

Charles Pennaforte

WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THINKING OF IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

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INTRODUCTION TO
THE THINKING OF
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WALLERSTEIN**



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IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN

Translated by **Juan Martin Gonzalez Cabañas**

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Two things threaten the world: order and disorder.

Paul Valéry (1934, p. 20)

They practice a massacre and call it peace.

Tácito (apud Hardt, Negri, 2001)

The men who have changed the world have never done so by changing the leaders, but always by stirring up the masses.

Napoleon Bonaparte (2010, p. 56)

Capitalism only succeeds when it begins to be identified with the state, when it is the state itself.

Fernand Braudel (apud Hardt, Negri, 2001, p. 21)

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INTRODUCTION

I continue to believe that world-systems analysis is first of all a protest against the ways in which science currently presents itself, including here the scope of its way of theorizing.

Immanuel Wallerstein (WALLERSTEIN apud ROJAS, 2007, p. 14)

Since the beginning of the 20th century the Marxist legacy has always framed capitalism as a structure ready to collapse. In fact, Marx's own observations about the autophagic character of capitalism and its structural inconsistencies pointed to its "final crisis", a process inherent in the development of capitalism itself. On this, indeed, there is no doubt. A careful reading of the Marxist works and their numerous theorists is enough to observe that this is not "positivism" or "anti-capitalist catastrophism".

However, the overcoming capacity of the bourgeoisie (a term almost forgotten nowadays) or the investors (the most modern term) in creating ways out and/or “formulas” to keep the system “healthy” in the face of its structural dilemmas, could not be considered at the beginning of the analysis of capitalism as a system in the 19th century. The reason was obvious: capitalism was still developing.

Some theorists have been important for the positive superation of Marx’s work and the understanding of capitalist dynamics since then. If on the one hand Karl Marx (1818-1883) theorized capitalism in its structural and ideological logic, it was up to Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) to transform reality and not only interpret it, paraphrasing one of Marx’s arguments¹ in the *Theses on Feuerbach* (MARX, 1982).

The Italian communist leader and theoretician Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was also an important contributor in this endeavor, providing a more sophisticated approach to the analysis of capitalism and its society². Gramsci’s relevance

1 This refers to its eleventh thesis: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it”.

2 Theoretical concepts such as “Passive Revolution”, “Hegemony”, “Historical Bloc”, “Piedmontese Function”, among others, are part of the Gramscian lexicon. His influence on social science is still considerable.

today is surprising and indispensable, impacting the Social Sciences in a very intense degree.

Understanding and criticizing a complex system such as capitalism is a Herculean task, especially with aim to escape from the pamphletary and/or orthodox discourse, and even from its “perfection” defended by liberals.

The intellectual work conducted by Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein (1930-2019) holds major importance for understanding the capitalist dynamics of the second half of the 20th century and its influence on the Social Sciences. This importance of his work is proven by its influence, which is comprehended in various areas of human knowledge, from politics to international relations.

The aim of this book is to present an overview of the thinking of the leading exponent of so-called World-Systems Analysis (WSA), Immanuel Wallerstein, in a clear and concise style, incorporating new realities and reflections of the last decade. We should point out that this is not an easy task, as the theoretician has navigated between the diverse areas of human thinking with ease, I hope that this purpose will be fully achieved.

To achieve these objectives, the book will be divided into five parts with the purpose of

providing an easier understanding of Wallerstein's work.

In order to understand Immanuel Wallerstein's intellectual path, and consequently his objects of study, we will briefly review his biography.

In the chapter "Origins of World-Systems Analysis" an overview will be outlined of the historical and methodological foundations that favored the emergence of WSA. The critique of modernization theory and the national liberation struggles that took place in Africa and Asia in the post-1945 period provided the context for its emergence.

In the second part, World-Systems Analysis, we will discuss the theoretical framework proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein and his epistemological critiques to understand the new dynamics generated by the emergence of the Third World and the explanations for its economic and social backwardness. I will also explain the main categories that compose WSA.

In the third part, *The systemic cycles of accumulation*, we will learn about Giovanni Arrighi's contribution to WSA in the economic field,

revealing the influences of Antonio Gramsci and Nikolai Kondratiev³.

The fourth part of this publication, *The Decline of US Hegemony*, deals with one of Wallerstein's most controversial theses. In his work *Decline of American power: the U.S. in a chaotic world*⁴ in 2003 he was already making a broad study on the origins of the crisis of US hegemony, which, in a general sense, we are able to visualize in several aspects of the present time.

As previously stated, the old Marxist tradition has always indicated the inevitability of capitalist collapse. Numerous critics of Marxism constantly point to the "remnants" of positivism in such claims. It's worth remembering that the "belief" in perfect and balanced capitalism, with an "invisible hand" perfectly regulating the dynamics of the system, is as positivist as the Marxist claims of its demise.

The contribution of Wallerstein to this topic is precisely the indication of the reasons for the hegemonic decline of the United States through a highly complex process of numerous variables. In other words, he pointed out what would be the "weak links" of contemporary capitalism.

