



Salvatore Babones, Christopher Chase-Dunn. *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis.* Oxford: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012. 535 S. ISBN 978-0-415-56364-2; ISBN 978-0-203-86342-8.

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S. Babones u.a. (Hrsg.): Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis

This is an extremely welcome book, a Festschrift in honour of Immanuel Wallerstein as well as a handbook of one major approach in world systems analysis. Although the editors describe its compiling as a bottom up process as they wanted to include as many different voices as possible, the book has a remarkable consistency, perhaps less due to theoretical rigour than to focus and commitment. Most contributions reflect an overarching unity in what the editors describe as: “the close link between world systems analysis and social and political activism [...] including environmentalism, feminism, indigenous knowledges.” The approach is legitimised in Wallerstein’s conclusion, where the father of this basically only North American and Anglo-Saxon world systems analysis describes it as “more than a perspective, more than a theory, if it is a theory. It is a knowledge movement.”

The remarkable unit in focus is achieved by avoiding to a large degree any theoretical controversy even at the price of a lack of precise theoretical statements. The unity is brought about by a parallel focus of nearly all contributions on a great variety of abject results of capitalism in a large variety of economic, social, and political fields. Some of these topics focus on the dynamics of the global system, whereas others like Samuel Cohn’s (340) contribution on the impact of infrastructures and especially railways to development could be part of any volume on economic history. It seems difficult to consider that there was a link between the neolithic shift to agriculture and trade, and a contribution of such trade to

globalization (E. N. Anderson: 40). The more recent policy fields lead to thought-provoking contributions (Lindsay: 350; Konieczny: 261; Felon: 307). The less the contributions links to Wallerstein’s approach, the more they are related to standard economic history (e.g. Wilkinson: 186; Reifer: 64).

The coherence of the book is based on a common denominator: capitalism is understood as a system of production which is characterized by unlimited accumulation of capital. This is the constituent basis of capitalism. It has to do with markets and commodities, as well as unequal specialisation and international division of labour. Capitalism is understood as a particularly efficient system of surplus extraction via commodity trade. Many contributions refer to these elements without seriously discussing the controversies related to such theoretical statements (Boles: 22; Bousquet 123; Cohen: 336; Smith 243). For example, monopolistic pre-capitalist trade certainly played a role in massive surplus extraction but it did not lead to economic development in the surplus-appropriating region. Spanish plundering of Latin America played the role of blocking Spanish development as author Jacques Berque Jacques Berque, *Les Arabes*. Paris 1959, p. 59f. had already observed decades before world system theory and Dutch disease modelling.

There are glimpses of diverging points, e.g. the observations that wages follow average per capita production (Bousquet: 124), that should not surprise any economist. But why does greedy capital then not take these poten-

tially available surplus in the richer countries? How does this fit with the observation of Bornschier (283) of increasing inequality on a world scale? And how does this fit into the problematic of wages at exchange rates not being useful for this endeavour, as wages at purchasing parity are required? Where does this leave the empirical basis for the comparison of inequality between China and England in the 18th-century? If part of the increase in production can be distributed to labour, why is there no possibility of using these resources - instead of private consumption - for public consumption in order to protect, for example, the environment? If this is possible, why then assume that the system cannot use those contradictions which it produces by using more resources and environment to transform into sources of growth by capitalistically providing a hitherto underpaid environment? How then can the scenario of a resource bound breakdown of the whole system be made plausible? (Garrego and Borrega: 357; Kick and McKinney: 395; Gulick: 407)

The only contradictory views taken into consideration in the book are Abu Lughod's critique of the emergence of a world system only in the 16th century (Blanton and Farger: 14; Boles: 22) and Andre Gunder Frank's argument the world system has existed for 5000 years (Denemark and Gills: 163). The relativisation of the fragmentation of Europe in relation to the old tributary modes of production, the ancient Empires with their periods of warring states in China and in Egypt, the extremely fragmented structure in the case of India during the Mughal times Rita Brara, *Kinship and the Political Order: The Afghani Sherwani Chiefs of Malerkotha (1454-1947)*, in: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 28 (1994), pp. 203-242, but also the emergence of the City republics at Gautama Buddha's times are not addressed.

