



The Semi-Periphery, World Revolution, and the Arab Spring: Reflections on Tunisia

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Global Formation: Structures of the World-Economy (1989, 1998) is Chase-Dunn's celebrated book, and students in the political economy course I have taught over the years have found this theoretical book as challenging but instructive as I did when I first read it. This is where I learned about Kondratieff waves, as well as the relationship of economic cycles and war. But it is the elaboration of the semi-periphery that I found most illuminating. Indeed, in my judgment, theorization of the semi-periphery is one of the most significant conceptual contributions to our understanding of both the global economy and cycles of contention. Coined by Immanuel Wallerstein, it has been extended historically and further elaborated by Chase-Dunn and his colleagues and students. Analyses of the newly-industrializing countries (NICs), the group of countries known as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa sometimes included), and the Latin American "pink tide" that began in the early 21st century—as well as debates on the rise and fall of hegemons—have been enriched by application of the concept of semi-peripheral development.

What I find especially interesting is the correlation of semi-peripheral development with both the evolution of capitalism and the emergence of revolutions and rebellions. As Chase-Dunn explains in *Global Formation* and elsewhere, the semi-periphery is the weak link in the world-



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system. This notion helped me to better understand and explain the Arab Spring protests. In this paper, I draw on Chase-Dunn's writings on the semi-periphery and world revolution to reflect on Tunisia's role in the Arab Spring protests and the world-systemic constraints that it has faced in the years since. I end with some comments on female labor in the world-economy and on Chase-Dunn's approach to culture in the world-system.

Semi-Peripheral Development

In two papers produced in 2012 and 2013 that focused on Latin America in the world-system, Chase-Dunn and his colleagues draw on Jeffrey Kentor's (2008) classification to include a group of small and large countries alike in the semi-periphery, among them Indonesia, Mexico, Brazil, India, China, Taiwan, South Korea, South Africa, and Israel. Of the countries of the Middle East, Turkey and two Arab countries—Egypt and Saudi Arabia—are included (Chase-Dunn and Morosin 2013, Fig. 2; see also Chase-Dunn, Garita, and Pugh 2012).¹ Earlier, in comparative work conducted with Thomas Hall, Chase-Dunn's concept of *semi-peripheral development* posited that attention should be paid to the emergence of social movements as well as to distinctive national regimes within the semi-periphery. Scholarship and the historical record alike confirm the importance of the semi-periphery in world-systemic changes (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). But also important is the role of certain peripheral countries in challenging the world-system's logic and especially the power of the hegemon (e.g., Vietnam in the 1970s, Iran 1979, Nicaragua in the early 1980s), as was documented in Terry Boswell's edited volume on revolution in the world-system (Boswell 1989). I would add that attention is due to smaller countries that lie perhaps at the nexus of periphery and semi-periphery. One such country is Tunisia, which launched the Arab Spring protests in December 2010 and which—some six years on—remains the one “success story” of that series of mass social protests. The challenges and constraints that the Tunisian experiment faces, however, are formidable. Here I reflect on Tunisia's relatively successful political revolution and its prospects in the context of other developments in the wider MENA region, the apparent waning of the Latin American pink tide, and the rightward shift across Europe.

The Arab Spring in the Context of World Revolutions

The Arab Spring occurred in what appeared to be global conditions propitious for major transformation. The 2008 Global Recession, which had begun the previous year with the subprime

¹ I would argue that Iran should be included in the semi-periphery, given the size of its territory and educated population, its GDP, military strength, and growing influence in regional politics and international affairs. According to data from the UNDP's 2015 Human Development Report, Iran's GDP is \$1.371 trillion; its population is 77 million, of which 70% are urban dwellers; it has an electrification rate of 98%; its tertiary enrollment rate is 55% and total fertility rate is 1.9; and it has a taxation regime despite its oil wealth. Its military spending, on the other hand, is much lower than that of Saudi Arabia or Israel.

mortgage meltdown in the United States, spread throughout the financial markets of the core countries and eventually enveloped the Global South countries. Ordinary citizens experienced food and fuel price increases, along with job, income, and housing losses, while banks and corporations were provided with bailouts by their governments. To deal with the crisis, governments instituted austerity measures. A number of studies had already analyzed growing income inequality in the core countries, and especially in the United States, and some had sought to show the advantages of greater social equality (*e.g.*, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Processes associated with neoliberal capitalist globalization culminated in the Arab Spring protests of early 2011, the anti-austerity protests in Europe that summer, and Occupy Wall Street in the United States that fall. There followed much public debate concerning the future of capitalism (see, *e.g.*, Foroohar 2016; Ostry *et al.* 2016) and the rise of new anti-globalization political parties on the left as well as the right.