3 Russian economist who elaborated, in the 1920s, the economic cycles that would explain the endemic crises of capitalism from a structural perspective.

4 O declínio do poder americano. Rio de Janeiro, Contraponto, 2004.

The world economic crisis of 2008 appeared to support Wallerstein's analysis so far. Without the action of the "notorious" government, the North American and world economies would have entered into such a crisis that the stock market crash of 1929 would not have been considered really important from a historical-economic point of view of capitalism.

The coronavirus pandemic itself at the end of 2019 and during 2020-2021, was another clear sign of the importance of the State as an active player in the economic process. For example, President Donald Trump (2017-2021) has poured billions of dollars into the US economy to mitigate the effects of the economic recession. An undeniably Keynesian measure to the despair of liberals who never refuse state aid in times of crisis.

Another important symbol of the US hegemonic crisis is the ever-increasing decline in its ability to exert influence in favor of its interests. The vis-à-vis actions of Donald Trump towards China during his term in office, with the "trade war" and attacks on the world's second economy, marked something beyond a simple conflict over jobs.

An additional example that is worth mentioning was the attempt to isolate Russia after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Several coun-

tries have refused to participate in the trade, economic, and political isolation promoted by the US and the European Union (EU), among them China, India, and Brazil. It's important to remember the multiple interests involved between these countries, from strategic aspects (China) to economic ones, and the lack of clarity of Brazilian foreign policy during the Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022).

In the chapter "Utopistics" we will address the paths and perspectives for the future in Wallerstein's vision. Thoughts such as the place of capitalism in this moment of transition, what will come after capitalism? Or will capitalism suffer yet another metamorphosis?

In the last part of this book, "Perspectives on the contemporary World-System", an analysis of the current state of international relations given the geopolitical decline of the US will be conducted through the Ukrainian war and NATO in the conflict, the role of BRICS and the things we can expect as corollary of this new reality. A contribution I hope will be thought-provoking and important for all those who want to stay one "step ahead" in today's world.

What would a scenario of a breakdown of the current cycle of accumulation look like? How could we grasp it? Will the so-called "emerging" countries have the capacity to replace the

nations that constitute the core of the current cycle of accumulation into a new cycle? Do the BRICS imply a new perspective? and what about the US? Is its “collapse” inevitable or will the system adapt once again and overcome its current crisis?

There are many questions indeed and certainly, answers exist, but not within the common sense disseminated in newspapers and magazines, or by scholars who create and/or reproduce analyses that meet the interests of large international corporations or educational institutions that are tied up to the process of system maintenance. Wallerstein proposed different and relevant analyses, so why not spread them more?

1

WHO WAS IMMANUEL
WALLERSTEIN?

Sociologist, born in New York (USA) on September 28, 1930. In 1947 he started the Sociology program at Columbia University and, at the same time, his political activism.

He began his career still in New York, the epicenter of world capitalism, where he found the fertile soil and the conditions of intellectual and financial freedoms to develop his ideas; As well as his colleagues Robert Cox (1926-2018), connected with York University in Toronto, Canada, and Giovanni Arrighi at Johns Hopkins.

In 1951 Wallerstein graduated and published his first article, *Revolution and Order*, in which he addressed how a possible world government would deal with the ongoing revolutions in the world and the problems that motivated them. (VIEIRA, 2021, p. 136). In 1953, he returned to Columbia University to write his Master's thesis, approved in 1954 with the title *McCarthyism and the Conservative* (Vieira, 2021).

Wallerstein's PhD was completed in 1959; he taught at the University until the early 1970s. He taught Sociology at McGill University in Canada until 1976. Between 1976 and 1996 he worked at Binghamton University, New York. Wallerstein was a visiting professor at several universities around the world and since 2000 he was a senior researcher at Yale University (US), where he worked until he died in 2019 (Genzlinger, 2019).

Wallerstein's work initially focused on post-colonial African issues. In his youth, he had come closer to Africa through two summits in 1951 and 1952, the second one taking place in Dakar (Senegal), where he had contact with the independence movements. His study focus would be defined from then on (Vieira, 2021, online).

After defending his thesis, *The role of voluntary associations in nationalist movements in Ghana and Ivory Coast*, Wallerstein would become a recognized Africanist. In the early 1970s, this theorist shifted his interest in Africa to the history and dynamics of the world dynamics of the world economy, and was recognized internationally.

Continuing with his career Wallerstein was director of the Fernand Braudel Center until 2005, and on several occasions served at the renowned École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. In the 1990s he led the Gulbenkian Commission for restructuring Social Sciences and between 1994-1998 he was president of the International Sociological Association.

Figure 1 - Immanuel Wallerstein at the European University,
St. Petersburg, 2008



Source: KOUPRIANOV, 2008 – CC BY-SA 3.0 – available on the
Wikimedia Commons digital repository.

