

Reception and topicality of the world-system analysis according to Wallerstein

Report about a round-table discussion

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Organizers: Department for Economic and Social History, Research Focus Global History, Mattersburg Circle for Development Research and Policy at Austrian Universities, Paulo Freire Center, Promedia Publishing House

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On the occasion of the demise of Immanuel Wallerstein - and incidentally also the Fernand Braudel Center at Binghamton University, which he founded -, the event was intended to set the stage and the topicality of his global-historical design as a comprehensive model for historical and development research. The podium was composed of Austrian global historians and development researchers.

Center and periphery, unequal exchange, transfer of value over commodity chains, development of parts of the world (core) at the expense of, the development of the of others (periphery), the formation of a capitalist, ever larger parts of the world incorporating world-system since the 16th century, cycles of the rise and decline of hegemonic powers - these are concepts that have become part of everyday concepts, but in some cases have never become "hegemonic". Not least of all, these concepts have strongly influenced the conception of the subject of global history in Vienna and are still very much alive today. That was the ratio of this event. It should be discussed which approaches raised by "world-system analysis" are applied today and what seems worth for further use. "With his world system theory Wallerstein in the precise sense of the word became a world-explainer, by seeing a necessary connection between the emergence of central economic spaces and their dependent peripheries," the Development Studies organizers wrote in their invitation. Thus, a central

function of Wallerstein's thinking is addressed: to give the world and world history and thus also the inequality in the world a frame of interpretation. However, this also always has been a central point of criticism: world system analysis presupposes such a strong framework of interpretation that makes it difficult to produce results that fall out of this framework.

The discussion was not aiming at becoming an event of reverence, confirming what Wallerstein said. Instead, as is regularly done in Madagascar with the dead, when they are brought back to the public and thoroughly shaken up, Wallerstein's work should be properly "shaken up" to see what remains relevant to scientific work today. For this purpose, the moderator Berthold Unfried asked an introductory question to each podium discussant.

Podium:

- Andrea Komlosy (Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna, Wallerstein-user of the first hour): Wallerstein's „Viennese School“
- Erich Landsteiner (Department of Economic and Social History, habitu e of the Maison des Sciences de l'homme, at which Wallerstein taught): The History as Lead Science: Braudel and Wallerstein
- Markus Lampe (Economic historian at Business University WU Vienna), who was the only person on the podium, who did not address Wallerstein from the inside, but as an interested observer: Which Wallersteinian concepts can be useful for economic historians today?
- David Mayer (Visiting Professor for Global History at the Department of Economic and Social History, intimate connaisseur and translator of "The modern world system Vol. 3" into German: Marxism and "socialist world system" in Wallerstein's world system
- Karin Fischer (social historian and development researcher at the Department of Global Sociology and Development Research at the University of Linz and chairwoman of the co-organizer Mattersburg Kreis for Development Research and Policy): Wallerstein's relevance to development research
- Moderation: Berthold Unfried (social historian at the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna).

Andrea Komlosy: Wallerstein's Viennese School

Unfried: I myself came into contact with Wallerstein's writings as a student in the early 1980s through a seminar with Peter Feldbauer¹ at the Economic and Social History department of Vienna University. How did it happen that Vienna is a bastion of Wallerstein and world systems orientation? How is this thinking present today?

Komlosy emphasized the important role that the seminars of Peter Feldbauer - not least thanks to the availability of central texts of dependency theory and world system analysis in German translation, edited by Dieter Senghaas – had on the development of a network of colleagues working on colonial history and development research. This network included different disciplines and faculties and reached out to other Austrian and German universities. Catalysts of the network, which also included Hans-Heinrich Nolte (University of Hannover; founder of the (German) Association for the History of the World System) after his retirement, were the "extra-European" ring lectures and several book series on non-European regions and themes. Based on these activities, the study programs of Global History and of International Development developed at the University of Vienna. Komlosy referred to her personal contact with Wallerstein, A.G. Frank and other development researchers at a UN University Conference in Austria in 1986. Subsequently, the Viennese Promedia Verlag with Hannes Hofbauer, also a Feldbauer graduate, published Wallerstein's "Modernes Weltsystem" and other works from the world system networks in German translation. Komlosy herself applies the concept of core formation and peripheralisation to the Habsburg Monarchy.

Erich Landsteiner: History as the Lead Science: Braudel and Wallerstein

Unfried: Wallerstein was inspired by Braudel and his project of the inter-disciplinary *sciences de l'homme*, the humanities, whose leading science should be history. Today we are far away from that, historical science is led by other disciplines that do not primarily work with temporality. Guiding principles are adopted by historical research from other social sciences and adopted to history. This is an occasion to take a look at the context in which

¹ Professor at the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Vienna. Author of "Die islamische Welt 600-1250, ein Frühfall von Unterentwicklung? Wien 1995.

Wallerstein's building came into being - meant as an intellectual building and as a network of research institutions. Wallerstein's world system analysis can be seen as an example of an intercontinental transfer of ideas, from French origins to the USA.

