had undergirded the liberal arts curriculum in the academy. The extension of a liberal arts education after the Second World War had been “nothing short of a radical democratic event, one in which all became potentially eligible for the life of freedom long reserved for the few” (Brown 2015: 185). It is precisely this that was undermined by the neoliberal turn.

This recasting of the university was made possible, David Graeber (2007) argued, because the economic constraints impinged just as the excluded—the women, the ethnic minorities—had begun to establish themselves:

These were the identities celebrated in the campus “identity politics” of the Eighties and Nineties—an inclusiveness that notably did not extend to, say, Baptists or “rednecks.” Unsurprisingly, many focused their rage not on government or on university administrations but on minorities, queers, and feminists.” (P. 38)

Liberal education is under attack from all sides now:

cultural values spurn it, capital is not interested in it, debt-burdened families anxious about the future do not demand it, neoliberal rationality does not index it, and, of course, states no longer invest in it. According to popular wisdom, the liberal arts are *passé*, the protected ivory tower is an expensive and outmoded relic, and the more the university remakes itself through and for the market, the better off everyone—except overpaid, underworked tenured faculty—will be. Skills for twenty-first century jobs provided by an instructional staff itself organized by market metrics ought to replace the patently anachronistic concepts and trappings of university life and content. (Brown 2015: 180–81)

Moreover, economic restructuring and the extraordinary widening of income inequalities has led to a sharp discount of the “college wage premium” and devalued a liberal arts education in the eyes of a large public especially when celebrity founders of Microsoft, Apple, and Facebook were college dropouts (Brown 2015).

Elite private universities—and some “public Ivies”—stand apart because of the prestige that accrues from their credentials and the social networks to which they give access and which leads to great socio-economic rewards. Their faculty also have lower teaching loads and more resources to provide a quality education and these are the select institutions that can preserve the liberal arts traditions. Ironically, then, the campus radicals who have been reabsorbed into the academy are now set to teach the children of the elite (Graeber 2007), but “what students learn at these institutions is mostly irrelevant to their future in worlds of business, finance, and tech, which is where most of them are going” (Brown 2015: 193). In other institutions, the resort to heavily-overworked, poorly-paid, contingent academic labor leads to greater use of multiple-choice questions routinely supplied in question banks by publishers of standard textbooks, often instituting peer-assessments among students that are only possible when the questions and answers are straightforward. Teaching in such conditions is rarely linked to research (Donaghue 2018) and perhaps for this reason in the United Kingdom and elsewhere polytechnics have been granted university status. In short, post-secondary education once again resembles the situation prevalent before the expansion of universities after the Second World War: a few select institutions training the elite and the many imparting basic skills needed to keep up with ever-changing technological needs.

Compounding matters, attacks on not merely radical social science but even on secular and liberal scholars in many international locations from where students used to come to the United States—Narendra Modi’s attacks on universities in India and his government’s attempt to fundamentally restructure education there; parallel moves against left-wing and secular academics in Turkey (Hansen 2019); Viktor Orban’s expulsion of the Central European University from Budapest (Newton 2018); the persecution of academics and activists in the Philippines—also does not auger well. Structural Adjustment Programs instituted by the World Bank had devastated universities in Africa and the Caribbean and low salaries often compelled academics—especially in Africa as Mamdani (2005) argues—to work as contract researchers for scholars in the global North who set the research agendas. Within the United States itself, attempts by the radical right to exclude “inglorious” aspects of domestic history from school curriculums and their attack on

“critical race theory” and on sexual orientation and gender identity within the context of a decline of tenure has sent a chill across faculty in many universities.

IV

Given the massive structural and geographical changes in the evolution of capitalism as a world-system, it becomes immediately apparent that concepts and tools required to investigate the axial division of labor (core-periphery relations) or state structures in the sixteenth century would be inadequate to study similar relations and structures in the twenty-first century. The emergence of major centers of accumulation outside Euro-North America render analytical categories of the several disciplines increasingly anachronistic as they embody the theoretical encapsulations of the Euro--North American narrative of capitalist development, state formation, and social change. To better analyze these changes, we may need to transcend the nineteenth century fragmentation of knowledge into discrete disciplinary tributaries and reconceptualize the organization of knowledge and analytical categories in world-relational terms.