2

THE ORIGINS OF WORLD- SYSTEM ANALYSIS

Capitalism represents a material reward for some, but for this to happen there can never be a material reward for all.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2002, p. 174-175)

The WSA emerged from a critique of the model of social and economic analysis used by the Social Sciences (Europe) since the 19th century. From the late 19th century until the 1970s, the Social Sciences consisted of a series of specific disciplines with more or less acceptance of their boundaries from an epistemological point of view.

In the years between 1850 and 1945, the most important intellectual cleavages among scholars since the 19th century were: the past/present and the Western World/Rest of the World. Under this logic, historians studied the past, and economists, political scientists, and sociologists studied the present. History, Economics, Political Science, and Sociology were focused on the Western World, while “Orientalists” and anthropologists studied the “Rest of the World”⁵ - Until 1945, the boundaries between those disciplines were well-defined. In the post-war period, according to Wallerstein, this model failed to account for the new reality that emerged with the process of independence struggles in Africa and Asia.

Nevertheless, that mainstream model of Social Science analysis, then under attack, began to weaken. According to Wallerstein, “the biggest change in world social science in the 25 years

5 Anthropologists therefore studied “primitive” societies and Orientalists studied non-Western “great civilizations”.

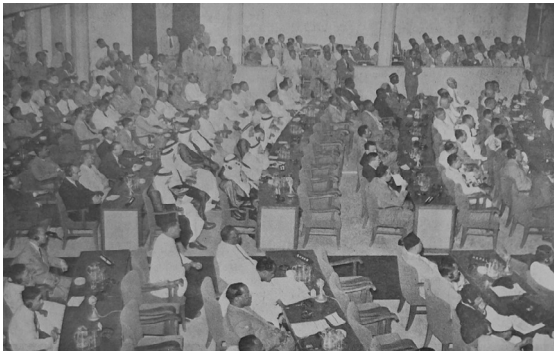
after 1945 was the discovery of the contemporary reality of the Third World”(2002, p. 231). In consequence, research in the Western world (Europe) was divided into three domains as a function of the new configuration of the modern world: the market (Economics), the State (Political Science), and civil society (Sociology).

As we have pointed out, a new context emerged in the post-1945 period with the struggles for national independence. Countless nations were influenced by the socialist proposal, mainly by the successful example of the Russian Revolution, with the People’s Republic of China adopting its model.

The former colonies tried to defend their political and cultural autonomy in the context of national liberation struggles and international events such as, for example, the Bandung Conference⁶ in 1955. It was a process of reaffirmation and/or self-affirmation aimed at the Western World. The new nations that a priori no longer owed any satisfaction to the colonizers were in the process of “getting in charge” of their destinies.

6 This conference brought together numerous countries of the then Third World that did not accept US/USSR bipolarity as a way to shape the international system.

Image 2 - Plenary session at the Bandung Conference (1955)



Source: Indonesian Foreign Ministry, 1955.

The epistemological perspective of specific disciplines for the rich countries (metropolis) and others for the “rest of the world” declined, and integration became necessary. The epistemological perspective of specific disciplines for the rich countries (metropolis) and others for the “rest of the world” entered in decline and integration became necessary. From then on, the study of Latin America, Asia, and Africa became valid.

The end of metropolitan power revealed a sad reality for the former colonies, demonstrating the real character of the capitalist system as a whole. The idea that the European occupation would be “beneficial” to the “backwards” peoples of Africa and Asia was proven not to be true. On the contrary, the disastrous result of

“civilization” was verified, especially in Africa. All the images of wars, misery, and epidemics that were common in the second half of the 20th century had/have in their core the plot created by the European colonizers in their economic and/or social manifestations.

With this scenario, the post-colonial political movements opted for other models different from the ones of the colonizers, hence the victory of the socialist and *Third-worldist* proposals among Asians and Africans. As a means to escape from the responsibility of this legacy, some sectors of academia related to capitalism/colonialism elaborated theories justifying the “backwardness” of the former colonies and, at the same time, “to rescue” the beneficial dimension of capitalism as a socio-economic organizing system.

By that time the notion of development in stages, an evolutionary process, became the great fashion of the social sciences in the post-war period. Economic development was understood as something inevitable (by the logic of its defenders) and therefore a solution to the economic and social problems of the former colonies. This notion was established in the mainstream academy. Thus the “blame” for the social and economic backwardness would no longer be the economic exploitation of the

former metropolis or capitalism as a system, but the “low” level of development of the colonies themselves.

Consequently, the Modernization Theory (MT) emerged, whose method of analysis was the systematic comparison between all nations. MT was based on the premise of a linear and universal development of all societies toward economic growth. Hence, all former colonies would inevitably reach high development levels by copying the “successful models” of the former metropolis, regardless of where the former colonies were placed in the systemic structure of capitalism (WALLERSTEIN, 2002)⁷.

