



Response to Commentators

Wilma A. Dunaway

Virginia Tech (Emerita)

dunawaywilma@gmail.com

Donald A. Clelland

University of Tennessee (Emeritus)

donclelland@gmail.com

We would like to thank the JWSR editor for pushing forward this debate about the impacts of the nonwestern semiperiphery on world ethnic/racial inequality. We would also like to thank the four commentators who sacrificed time from their summer writing schedules to participate in this symposium. Most particularly, we wish to express our appreciation for the cogent reformulation of our arguments by Brazilian scholar-activist Ana Garcia. Unfortunately, three of the commentators pay little attention to the conceptual arguments or the empirical data presented in our essay. Consequently, their ideas render invisible the important middle tier of the world-system upon which we focus. One of the worst flaws of global racial dualisms is their description of world ethnic/racial inequality as though it was structured once in the past and has never changed over the history of the modern world-system. According to Winant, the 21st century nonwestern semiperiphery is unimportant because “racial differences often operate as they did in centuries past.” Boatca insists that the historical “colonial axis” constructed by white western colonizers is of greater significance than systemic changes that are occurring in the 21st century nonwestern semiperiphery.



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System, University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#) and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

We have analyzed four systemic trends that challenge their positions. First, a majority of the world's population is now concentrated in the nonwestern semiperiphery, and this zone now accounts for most of the world's ethnic/racial exploitation and conflict. Second, nonwestern semiperipheries are expanding their economic agendas globally and nationally in ways that parallel past western colonialism and imperialism. Third, our empirical analyses point to recent wealth accumulation in nonwestern semiperipheries, driven by emerging nonwestern fractions of the transnational capitalist class. We have emphasized the growing significance of nonwestern transnational capitalists and their compradors who structure ethnic/racial exploitation throughout the millions of commodity chains that orchestrate the world-economy. Fourth, we have examined ten ways in which nonwestern semiperipheries cause and exacerbate world ethnic/racial inequality through mechanisms that the global apartheid and colonial axis theses attribute only to western whites.

We do not lose sight of the world-system as unit of analysis, as Boatca suggests. Nor does Wallerstein (1974b, 1976, 1983, 1990) conceptualize the world-system in the unidirectional, historically static way that Boatca does. Instead, the world-system consists of the *ever-changing trimodal structure* of exploitative relationships that are loosely “governed” by an *interstate system* comprised of *nation-states*—all of which operate in contradictory ways to both support and resist the survival of the system. We follow closely Wallerstein's dialectical thinking to analyze the ways in which semiperipheral elites inconsistently abet and resist core agendas about world ethnic/racial exploitation. Like other world-systems analysts, we conceptualize nonwestern semiperipheries to be far more than weak puppets of the core. Indeed, we examine them as zones of potential systemic change, and we contend that semiperipheral ethnic/racial conflict can be very costly to the core and to the world-system. In contrast to world-systems analysis, the global apartheid and colonial axis models cannot account for the rise of previously colonized nonwestern semiperipheries to core status, nor do they allow for such future systemic changes. Moreover, global racial dualisms silence the history of nonwestern actors that engage in colonialism or imperialism. We have pointed out that nonwestern semiperipheries often employ ethnic/racial conflict to engage in subimperialism toward other societies in order to implement core and/or nationalistic goals. Garcia summarizes our argument quite well when she observes: “What stands out here is the semiperiphery's role as both the exploiter and the exploited due to the position it occupies in the global value chains and its participation in infrastructure mega-projects and export-oriented investments.”

Khader is wrong when he claims that we “reify race.” Our goal is to challenge the ethnocentric, sloppy universalization of this concept to the entire world, most especially to the nonwestern semiperiphery. Indeed, our central argument is that *we have reached a point in the history of the modern world-system that requires “theoretical retrenchment” from the vantage*

point of the world's "excluded middle." We argue that 21st century theory must decenter analysis of global ethnic/racial inequality by bringing the nonwestern semiperiphery to the foreground. In sharp contrast to our argument, Winant contends that "race" and "racism" should be applied universally. In doing so, he plays paradigm gatekeeper (Kuhn 2012) to argue that no new knowledge production is needed beyond the current western race paradigm. What does he offer as evidence? According to him, *western* biases like Islamophobia prove that racism is "global." In an attempt to trivialize challenges like ours, he insists that we accept the faulty assumption that his research question ("is racism global?") answers itself. The answer to this question is obvious, he suggests, and it is beyond debate. Through such teleological reasoning, he substitutes ideological posturing for sound theory construction, and he attempts to stigmatize the normal social science doubting (Kuhn 2012) in which we have engaged. In contrast to the recommendations of Winant and Boatca that we continue to hang onto approaches grounded in the past, *we contend that the future of the world-system is not what it used to be.* Increasingly, the extraction of world surplus is dependent upon the widening and deepening of ethnic/racial exploitation of workers and ecosystems in nonwestern semiperipheries and upon the subimperialism of nonwestern semiperipheries toward internal and external peripheries.

We hope this essay will stimulate new research questions that move us further toward new conceptual approaches. We are quite aware that many of our theoretical and empirical points need further debate, reformulation, and data testing. Many of our subsections cry out for full essay interventions that we hope to see others develop. We regret that we were unable to explore the ways in which nonwestern ethnic/racial inequality are complicated by gender and class. We are well aware that many academics and readers will cling to the western race paradigm in which they are trained, teach courses, publish or conceptualize praxis. We are not naive enough to expect knowledge conversion experiences from established scholars. Rather we expect the kind of resistance to theoretical change that Thomas Kuhn (2012) describes and that Immanuel Wallerstein (1974b) faced when he introduced the world-systems framework. For that reason, we focus on trying to bolster those thinkers who are courageous enough to break new ground despite the politics of paradigm protectionism. While most western scholars continue to limit themselves to analyses bounded by the race paradigm, nonwestern semiperipheral capitalists and states are carving new directions in ethnic/racial exploitation and inequality, and nonwestern communities and social movements are resisting those strategies. As we face the volatile 21st century, there are few relevant conceptual tools in the western race paradigm to explore and to research these systemic changes. As Garcia notes:

The transformation of the capitalist world-system will be the result of struggles, mobilizations and resistance backed by theoretic reformulations

that break with ethnic-racial simplistic binaries.... We need to stop filtering nonwestern contexts through the lenses of western categories of race that ignore the multiple layers of the more complex causes of inequality and oppression.... The struggles of the 21st century need new advances.