The revolts that emerged in various Arab countries in early 2011—in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen—were rooted to some degree in the world-systemic developments mentioned above, although each had its own specific grievances, objectives, and tactics. Socio-economic grievances were most prominent in the slogans, banners, and public demands of Tunisia and Morocco, and to a lesser degree Egypt. In those countries, too, the protesters engaged in non-violent collective action.² And yet, when the Arab Spring gained momentum in 2011, some scholars argued that it had come as a complete shock and surprise and that the downfall of such authoritarian regimes was thoroughly unexpected and unpredicted.³ This may have been because of the research approaches many scholars had taken. Some had devoted considerable time to ethnographies of everyday life. Others had been studying the “moderation” and parliamentary turn of Islamist movements. Yet other scholars had been preoccupied with analyzing “state robustness” and “authoritarian resilience”. Many such studies, while elucidating important aspects of societies and politics in the Middle East and North Africa, rarely examined either the activities of civil society and oppositional movements (other than the afore-mentioned Islamist movements) or the world-system’s pressures on Arab states and societies. Analyses of “social non-movements” and “authoritarian resilience” seemed to overlook the successful social revolution in Iran in 1979, the labor protests that occurred periodically in Egypt and Tunisia, and the role of the U.S. and U.K. in the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq and the downfall of the Saddam regime. They also elided the anti-authoritarian social movements of Latin America that had peacefully overthrown brutal military dictatorships and ushered in democratic transitions in

² There was some violence in Egyptian towns, where protesters attacked police stations, and assaults on women protesters in Tahrir Square.

³ The conference on “Seasons of the Arab Spring”, held at the University of Pittsburgh on 28-20 March 2012, included three speakers who emphasized the “unexpected” nature of the protests and the regime changes in Egypt and Tunisia.

the 1980s and 1990s. Contrary to the aforementioned approaches, it was in fact just a matter of time before Arab countries would produce pro-democracy movements.

Chase-Dunn has pointed out that instead of the sort of violent revolutions or coups that predominated in the past, the new global left movements have preferred peaceful protests and the ballot box. We witnessed that in Latin America in the early part of this century, where the coming to power of left-wing governments in the wake of strong social movements raised the hopes of many across the globe. We also witnessed peaceful protests during the Arab Spring and a preference for the ballot box afterwards, especially in Tunisia and Morocco.⁴

The widespread protests, the regime changes in Tunisia and Egypt, and the *mouvement 20 février* in Morocco generated emotions of joy and hope among citizens and many international supporters. In particular, Tunisia's "Jasmine" or "Dignity" revolution of 2011 quickly established procedures for its democratic transition. To paraphrase Chase-Dunn, there was both motivation and opportunity for semi-peripheral democratic socialism in Tunisia. Moreover, Tunisians' demand for dignity during their revolution could inspire people around the world mired in precarious or exploitative conditions, yearning not only for material needs but for a redefinition of the public good and of what it means to be human together. In my own work, I hypothesized that the Arab Spring—along with the World Social Forum, Occupy Wall Street, the European anti-austerity protests, and the many transnational advocacy and activist networks that had constituted global civil society—could constitute a fourth wave of democracy. I had borrowed the notion of "democracy waves" from Samuel Huntington's work (1992) but was also cognizant of the socialist nature of various revolutions across time and space as well as the role of imperialism in failed revolutions. I thus constructed a table, which Chase-Dunn kindly commented on, that highlighted successful and failed democratic revolutions, along with the relevant "external impositions" (Moghadam 2013, Table 3.1, pp. 72-73). Though hopeful about the Arab Spring, I also had reservations and concerns, which are discussed below.