The MT was perfect to explain the not-very-favorable outcome of colonial exploration since the 19th century. In fact, the proposal was to undertake a capitalist “shock” to the former colonies that had suffered under capitalism itself. In fact, what was now being proposed was a capitalist “shock” to the former colonies that had suffered under capitalism itself.

In the opposite direction, WSA has presented itself as a theoretical perspective to understand and explain the new reality of its

7 For an in-depth look at developmentalism and its results, the article Geoculture of development (1993) by Wallerstein must be checked.

moment. More precisely, “if world-system analysis took shape in the [19]70s, it was because the conditions for its emergence were maturing within the world-system” (WALLERSTEIN, 2002, p. 231). Wallerstein also stated that the “original intention of world-systems analysis world-systems analysis [was] the protest against modernization theory [...]”. (2002b, p. 234). Finally, he argued that:

[...] it's at the point where world-systems analysis presents itself as a movement of knowledge that made a series of arguments that called into question modernization theory and then, more fundamentally, the whole structure of the social sciences as they had been constructed in the 19th century (WALLERSTEIN, 2004, p. 4).

Due all these implications, the stage for formulating responses to the post-colonial status quo was set.

3

WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

It's for this reason that I have always resisted using the term "world-systems theory" often used to describe what we are discussing, especially by non-specialists, and I have insisted on calling our work "World-Systems Analysis".

Immanuel Wallerstein (2002, p. 231)

In the previous chapter, we observed the systemic contradictions that allowed the emergence of WSA. Although he is regarded as one of the leading figures of the WSA, Immanuel Wallerstein wasn't alone; they include André Gunder Frank (1929-2005), Samir Amin (1931-2018), and Oliver C. Cox (1901-1974). One of the founding fathers of the WSA would be Oliver Cox. (SWEEZY apud WALLERSTEIN, 2017, p. 179). It was Wallerstein himself who pointed out Cox's key role in the world-system perspective, pointing out that he had written for ten years on the various important aspects of historical capitalism (SWEEZY apud WALLERSTEIN, 2017, p. 179).

According to Wallerstein, Cox had proposed five essential elements for the future analytical perspective of WSA. These were:

1. Capitalism is not merely a system; it's a World-System;
2. Capitalism operates as a capitalist world-economy, based on the endless accumulation of capital;
3. In the capitalist world-economy, there is an axial division of labor based on the core-periphery antinomy;
4. Inevitably there will be a constant shift in the ubication of the central states (core) within the system;

5. Capitalism was not invented multiple times, but only once (SWEEZY apud WALLERSTEIN, 2017, p. 179).

According to Wallerstein, Cox was correct and exposed the basic ideas of WSA in the 1950s and 1960s (SWEEZY apud WALLERSTEIN, 2017, p. 179). Therefore, Cox would really be the “founding father” of WSA.

In his book *The World-System and Africa* (2017), a collection of articles published between 1985 and 2009, Wallerstein dedicates a chapter to Oliver C. Cox to highlight the importance of the Trinidadian sociologist for the WSA, according to him *“I think the reader will now see clearly how Cox’s manner of analysis of capitalism is in line with what has come to be called world-system analysis.”* (SWEEZY apud WALLERSTEIN, 2017, p. 190).

Besides Immanuel Wallerstein’s own observations and Oliver C. Cox’s contribution, the WSA has three important influences on its composition: the Annales School, Marxism and Dependency Theory (VELA, 2001, p. 3). From the first one, “Wallerstein took Braudel’s insistence on the long duration (*longue durée*) [...] The impact of the Annales School is present at the general methodological level” (VELA, 2001, p. 3).

The contribution of the Annales through the *longue durée* (long duration) would help Waller-

stein to understand the “World-System” as a “historical-system” that has a “cycle” of life: one of rise and decadence. Thus, there would be a dynamic and dialectical process that would allow the existence of one World-System to be replaced by another, thereby resulting in periods of transitions (WALLERSTEIN, 2006, p. 306).

From Marx, Wallerstein concluded that (1) the fundamental reality is materially based on the social conflict between human groups, (2) the concern to achieve holistic knowledge (3) the transitory nature of social structures and theories about them (4) the centrality of the accumulation process and the competitiveness of the class struggle resulting from it (5) a dialectical sense of movement through conflict and contradiction (VELA, 2001, p. 3).

Dependency theory is strongly inspired by a Neo-Marxist explanation of development processes, popular in the developing world [...] Dependency theory focuses on understanding the “Periphery” by examining Core-Periphery relations (VELA, 2001, p. 3).

The economists Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) and Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) also provided important observations for Wallerstein’s work.

For some analysts, WSA would be in some sense an adaptation of DT because it presents

an explanation of the process of economic development linked to the dynamics of the Core (rich countries), Periphery and Semi-Periphery *-underdeveloped countries-* (VELA, 2001, p. 3).

Image 3 - The Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi



Source: unknown author, 2019 - CC-PD 1.0 - available on the Wikimedia Commons digital repository.