Landsteiner spoke about the relationship between Wallerstein and Braudel, from which Wallerstein took over many central figures of thought: World regions as their own "economic worlds" (*économies mondes*), "capitalism" as the sphere of monopolies not subject to market competition, cycles of different temporal ranges, the *longue durée*. Landsteiner portrayed Wallerstein as an attentive reader and recipient who incorporated into his building of interpretation what he found interesting: in addition to *dependencia* theory, which was prominent in his time, less well-known concepts of "world economy" by the German economic historian Fritz Rörig and the attempts to explain "unequal exchange" by the Greek economist Arghiri Emmanuel, who was also little known at the time.

Markus Lampe: *What can Wallerstein mean to historically working economists today?*

Unfried: I assume that Wallerstein is not even known today to some of the economists and economic historians, especially those who work quantitatively. Others do not make use of the analytical framework he offered. How do economic historians deal with this tradition today?

Lampe reported about the result of a citation analysis on the Internet that, despite massive criticism of Wallerstein's design at the time, for example by the economic historian Patrick O'Brien of the *London School of Economics*, Wallerstein was apparently accepted into the league of those whose *oeuvre* is shown reference by a blanket reference, but apart from mere reference rather no productive confrontation of contemporary economic historians with his work takes place.

David Mayer: *Marxism and "Socialist World System" in Wallerstein's World System*

Unfried: Historians today use the term "socialist world system" as a self-designation of the system that has understood itself as an integrated socialist economic system with worldwide expansion. Wallerstein disagreed - he saw it only as a semi-periphery of the single global

capitalist world system. He differed in essential points from Marxist social scientists of Marxist-Leninist coinage. What were points of agreement and divergence?

Mayer described Wallerstein as a thinker of the "New Left", which, in contrast to the "old" social democratic and communist left, wanted to rely on the "new social movements" that emerged from the worldwide "1968 momentum": Women, ecology, anti-systemic protest movements. This explains Wallerstein's scepticism towards the Soviet model of "real socialism". His interpretation of the "global 1968" as the key date for a cycle of decline of US hegemony in the world system is, from today's point of view, strongly tied to the time of the crisis of US political hegemony in the 1970s, of which nobody assumed at the time that it would end with the incorporation of the competing "socialist world" system. Mayer emphasized Wallerstein's innovative and global new conception of revolutionary cycles. Instead of 1789 and 1917 he set 1848 and 1968 as emblematic dates for revolutionary change in the world system.

Karin Fischer: Wallerstein's topicality for development research

Unfried: Global history and development research complement each other in world system analysis. This is also the logic of today's event, organized in cooperation between Global History at the University of Vienna and colleagues from Development Research. In courses on global history it strikes me that many students of history and especially of "international development" first have to be made aware of the fact that dependency and world-systems analysis are not generally accepted but have provoked criticism and contradiction. In development studies, this is the *doxa*, at least in Vienna and probably also in Linz. How does this academic hegemony come about in this area, whereas in other parts of research Wallerstein's approach is considered completely outdated?

On the other hand, the unity between global history and development studies seems broken today - they go separate ways as disciplines without communicating much with each other. How did that happen?

Karin Fischer, who also came into contact with world-system analysis in her history studies through Peter Feldbauer, took this approach into her development research, where "world system" occupies a fixed place in the explanation of global inequality. She did not see

a break with historical research. Fischer particularly emphasized the analysis of labour relations in the capitalist world system, which Wallerstein describes not as a linear development towards free wage labour, but as a combination of paid and unpaid, free and unfree forms, thus making the household as an economic unit a central category of analysis. Wallerstein thus provided essential impulses for the global history of work and for women's studies.

The audience discussion took up this facet of world system analysis, which does not focus on the working individual, but on households as analytical units of global labour history. Wallerstein's understanding of capitalism, taken over from Braudel, was also discussed. Braudel did not define capitalism to represent a certain ("capitalist") social formation, but he referred to the monopolistic level of exchange that had existed in all societies. A third line of discussion arose on the concept of "unequal exchange", because the contribution respectively the appropriation of resources and the transfer of values from the peripheries to the central areas are assessed in different ways and it is difficult to grasp it empirically. In his concluding remarks, Unfried referred to Wallerstein's broad concept of "hegemony," which lifts Wallerstein's thinking beyond the realm of economic history alone into broader (geo)political and cultural spheres.

The event was well attended, mainly by people who, in one way or another, identified with the approach of world system analysis; in any case, there were no voices of criticism. What was remarkable about the panel and audience contributions was the wide range of possibilities that Wallerstein's analysis of the world system opens up for access to questions of global economic and social history. Can you take some of them out without having to take others with you? We think that "world system analysis" offers a broad range of approaches to be adapted to and combined with other concepts of global social and economic history.

Immanuel Wallerstein in German language at Promedia Publishing House:

Das moderne Weltsystem, Bd. 1 - Die Anfänge der kapitalistischen Landwirtschaft und die europäische Weltökonomie im 16. Jahrhundert (Wien 2004-2).

Das moderne Weltsystem Bd. 2 - Der Merkantilismus. Europa zwischen 1600 und 1750 (Wien 1998).

Das moderne Weltsystem Bd. 3 - Die große Expansion. Die Konsolidierung der Weltwirtschaft im langen 18. Jahrhundert (Wien 2004).

Das Moderne Weltsystem Bd. 4 – Der Siegeszug des Liberalismus 1789-1914 (Wien 2012).

Utopistik. Historische Alternativen des 21. Jahrhunderts (Wien 2002).

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