Could the Arab Spring have been part of what Chase-Dunn and his colleagues have called the "spiral of capitalism and socialism", their conceptual alternative to Karl Polanyi's double-movement? The coming of the new millennium seemed to feature "the New Global Left" and the possibility for "the World Revolution of 20xx" (Chase-Dunn and Morosin 2013). World revolutions are time-bound clusters of local, national, and transnational struggles. Their relationship to the evolution of capitalism and its institutions has been elaborated in a number of publications (Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000; Chase-Dunn 2010; Smith, Karides et al 2014) as well as in the many working papers on the UC-Riverside website. Chase-Dunn notes that the world

⁴ Morocco had been experiencing a very gradual form of democratization since 1998, when a progressive political party came to power, though it lost in subsequent elections.

revolution of 20xx has been primarily a reaction against the neoliberal globalization project. It began with the anti-IMF riots that broke out in the 1980s when the Structural Adjustment Programs caused prices of food and transportation to rise in many of the cities of the Global South. It re-emerged with the 1994 Zapatista revolt, and in the new century continued with the Latin American pink tide, the World Social Forum, the transnational social movements against globalization, and the anti-austerity protests of 2011.

How does this align with earlier world-systems analyses of revolution? Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein (1989: 19) wrote of “two *world* revolutions” (emphasis in the original)—1848 and 1968—both of which failed but also transformed the world. As they point out, “the bubble of popular enthusiasm and radical innovations was burst within a relatively short period” (20). The 1848 revolution, they write, institutionalized the Old Left and was a dress rehearsal for the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik Revolution; 1968 institutionalized the new social movements but Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein leave open the question of what it prefigured. They acknowledge the new social movements’ priorities and identities, including gender, generation, ethnicity, race, disability, sexuality. But they assert that “the contradiction between labor and capital, given both the increasing centralization of capital and the increasing marginalization of large sectors of the labor force, will remain elemental” (28). In light of what we know about income inequalities, obscene CEO compensation, stagnating wages, and precarious forms of employment, this prescient comment is even more applicable to today’s world.

The Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein paper was written prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and communist parties in Eastern Europe, and in my judgment, it is doubtful that the great student and anti-imperialist uprisings of 1968 were a dress rehearsal for the revival of liberal capitalism in the former communist bloc. It seems more appropriate to call 1968 a dress rehearsal for the events of the new century—the anti-globalization protests, the World Social Forum, and the Latin American pink tide starting in 2001; and in 2011, the Arab Spring, the European anti-austerity summer, and the American Occupy Wall Street encampments—what I referred to as democracy’s possible fourth wave and what Chase-Dunn refers to as the world revolution of 20xx.

At the same time, I was aware of the limitations of the Arab protest movements and so-called revolutions. In 2011 and 2012, the role of Islamists in Egypt, Libya, and Syria seemed to foreclose any progressive outcome, and as I had written earlier, Islamist movements have no quarrel with capitalism or even its neoliberal version. Apart from the open calls in Morocco and Tunisia for decent work, better education and healthcare, and more equality, none of the protest movements advanced anything like a program for social and economic justice. A turn similar to the Latin American pink tide of the early part of the century, therefore, seemed unlikely (Moghadam 2012).

In fact, not all Arab countries could produce effective pro-democracy movements, revolutions, or democratic transitions. Past scholarship has identified certain prerequisites,

including a level of economic and societal modernization, pre-existing repertoires of collective action, and a mobilizing ideology (Foran 1997; Hadenius and Teorell 2005; Moghadam 2003; Pzeworski et al. 2000; Welzel 2006). As such, and given the political, economic, and societal diversity across the Arab region as well as countries' varied locations and logics within the capitalist world-economy, some countries more than others would be better able to sustain a pro-democracy movement, revolution, and transition. Those countries with large educated middle classes, historic left-wing political parties, established feminist groups, and modern political institutions—countries with populations that could be part of what Chase-Dunn and others called the New Global Left—were best placed to effect progressive social change. Most of the Arab countries involved in or affected by the Arab Spring protests could not experience such progressive social change, as a result of both endogenous and exogenous factors and forces.