In this process, poor countries would be at a qualitative disadvantage in the terms of trade between low-value-added products (raw materials, for example) for high value-added (industrialized) products from the more developed nations (Core) within the capitalist world-system.

The technological gap between nations would be the central point in the process of economic and social backwardness and in the

maintenance of this status quo. Referring to such influences, Wallerstein has constructed an important analysis for interpreting capitalist reality over the last 45 years.

As we have seen, the theorist refuted the idea that he had constructed a “World-System theory”. In his own words:

[...] I have always resisted using the term “world-systems theory”, often used to describe what we are discussing, especially by non-specialists, and I have insisted on calling our work “world-systems analysis”. It’s too early to theorize in any serious way, and when we get to the point of doing so it is social science and not world-systems that we must theorize. I see the work of the last 20 years and some years ahead as clearing the ground that will allow us to build a useful framework for social science (WALLERSTEIN, 2002, p. 231).

As previously stated, WSA emerged as a knowledge movement that which questioned MT and later on, more fundamentally, the whole structure of the social sciences as it had been built since the 19th century.

According to Wallerstein, WSA should contain three pillars:

1. The World-System (not nation-states) is the basic unit of social analysis;

2. Neither idiographic⁸ nor nomothetic⁹ epistemologies are useful for analyzing social reality;
3. The existence of disciplinary limits within the Social Sciences makes no intellectual sense whatsoever.

In Wallerstein's opinion, the World-System was defined as "[a] multicultural territorial division of labor in which the productions and exchange of basic goods and raw materials is necessary for the life of its inhabitants every day" (VELA, 2001, p. 4).

An important detail always mentioned by critics of WSA is the macro/micro, local/national dichotomy. According to Wallerstein that would be a false controversy, because determining whether the social boundaries correspond to the World-System or to the State-Nations is the least important.

According to the North-American sociologist, the real new feature is that the world-systems perspective denies that the "Nation-State"

8 They would coincide, generally speaking, with the Human/ Social Sciences, whose methodology would not necessarily be linked to the creation of general laws of great explanatory magnitude, such as the events that occur in the universe.

9 They establish general laws for phenomena that can be reproduced for the understanding of the universe. In general, they would correspond to the exact sciences.

represents in any sense a relatively autonomous “society” that “develops” over time (WALLERSTEIN, 2002, p. 306).

Capitalism is therefore understood as the modern social system, a world-economy, which has numerous political centers (states) contending for the hegemony of the system. In WSA the definition of Hegemony would be connected to the Systemic Cycles of Accumulation¹⁰.

According Rojas, Wallerstein’s work follows four important axes: *the historical-critical, the critical-analysis, the study of the immediate history, and the critical epistemological reflection* (ROJAS, 2007, p. 15-20).

The *historical-critical axis* would comprise the analysis of the global history of capitalism from the 16th century to the present day. The *critical analysis* refers to the elucidation of the main processes that would compress the “long 20th century” with all its systemic contradictions. In *the study of the immediate history* Wallerstein outlines projections on the future of the capitalist system as a world-system. The last axis of the *Wallersteinian* approach is *critical epistemological reflection*, in this stage a critical re-evaluation of the Social Sciences

10 “We will address this topic in the next chapter.

and the dominant knowledge in the capitalist world-economy is made.

The road to constructing WSA began in 1974, when Wallerstein published his work *The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: concepts for comparative analysis*, an important contribution to historical and sociological studies.

Wallerstein's goal was, according to Skocpol, "a clear conceptual break with theories of modernization and thus provide a new theoretical paradigm to guide our investigations into the emergence and development of capitalism, industrialism, and nation states" (SKOPCOL apud VELA, 2001, p. 2).

Carlos A. Martinez Vela points out that the objective was to realize a broad critique of the valid paradigms of the period:

Criticisms of modernization include (1) the reification of the nation-state as the sole unit of analysis, (2) assumption that all countries can follow only a single evolutionary developing path, (3) rejection of the world-historical development of the transnational structure that conditions local and national development, (4) explanation in terms of ideal types history of "tradition" versus "modernity", which are elaborated and applied to national cases (VELA, 2001, p. 2).

Two years later (1976), Wallerstein published *The modern world system: capitalist agriculture and the origins of the european world economy in the sixteenth century*, considered his masterpiece. In the work *The modern world system*, Wallerstein aimed to develop a theoretical framework that would allow an understanding of the historical changes involved in the rise of the modern world.

According to Wallerstein, the modern (capitalist) world-system could be explained by the crisis of the feudal system and the rise of Western Europe to world supremacy between 1450 and 1670. Such perspective would facilitate the understanding of the modernization process in the noted period by providing comparisons between different parts of the world. Wallerstein explains that:

A world-system is not the system of the world, but a system that is a world and can be, and often has been located in a world systems analysis which argues that the units of social reality within which we operate, whose rules restrict us, are mostly such world-systems (WALLERSTEIN apud VOIGT, 2007, p. 110).