And as China rises and a new world order emerges, a world-systems perspective has much to offer: namely, studies on hegemony clearly bear on the rivalry between the United States and China. Indeed, the rise of a state that was not an inheritor of the “geoculture” of the West raises fundamental questions on social and political organization. In fact, the positing of a liberal geoculture of the world-system, based primarily on the late nineteenth century experience of Britain and France, goes against the grain of state construction in much of the rest of the world. As European colonial structures were dismantled in much of Asia and Africa state formation occurred under fundamentally different conditions: colonial systems of rule had radically reshaped ethnicities and given new implications to notions to pre-existing identities. Territorial integrity that had taken many decades to establish in Europe had to be asserted often without the consent of the people since administrative boundaries violated everyday practices; state formation was complicated by the interference of superpowers and the impact of Cold War politics; electoral democracy in conditions of relative poverty and high degrees of illiteracy was a historical novelty and did not facilitate the spread of liberal “geoculture” of nineteenth century a la England and France (Kaviraj 1994; Martin and Beittel 1998). Pressures from core states in the interstate system compelled national liberation movements to make substantial concessions if they were to retain power (Wallerstein 1996) though it does not fully account for later changes such as the rise of Hindutva in India, or to Xi Jinping’s turn to autocracy and the persecution of the Uighur.

Attacks on academic freedoms in rising states—China, India, Turkey—also raise difficult questions on the legacies of the European Enlightenment and we need to challenge the false identity between Eurocentrism and the Enlightenment (Dirlik 2012, 2016). As the Nigerian postcolonial philosopher, Emmanuel Eze argued:

In contrast to traditional theories of colonialism, critical theory in the postcolonial age, in its many facets, carries forward the promise of emancipation embodied in aspects of the Enlightenment and modernist discourses. But it also seeks to hold the

processes of modernity, and the European-inspired Enlightenment accountable for the false conceptual frameworks within which they produced, for example, the idea of history as something in the name of which peoples outside of the narrow spheres of Europe appeared to many European states as legitimate objects of capitalist enslavement, political conquest and economic depredation. It is in these dual intentions that the *critical* element in postcolonial theory is to be understood. (quoted in Dirlik 2016: 81)

Autocracies everywhere are against the values of the Enlightenment not because the Enlightenment is merely an encapsulation of Eurocentrism but because it was an emancipatory movement initially against the Church, but potentially against all forms of despotism. Its basic principles were as Jonathan Israel (2010) puts it:

democracy; racial and sexual equality; individual liberty of lifestyle; full freedom of thought, expression, and the press; eradication of religious authority from the legislative process and education; and full separation of church and state...Its universalism lies in its claim that all men [*sic*] have the right to pursue happiness in their own way, and think and say whatever they see fit, and no one, including those who convince others they are divinely chosen to be their master, rulers, or spiritual guides, is justified in denying or hindering others in the enjoyment of rights that pertain to all men and women equally. (P. vii–viii)

These ideas adopted by intellectuals in the non-Western world to challenge arbitrary rule and stifling traditions are opposed by elites and even in some cases the population at large as “foreign” ideas because they subvert existing values and structures of power.

The emergence of China as the “workshop of the world” also interrogates concepts like Fordism—the possibility of selling products on a wider world market meant that paying workers higher wages to transform them into consumers of the commodities they make— as it was superseded by forms that have been called the “dormitory labor regime” (Ngai Pun and Chan 2013). Can this be seen as extending the internalization of costs: of the internalization of protection costs under Dutch hegemony; of production costs under British hegemony; of transaction costs under U. S. hegemony (Arrighi 1994); and now of reproduction costs? And how would this determine new waves of labor movements?

The rise of large populous countries like China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil, especially after the financial crisis of 2007–2008, has meant that growth was good for the global poor and the global middle class but bad for the middle classes in the high-income states of Western Europe and the United States. It is, in fact, the first time since the incorporation of China and India into the capitalist world-economy that the working classes of Euro-North America have experienced a relative decline in their incomes (Milanovic 2020). Though inequalities in income and wealth have widened dramatically in each and every state, the economic growth of these countries with large populations has decreased global inequality for the first time since the mid-nineteenth century! How does this relate to the growth of populist movements like the Tea Party Movement in the United States, Brexit in the United Kingdom, Occupy movements, the Alternative for Deutschland in Germany, *Rassemblement National* in France (see Gerstle 2022)? Indeed, how does this growth of large, populous countries impact on the trimodal distribution of income? Was that a transitional

feature of the world-system? If semiperipheral states had been a key stabilizing element in the system (Martin 1990), would their decreasing salience entail a very chaotic and distinct ordering of the world-economy? In any event, an exploration of the rise of China from a world-systems perspective will be far more intellectually fruitful than Graham Allison's (2017) "Thucydides's Trap" which sees great power rivalry merely as a transhistorical game of musical chairs!

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