In Bahrain, the disenfranchised Shia majority protested its second-class citizenship, and that particular social movement was repressed with the assistance of Saudi Arabia's military intervention. In Libya and Syria, demands for regime change were met with state repression and quickly escalated into violent contention. Following a flawed Security Council resolution, NATO helped crush the Qaddafi regime, but what followed were chaos, terrorism, and a failed state. The same core countries that had been behind the Libyan fiasco—the U.S., U.K., and France, along with their regional allies among the Gulf states and Turkey—then began to support the anti-Assad rebels. The Syrian state, however, has proven to be rather more difficult to crush than the Libyan state. In Yemen, complicated internal tribal politics opened the way for Saudi military intervention. Yemen, too, is now a failed state, while Saudi Arabia, the ally of the major core countries, has not faced the opprobrium of the world's governments for its relentless bombardment of Yemen.⁵

Initially, there were great hopes for Egypt. But that country lacked the necessary prerequisites for a successful democratic revolution, much less a women-friendly one: its largest political party was a conservative Islamist party that wanted to impose Islamic law; its military had always been strong and interventionist; its civil society had not been allowed to flourish; too many citizens looked to the military for solutions; it did not have the kind of robust feminist movements that had developed in Morocco and Tunisia; and poverty and illiteracy, along with crony capitalism and state repression, had precluded the diffusion of democratic values among the population. In Libya, Syria, and Yemen, too, violence and chaos seemed to be the preferred strategies, and those countries lacked both a strong female presence in the public sphere and prominent feminist

⁵ In what can only be described as a craven gesture, particularly in light of Saudi Arabia's destructive air assaults on Yemen, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon agreed to remove Saudi Arabia from the list of countries whose armies harm and kill children, admitting he did so after the oil-rich kingdom threatened to withdraw funding from various UN projects. See http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/10/world/middleeast/saudi-arabia-yemen-children-ban-ki-moon.html?_r=0

movements (Moghadam 2017). To summarize, apart from Tunisia and Morocco, the other experiments of the Arab Spring were met by fierce repression and authoritarian reversals (Bahrain, Egypt), descended into failed states (Libya, Yemen), or morphed into internationalized civil conflicts through pernicious external intervention (Syria, Yemen).

Was this the end of what one scholar called *The New Arab Revolutions that Shook the World* (Khosrokhavar 2012)? Or was the Arab Spring “the end of postcolonialism” (Dabashi 2012) and the beginning of a protracted revolutionary process (Achcar 2013)? With their successful appeals for Western help, the rebels in Libya and Syria could hardly be called harbingers of the end of postcoloniality or the agents of an open-ended, permanent revolution. And the Arab world has not so much shaken the world as it has been profoundly shaken by hegemonic interventions. The chaos in Libya, Syria, and Yemen are the result not only of domestic divisions but also of world-systemic factors such as the significance of particular countries in the global oil market and the assertion or reassertion of core influence and hegemonic power. One need only recall the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, but also wonder at the repetition of such violations of state sovereignty and of international law: the NATO role in the collapse of Ghaddafi’s Libya; the unilateral decision by the governments of France, the UK, and US that Syria’s “Assad must go”; the impunity of the West’s regional ally Saudi Arabia in death, destruction, and famine in Yemen. All of this has created a vacuum for the growth and spread of Islamist terrorists such as ISIS/ISIL/Daesh.

In 2011-12, of all the Arab Spring “revolutions,” only Tunisia’s could be considered part of the contemporary world revolution. But what kind of a democracy was to be crafted in Tunisia? That was the big question of 2011-14. On matters other than respect for religion, most Tunisians would be on the left side of the political continuum, certainly on matters of social rights, a welfare state, and the responsibility of government toward its citizens, as well as the array of democratic rights. As a small country, its geopolitical isolation and lack of oil had saved it from the untoward attention of U.S. governments and NATO. Over the decades, Tunisia had seen the emergence of a committed left community, often underground but quite resilient, as well as a strong trade union and a small but incredibly vibrant feminist movement. Those socio-political forces had constituted various waves of democratic and popular struggles, finally succeeding in leading a political revolution in January 2011 and organizing a peaceful democratic transition culminating in a new constitution in January 2014 and elections in the fall of that year. The convening of two World Social Forums in Tunisia—in 2013 and 2015—were important signs of global solidarity as well as a way of connecting Tunisian progressives more deeply and extensively with the wider struggles for global justice.⁶ During that period, Tunisian secularists, leftists, and feminists mobilized to