The theorist also pointed out the existence of two types of world-systems: (1) world empires and (2) world economies. The differentiation between the two types of world-systems

would be that World Empires were or are a large bureaucratic structure with political centralization and a central division of labor, with multiple cultures coexisting. The world-economy, by contrast, would be characterized by a large central division of labor, numerous political centers maintaining the coexistence of multiple cultures.

The modern world system today is said to been established in the 16th century in Europe, expanding around the globe until the 20th century:

The world in which we now find ourselves, that is, the modern world system, had its origins in the 16th century. This world system was then located in only one part of the globe, mainly in regions of Europe and the Americas. It has expanded over the years and reached across the globe. It is, and always has been, a world-economy. It is, and always has been, a capitalist world-economy. (WALLERSTEIN apud VOIGT, 2007, p. 111).

4

THE SYSTEMIC CYCLES OF ACCUMULATION

The notion of a systemic cycle of accumulation, as we have noted, derives directly from the Braudelian idea of capitalism as the top layer of the hierarchy of the business world. Our analytical construct, Therefore, it focuses on this upper layer and provides a limited view of what is going on in the middle layer, that of the market economy, and the lower layer, that of material life. This is both the strength and the weakness of the construct. It is their strength because the top layer is the “true home of capitalism” and, at the same time, it is less transparent and less exploited than the middle layer, that of the market economy.

Giovanni Arrighi (1996, p. 24)

Another important theorist for the construction of the WSA was the Italian economist living in the US, Giovanni Arrighi¹¹ (1937-2009). With his book *The long twentieth century*¹² among other works, Arrighi provided important contributions. His main contribution was the analysis of US hegemony under Gramscian inspiration and the cycles of capitalist accumulation. Arrighi was a supporter, like Wallerstein, of Kondratiev Cycles, a theoretical elaboration by the Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev (1898-1932) in the 1920s. The Russian economist's thesis for capitalism, analyzing the development of 19th century capitalism, was that its development was based on cycles.

A Kondratiev cycle would have a fixed duration period of 40 to 60 years that corresponds roughly to the return of the same phenomenon. This cycle has two distinct phases: an ascending phase (*phase A*) and a descending phase (*phase B*). These long-term fluctuations would be characteristic of the capitalist economy.

11 He was Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York (Binghamton) and Johns Hopkins University (USA).

12 Besides the book *The Long Twentieth Century*, it's worth reading the books *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (with Beverly Silver) and *Adam Smith in Beijing*. The three books analyzed historical capitalism and are important contributions to WSA.

Kondratiev's first reference to extended cycles was in his book *The World Economy and its Conjunctures During and After the War* (1922). For him, the particularly severe nature of the post-war (World War I) crisis was explained by the turning point in the extended cycle and the beginning of its downward phase. In 1926, Kondratiev introduced in his work *The Major Cycles of the Conjuncture the hypothesis of the existence of long cycles*¹³.

On the basis of empirical curves, Kondratiev elaborated theoretical curves that, in his vision, showed secular trends. He considered that he discovered two and a half long cycles between 1780 and 1920, beginning the downward phase of the third cycle. According to Kondratiev, the basis of long cycles is the attrition, replacement and increase of the funds of basic capital goods, the production of which would require huge investments. The replenishment and increase of these funds would not be a continuous process and would occur in leaps and bounds. The economic cycles would occur from these facts.

Inspired by Kondratiev's Cycles, according to Arrighi, the capitalist system would have

13 Kondratiev based the foundations of his analysis the time series of wholesale prices, from 1790 to 1920, of the capitalist powers in the period: The United States, France and the United Kingdom.

gone through four systemic cycles of accumulation and expansion: Genoese, Dutch, British and (*North*) American.

The systemic cycles of capital accumulation constitute a chain of partially overlapped stages, through which the European capitalist economy transformed the world economy into an intense exchange system.

Image 4 - Russian economist Nikolai Kondratiev



Source: unknown author, 2018 - Public Domain - available at the Wikimedia Commons digital repository.

The superposition of these cycles takes place in the passage from one to the other, that is, while one cycle is approaching its end, at the same time, another systemic cycle of accumulation begins to shape up. This overlapped phase takes place

during the so-called financial turbulence of the cycle that is coming to an end¹⁴.

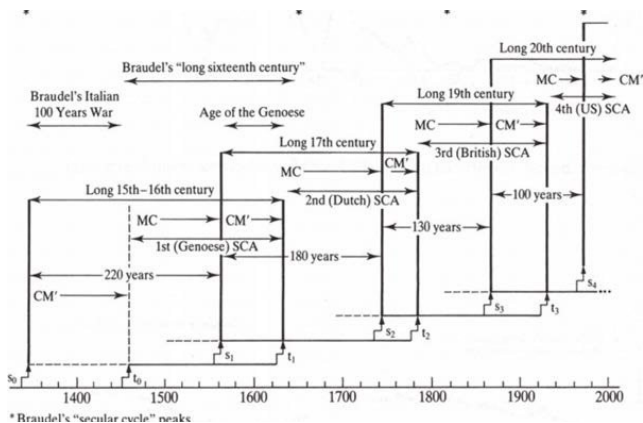
In this way, great material and financial expansions would occur when a dominant bloc had accumulated enough to dominate the world system, which, when it came to an end, would cause the hegemonic power to change. When this occurs, a new systemic cycle of accumulation begins. This “overlapped phase” takes place during the so-called financial turmoil of the cycle that is coming to an end.