In order to reject Abu Lughod, the criterion of an unequal division operationalized as an unequal exchange of labour (sometimes it is not clear whether the problematic of reduction of concrete labour to labour value is recognised by the authors) is introduced as a constitutive element of a world system which, closely following Wallerstein and not considering any discussion since his 1974 contribution, is defined as unequal possibilities of surplus extraction (Parnreiter: 235; Mielants: 56; Clelland: 198), with some core countries centralising surplus produced elsewhere and the semi-periphery as an intermediate area. The constitution of a semi-periphery was meant to immunise a simplistic and mechanistic analysis of the world system as a hierarchy of structures of exploitation, but the dynamics of the international division

of labour perceived by most of the authors of access to internationally circulating surplus increasingly gets into contradiction with the real world.

China is actually exploited in the sense that China's products are sold on the world market at prices where the share for labour is not even sufficient for purchasing the necessities for the survival of additional export workers from the world market. Even the reproduction, and not any increase of real consumption beyond the basic subsistence of this labour (a consumption which these workers have access to however), depends on subtle mechanisms of mobilising internally produced surplus for it to occur. The mechanism is obviously based on devaluation of the currency below purchasing parity. Depending on specialisation, in the *Mano-lescu Mihailescu, Thémorie du protectionnisme et de l'échange international*, Paris 1929, p. 96. type, exploitation in the form of a loss of labour value or surplus to the rest of the world may favourably affect further catching up and overcoming underdevelopment. This point is rarely understood by the rentiers of the Third World, and not by our authors. The contribution of So on the Chinese catching up process is hence particularly weak (So: 77), demonstrating an absence of a theory of growth in his approach: In the early 1990s he sees indicators for the strong economic growth of China coming to an end and signs of revitalization [â]when the region moved to the 21st centuryâ without any effort to give an explanation other than showing market conditions in other economies which were unsatisfactory. Despite these unsatisfactory conditions, continuing high growth in China remains unexplained as the process of export-oriented and devaluation-based growth seems not fully understood.

It is now generally accepted that Britain did not develop because it could attract surplus value from the colonies, such as profits from the exploitation of slave labour, but through selling cheap textiles worldwide and specialising on the branch where the highest progress in technical innovation in mass consumption oriented production could be achieved. In the Wallerstein approach, in the first half of the 19th century Britain has to be considered as a periphery of the world economy with massively declining terms of trade, and not when Britain started to compete with Indian textiles before 1780. This had to be admitted ultimately by A.G. Frank *Andre Gunder Frank, ReOrient. Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Berkeley 1998, pp. 301ff. , albeit shamefully without referring to those who had before him defended this argument. It was the specialisation on cheap, simple,

but industrially produced products which allowed Britain to overtake China.

It is therefore quite consequent, that modern theories of capitalism of whatever school, except for Wallerstein's approach, do not find any mention in the book. Endogenous growth theory, likewise Keynesianism, have for many years insisted on the relatively limited importance of the accumulation of physical capital. Even Amin can no longer refuse it. Samir Amin, *La révolution technologique au coeur des contradictions du capitalisme vieillissant*, in: *Labour, Capital, and Society* 37 (2004), pp. 6-27, here p. 19. Outside Wallerstein's school, it is hence also difficult to find any more serious authors who would maintain that the Industrial Revolution was not linked to rises in real mass incomes. Nicholas F.R. Crafts, *English Workers' Real Wages during the Industrial Revolution: Some Remaining Problems*, in: *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985), pp. 139-144. The only dispute is whether it was related only to the lower middle strata or also to low income stratas.

The absence of any extended and nuanced discussion of competing paradigms in the field of world history or global history, by the pretence that only Wallerstein and some authors as long as they followed him were properly introduced to world systems research, is reflected by the way most contributions, if not all, construct their theoretical basis. They derive their models from some ob-

servations in Wallerstein's work which they fail to problematize, it's akin to when innovative work in the former Soviet countries was shielded from critique by referring to political resolutions.

It is difficult to praise the book for more than the demonstration that the world is increasingly global and that this is brought about by the greed of capitalists which bring the world from bad to worse. There is only a slight perspective of improvement by resistance of the people or political activity from below. The necessary locally based points of departure for resistance are not dealt with. The book remains, like the early anti-colonialist meetings of the 1920s, in the realm of general statements without reference to any praxis.

In this perspective the book is a wonderful document of the contradictions into which a socially relatively isolated intelligentsia with limited praxis will run. It demonstrates what happens if one does not enter into true interdisciplinarity by taking account of the state of the arts in the other disciplines. Marx, a true interdisciplinary, commented on this type of intellectual attitude in criticising the German holy family in his early writings. I do not want to replicate his cynicism, but I doubt that with such theoretical precision other milieus can be impressed by those who reproduce themselves by appearing as brilliant in bourgeois sitting rooms.

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