⁶ Immediately after the political revolution in Tunisia, I contacted Chase-Dunn to urge him to ask his contacts within the International Council (IC) to hold the next meeting of the World Social Forum in Tunisia. The IC did so, twice.

ensure that the parliamentary and presidential elections of fall 2014 would bring about a secular, pro-feminist, and left-leaning government. A coalition party called Nidaa Tounès won the most seats.

Tunisia's democratic republic is now home to many political parties, and its new parliamentary system is dramatically different from the pre-revolutionary era. The downside, however, is that multiple parties and a tendency toward "political party nomadism" (Labidi 2014) likely split the left-leaning vote in 2014, ensuring a larger number of parliamentary seats for Ennahda than progressives and feminists had hoped for. Some of the progressives from the 2011-2014 National Constituent Assembly, including a number of impressive women deputies, lost their seats in the fall 2014 parliamentary election, although the far-left Front Populaire had a strong showing, winning a respectable 15 seats in the new parliament.

Whither Tunisia?

Despite what initially appeared to be cracks in the viability of the capitalist world-system and conditions propitious for major transformations, the social protests of 2011 were not able to undermine the neoliberal global order. Nor were the powerful core countries willing to allow the Arab Spring protests to run their course organically and without external interference. Moreover, the one Arab country that peacefully overthrew its government and sought to establish a viable social democracy—Tunisia—has struggled ever since.

Tunisia was affected by the world-economy in ways that make its democratic transition not only challenging but susceptible to neoliberal impositions. In the 1980s and 1990s, manufacturing was by far the most female-intensive sector of the economy and the labor force, and by the mid-1990s, the expansion of light assembly-type manufacturing had drawn in large numbers of women into employment (Moghadam 1998: 68). Production of garments in Tunisia had close links with enterprises abroad through foreign direct investment, foreign contracting and localization in export-processing zones. As in other countries, such firms employed a relatively high share of women workers. The success of the Tunisian garments industry was, however, contingent on special trade policies giving it preferential access to the European Union (EU) market. With the end of the Multi-Fiber Agreement and the integration of Eastern Europe into the EU, Tunisia lost its privileged position and the performance of the garments industry gradually deteriorated. Tunisia continued to rely on EU markets, but then the Great Recession took a toll, mainly because of the garment sector's dependence on southern EU markets. The total share of women in the total industrial workforce declined thereafter, though women continued to make up a large proportion of what had become a low-wage, low-value manufacturing work force.

The Great Recession and closure of plants contributed to both unemployment and the "discouraged worker" effect, but so did the turn to "flexible" labor markets. In the years leading

up to Tunisia's revolution, flexibilization had resulted in the proliferation of short-term contracts and working conditions in the private sector that set it apart from, and far less attractive than, public sector employment. Educated young people faced private-sector demand for low-wage, low-skill, replaceable labor, which they preferred to avoid. The unemployment rate, which had begun to rise in the 1990s, took on alarming proportions in the new century, especially among the country's youth and women.

Tunisia's 2011 revolution raised hopes for new political and economic directions. But subsequent political upheavals, combined with the global recession, have created deteriorating economic conditions. In the wake of the revolution, and in the context of the region's political instability, investments sharply declined in almost all sectors; FDI flows decreased by 29% in 2011 and 182 foreign firms—Italian, French, and German—closed, leading to the loss of 10,930 jobs (Ayadi and Mattoussi 2014: 6). The decline of FDI was also severe in the tourism sector. Tunisia is heavily reliant on travel and tourism, but tourism receipts plummeted after 2011, especially following the two spectacular terrorist attacks on tourists in 2013. To get a sense of the tourism sector's importance, despite its contraction after 2011 and the loss of some 72,000 jobs since the high point of tourism-related employment in 2008, the sector accounted for 11.5% of jobs and 12.6% of GDP in 2015.⁷