Arrighi corroborated that the most important and perennial contribution to the development of capitalism as a world system is found in the realm of high finance, during the Italian Renaissance of

14 “The main feature of the temporal profile of historical capitalism schematized here is the similar structure of all the long centuries. All these constructs consist of three distinct segments or periods: (1) a first period of financial expansion (extending from S_{n-1} to T_{n-1}), in the course of which the new regime of accumulation develops within the old, its development being an integral aspect of the full expansion and contradictions of the latter; (2) a period of consolidation and further development of the new accumulation regime (ranging from T_{n-1} to S_n), during which its principal agents promote, monitor, and benefit from the material expansion of the entire world economy; and (3) a second period of financial expansion (from S_n to T_n), during which the contradictions of the fully developed accumulation regime create space for the emergence of competing and alternative regimes, one of which eventually (at time T_n) becomes the new dominant regime” (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 219-220).

the late 14th and early 15th centuries, which is its emerging period.

Image 5 - Systemic Cycles of Accumulation



Source: Fig. 2. From Giovanni Arrighi, "Long Centuries and Systemic Cycles of cumulation." *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994; print; 220).

The first systemic cycle, the Genoese, according to Arrighi, is derived from Fernand Braudel: "The maturity of all major developments in the world capitalist economy is heralded by a peculiar shift from trade in commodities to trade in currencies" (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 111). Genoese financial capitalism developed in the second half of the 16th century. According to Arrighi:

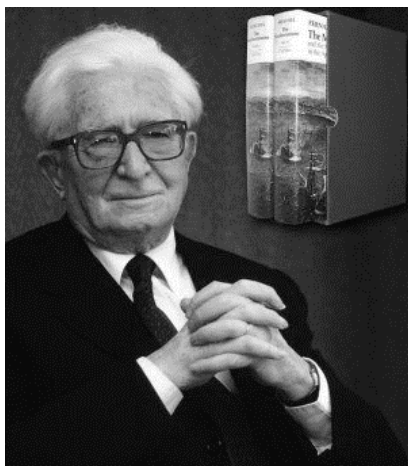
As competitive pressures intensified and the struggle for power escalated, surplus capital, which no longer found profitable investment in commerce, was kept in a state of liquidity and used to finance the growing public debt of the city-states, whose assets and future income were thus more completely alienated than ever before to their respective capitalist classes (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 112).

The Genoese accumulation cycle was the capital accumulation from a systemic and structured perspective:

[...]a major material expansion of the European world economy, through the establishment of new trade routes and the incorporation of new areas of commercial exploitation was followed by a financial expansion that accentuated the control of capital over an enlarged world economy. Moreover, a clearly identifiable capitalist class (the Genoese) encouraged, supervised and benefited from both expansions, by virtue of a structure of capital accumulation that, for the most part, had already come into existence when the material expansion began (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 129-130).

According to Arrighi, this pattern would be the “systemic cycle of accumulation”. The Genoese capitalists would be the precursors in the 16th century, a fact that would occur three more times.

IMAGE 6 - French historian Fernand Braudel



Source: Confins, French-Brazilian Journal of Geography, 2014, online.

In the Dutch cycle, its commercial supremacy was based on a capitalist logic of power (represented by the “Money-Labor-Money” formula), while the later English commercial supremacy, which began in the early 18th century, was based on a harmonious synthesis between the territorial power (“L-M-L”) and capitalist (“M-L-M”) logics. Such synthesis was the fundamental factor for the English regime to have reached a much more advanced systemic cycle of accumulation than the Dutch (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 204).

The British cycle was characterized by a continuous process of expansion, restructuring and financial reorganization of the capitalist world

economy. The periods of financial expansion were times of competitive pressures on governments as well as on business and trade increased. These pressures favored the English industrial expansion, which held on to world economic supremacy until the early 20th century.

The (North) American cycle would be the expansion of the modern world system that would take place during almost the entire 20th century, such a cycle will be entered into crisis in the 1970s decade.

According to Arrighi, using the meditations of Antonio Gramsci, the hegemonic crisis is an important component for the end of the accumulation cycle:

The concept of "World Hegemony" [...] refers specifically to the ability of a state to exercise leadership and governing functions over a system of sovereign nations. At the beginning, this power may only involve the daily management of this system, as established at a given moment. Historically, however, the governance of a system of sovereign states has always entailed some kind of transformative action, that fundamentally changed the way the system works (ARRIGHI, 1996, p. 27).