An analysis of Tunisian responses from the 6th wave (2010-2014) of the World Values Survey, a 2015 Pew Research Center survey, and the 2016 Tunisian Social Observatory shows that the socio-economic frustrations of Tunisian citizens, along with declining confidence in institutions and numerous strikes across the country, are threatening to derail Tunisia's democratic transition. Young people in particular are disillusioned by the high rates of unemployment (15% total, 31% for recent higher-education graduates) and 80% of them surveyed reported that they did not vote in the 2014 parliamentary elections. The majority of Tunisians surveyed (62%) say that their country needs a stable political system, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic (Yahya 2016). My own interviews, conducted annually since 2012, reveal great pride in the new freedoms of expression and association but also dismay at continued economic difficulties. They also confirm that the qualities Tunisians seek in a democracy are a mixed economy, state aid to reduce unemployment, choice in leadership, women's rights protection, redistribution through taxation, mixed public/private ownership of businesses, and civil rights protection (Yahya 2016).

In early 2016, the Tunisian government was compelled to turn to the IMF, reaching an agreement for a \$2.8 billion bailout to cope with economic and political transitions and to help

⁷ For details, see World Travel and Tourism Council <http://www.wttc.org/datagateway/>; see also http://www3.weforum.org/docs/TT15/WEF_Global_Travel&Tourism_Report_2015.pdf.

fund its new 2016-2020 Development Plan (République Tunisienne 2016). The Plan, endorsed by the IMF, sets a number of goals for the productive capacity of the economy. The main ones are to:

- Promote modern agriculture, food processing and food security
- Protect natural resources
- Promote the knowledge economy, including transforming 50% of universities into STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) institutions
- Promote tourism, including cultural and health tourism
- Expand the health sector, with emphasis on preventative medicine, regional hospital poles and medical research
- Increase the size of the social care sector (kindergarten enrollments to rise from 35% in 2015 to 53% in 2020), child protection, sports and home-care support provision
- Support culture and media production

The goals are admirable, and it is notable that the Plan is the product of a wide-ranging social dialogue that included the UGTT. This is a testament to the ongoing efforts at genuine democratization in Tunisia. In addition to acknowledging the significance of the social care sector, Tunisia's government recognizes the important role that women play in economic and social development, and thus plans to increase the female share of the labor force to 35 percent by 2020. But it is as yet unclear as to how the goals will be carried out, under what labor market conditions, and how far the IMF bailout will revive Tunisia's economy. At a time when progressive political parties and movements are struggling in Europe, Latin America, the U.S., and the Middle East, what kind of global environment can support and sustain Tunisia's democratic transition, not to mention more expansive social transformation? This much seems clear: Tunisia's predicament confirms the argument of dependency theorists regarding the adverse effects of foreign investment on long-term national economic development and growth (Chase-Dunn 1998: 67-68). It also confirms Chase-Dunn's argument that peripheral dependence on equity investment and through debt serves to reproduce global capitalism and the core/periphery hierarchy (*ibid*: 255).

The Middle East and North Africa is not the only region with political turmoil, economic difficulties, deadly conflicts and the outpouring of refugees fleeing war or unemployment. Youth unemployment remains very high in southern Europe, and many Europeans have turned against the massive waves of migration from sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan as well as from Arab countries, just as many Americans oppose the continued migration into the U.S. from Mexico and Central America. Globalization may be under attack by populist movements but neoliberal capitalism remains intact. The BRIC countries seem to have lost some of the economic dynamism for which they had become known, and the Latin American pink tide seems to have receded with the rightward turn in Argentina and Brazil, the implosion of Venezuela, and the endorsement by

Chile, Mexico, and Peru of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (see Bello 2016). Instead of progressive semi-peripheral countries with international clout, we have Saudi Arabia.

These new developments raise a fundamental question: At a time of violent conflict and economic failures in so many parts of the world—in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, Central America, and the inner cities and isolated small towns across the U.S.—what is the future of the contemporary capitalist world-system? Here Chase-Dunn has given us a number of alternative futures: continued U.S. hegemony, global collapse, or global democracy. Each of these possibilities can realistically come to pass, though I would most definitely prefer the third option (actually, a socialist global democracy).

And this is why attention to countries like Tunisia is important. What Tunisia is going through is a microcosm of the travails of the world-system and the three possibilities that Chase-Dunn has laid out. The organized terrorism that revealed itself at the start of this century, when 19 young men—15 of them Saudi citizens—attacked the United States, only escalated after the invasion of Iraq, the overthrow of Ghaddafi and the destabilization of the Syrian state. As noted, Tunisia has suffered several terrorist attacks, two of them on foreign tourists, thus undermining the tourism industry. On the economic front, Tunisia remains dependent on the core. Without financial assistance from the capitalist West, it could collapse under the weight of economic difficulties, along with the demands and actions of the poor, unemployed, and marginalized.

Conversely (and in keeping with Chase-Dunn's third option), Tunisia's government, its civil society, and its progressive political parties could receive international solidarity and support from other forward-looking semi-peripheral countries and of course from progressives everywhere in order to keep it safe from both imperialism and Islamism, part of the Global Left, and a successful participant in the 21st century world revolution. As Chase-Dunn rightly notes, the combination of the resources of the semi-periphery and the transnational social movements is structurally advantaged to take the lead in the movement toward global democracy, which would include a world-economy of a new type. And yet, with the rightward shift in so many European countries and with the apparent demise of this century's Latin American experiment with social democracy and progressive politics, this outcome seems unlikely in the foreseeable future.

On Female Labor and Women's Mobilizations in the World-System

I would be remiss if I did not turn to one important dimension of the semi-periphery and the world revolution that is sometimes neglected in world-systems analyses, which is the role of female labor and women's mobilization. To his credit, Chase-Dunn does include feminist political economy in the various projects that he launches, including my own (see, e.g., Chase-Dunn and Babones 2006), and in *Global Formation* he discusses the implications of Kathryn Ward's research on the effects of investment dependence on the status of women and fertility rates. Moreover, the book by

Boswell and Chase-Dunn (2000) acknowledges the progressive nature of the women's movement, although it does not elaborate on its character, activities or demands. Global accumulation may run along the axes of core, periphery, and semi-periphery, but as many feminist social scientists have pointed out, it also depends crucially on divisions of gender and class and race/ethnicity. In particular, the varied forms of female labor—situated as they are along the many nodes of global commodity chains—contribute significantly to the world's surplus value (Bair 2010; Dunaway 2001, 2014). Equally important is the rising of feminist consciousness and political activism in the semi-periphery and the more advanced periphery. Again, Tunisia is an example. The absence of oil or other natural resources was both a curse and a blessing. The downside was that Tunisia could not become a rich or high-income semi-peripheral country. But the blessing was that it had to diversify its economy and rely on female labor to produce growth and development—which in turn created a strong and committed educated female middle class that formed or joined feminist organizations and members of the proletariat who became unionized. By international standards its female labor force participation rate is not high, but the large proportion of women in leading industrial sectors (notably export manufacturing) and in key domains such as the arts, medicine, the judiciary, and academia is impressive. It is precisely that female population which has been leading the movement for genuine democracy in Tunisia. And at the global level, too, employed women, whether in production or in the professions, can be relied upon to be the most consistent proponents of a left social democracy (Walby 2009).

Uniquely, female labor is situated in both production and reproduction spheres. Mainstream economics, and much popular thinking, tend to separate the market economy (the financial market and the “real economy”) from social and natural reproduction. What is therefore overlooked is the hierarchical relationship between paid labor (performed by men and women alike) and unpaid care work (provided mainly by women). Whereas the financial market and real economy are defined as productive and value-adding institutions, it is assumed that care work is unproductive and extra-economic and does not create value. To some extent this parallels the distinction between surplus value and use value in Marxian theory. As such, theory and conventional wisdom project capitalism—whether industrial or financial—as *dis-embedded* from social relations, a point made by Marx and later by Karl Polanyi. In actual fact, the sphere of social reproduction is intimately tied to the sphere of production and to value creation in at least two ways. First, care work—such as childcare and elder care—subsidizes the reproduction of labor power and provides a kind of cushion for surplus-value creation. It also absorbs the effects of cuts in social spending or the absence of social provisioning. Secondly, capital accumulation processes appropriate care work either without remuneration or by underpaying those who provide personal or social services such as childcare and elder care. Let us note that childcare is provided by mothers or female kin, migrant nannies, and low-paid minders, and that elder care is usually performed by a female family member

or a low-paid immigrant or minority worker. In this way, capitalism is very much embedded in the social relations of gender, class, and ethnicity.

Female labor has been central to the making of the capitalist world-system's semi-periphery, and women's political mobilizations will play a similar role in our future global democracy, just as women's mobilizations in Tunisia helped ensure a relatively smooth democratic transition. As in Wilma Dunaway's work, we need to consider the fundamental role of gender in global commodity chains, identifying the crucial role that social reproduction plays in production, declaring the household as an important site of production, and affirming the importance of women's work in global production.

The World-Economy and Cultural Contestations

Christopher Chase-Dunn's contributions to sociology, to world-systems theorizing, and to progressive thought are far-reaching. In *Global Formation*, his chapter on culture is brilliant, and his argument there was solidly confirmed by my experience and observations at UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

I have twice worked for the UN, and at my second UN job, this time with UNESCO in Paris, I was privy to a set of deliberations by member-states attempting to protect their cultural heritage, products, and expressions in an era of free trade. A new convention was in the making, and I decided to do something that a UN staff person is not supposed to do—take notes and publish a paper on the subject of the deliberations. Actually, it was after I had left UNESCO that the paper was finalized and published (see Moghadam and Elveren 2008), but while I was still in Paris I sent Chase-Dunn an email about my intention and asked for suggestions. Chase-Dunn suggested that I pay attention to what the semi-peripheral states were doing and saying. I had already started to do that, through interviews with members of the national delegations and a review of the votes cast. I found that the semi-peripheral countries were key to the isolation of the US and Israel—the only two member-states to vote against the proposed convention—and to the success of the convention. Of course, *la francophonie* (led by France) was at the center of the protectionist camp, but so were semi-peripheral countries such as India, Brazil, Iran, Venezuela, Russia, and Mexico. My work at UNESCO—the UN agency that most emphasizes universal values—and my observation of the deliberations on the culture convention did confirm the presence of what world culture theorists argue is a kind of “shared modernity,” or institutionalized norms that account for the stability of the interstate system.

However, the UNESCO convention delegated to the WTO any mediation over violations to the convention. Toward the end of the lengthy deliberations, it became clear to me that the neoliberal world order would trump the protection of cultural expressions and products—despite the passionate speeches made by many delegates about the importance of their tangible and

intangible cultural heritage and the pitfalls of commodification. The making of the convention confirmed the presence of a hierarchy among the institutions of global governance that mirrors that of the world-system of markets and states—a hierarchy that is sometimes contested in important ways but typically accepted by the semi-peripheral states. Chapter 5 of *Global Formation* is entitled “World Culture, Normative Integration and Community.” While paying tribute to John Meyer, his former professor and the intellectual founder of the world society perspective, Chase-Dunn takes issue with some of the theory’s postulates regarding culture and world society. He concedes the presence of a world culture but argues that normative rules are not as strong and binding as Meyer and his colleagues have argued. Instead, “the capitalist world-system is integrated more by political-military power and market interdependence than by normative consensus” (88). My experience at UNESCO, and especially my observations of the deliberations around the convention on cultural protection and the final transfer of decision-making power to the WTO confirmed Chase-Dunn’s assertion that normative and value-based consensus does not play a strong integrative role in the dynamics of the contemporary world-system (104).

Let me end by saying how much I appreciate Chase-Dunn’s optimism. Given my own, more pessimistic disposition, I find his historical approach to waves of capitalist accumulation and popular struggles and his hopeful view of a future global social democracy to be a breath of fresh air. As he writes at the end of *Global Formation*:

Socialism is not the utopian end of history. It is simply the next progressive step, as was capitalism. Socialism is not inevitable or perfect, and neither is it immutable. But it is certainly preferable to the current system of violent conflict, uneven development, and exploitation.

To which I can only add, indeed it is.

About Author

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