IMAGE 7 - Antonio Gramsci in the early 1920s



Source: Unknown author, 2007 - Public Domain - available in the Wikimedia Commons digital repository.

We would, therefore, be living through a crisis of the systemic accumulation cycle, a fact that would favor the emergence of new anti-systemic perspectives to overcome the current phase. As Wallerstein points out:

We are going through a transition in our current world system, the capitalist world economy will be transforming itself into another world system - or systems. We do not know whether this change will be for the better or the worse. And we won't know until we get there, a process that may take another 50 years or so from the time we are. We know, however, that the transition period will be a difficult time for all those who experience it. (WALLERSTEIN, 2003, p. 49).

5

THE DECLINE OF U.S. HEGEMONY

Is the United States in decline? When this is stated, most people don't believe it. Yes, the only ones who think the idea is pertinent are the American hawks, whose main argument is the need to reverse the decline.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2002, p. 9)

Despite the victory over the USSR, a fact that provoked several celebrations about the “New Order” emerging for the international system, that would be an era of peace and capitalist prosperity (*Pax Americana*), reality proved to be quite different at the end of the 20th century and in the first decades of the 21st century. The 2008 global economic crisis, Russia’s return to the global geopolitical stage, China assuming economic and geopolitical prominence, Iran’s nuclear program, and North Korea as a nuclear power, among other facts, demonstrate that the scenario is very different from the Cold War.

The US is no longer a role model or a power able to impose its interests as forcefully as before. George W. Bush (2001-2009) and Donald Trump (2017-2021) were important players in the undermining that began a few decades earlier. According to Wallerstein, the decline of the US began in the 1970s and derives from simple logic, a priori, as he points out: “the economic, political and military factors that contributed to the hegemony of the USA are the same factors that will produce the imminent decline of the US” (WALLERSTEIN, 2004, p. 21).

The US hegemony historically began with the world recession of 1873, when its economy increased strongly at the same time that the British economy was entering an inflection

point. In the period between 1873 and 1914, the US and Germany became the leading producers of steel and chemicals. Therefore, the quest for hegemony should be a natural process.

The Second World War provided a privileged position for the USA, the country's territory, infrastructure, population, industrial capacities did not suffer at the same level as other countries involved in the conflict, unlike Europe and Asia. With the defeat of Nazism, real Socialism became the main obstacle to US hegemony in global terms.

If on the one hand the Soviets collaborated decisively to the Allies' successful victory, from an ideological point of view, The Kremlin achieved a privileged position by projecting to the world an image of a nation with great military strength and a defender of universal values of equality. At the same time, there was an expansion of its political influence over Eastern Europe through the formation of "Satellite States". In Asia, the U.S. also had some setbacks: the victory of Mao Zedong (1893-1976) in China (1949), the split of the Koreas (1953), and the unification of Vietnam (1976) under the leadership of Ho-Chi Min (1890-1969).

Despite the "problems" verified in the region, the US action in the reconstruction of Japan, from the 1950s on, allowed the North-Americans to find

important “ideological loopholes” to keep communism away from their allies. Japan became a “showcase” for capitalism in Asia, demonstrating over time how the market economy was a “successful model” to be followed and/or copied.

According to Wallerstein, it was the post-war success of the US as a hegemonic power that caused the beginning of its own decline:

The success of the US as a hegemonic power in the post-war period created the conditions for its own hegemony to be undermined. This process can be captured in four symbols: the Vietnam War, the 1968 revolutions, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the terrorist attacks of September 2001. Each symbol adds to the previous one, culminating in the situation the US finds itself in today: a lonely superpower that lacks any real power, a world leader that nobody follows and few respects, and a nation dangerously adrift, immersed in global chaos it cannot control (WALLERSTEIN, 2004, p. 25).

The four events identified by Wallerstein represent each moment of the decline of North-American power: Increasing military spending, the ideological weakening of the capitalist system as the creator of a “free society”. To demonstrate this logic, according to the theorist,

the Bush era (2001-2009) reflects the corrosion of US geoculture¹⁵.

From former “defenders of the free world”, the US became associated with oppression and torture. Through the leadership of George W. Bush, the US became a global villain. More recently Donald Trump has taken the spotlight on US attrition with his policy of attacks on the environment, the disdain for minorities, and the trade war with China — a corollary that has culminated in his defeat in 2021 against the Democrat Joe Biden.

The fact is that without “communism” as a threat to the “free world”, the US was left alone on the global stage to exercise its now widely questioned power through *Hard Power*¹⁶ in a much more incisive way. The so-called “war on terror” led by the US after 9/11 was an attempt to rally the international community by using terrorism as a major issue on the global agenda.

The inevitable attrition of hegemonic power was accentuated by the great intracapitalist

15 According to Wallerstein: “Geoculture [...] a term created by analogy with that of Geopolitics, designates discursive norms and practices widely recognized as legitimate within a world-system” (WALLERSTEIN, 2006, p. 150).

16 This term represents the use of coercive means (wars, invasions, economic sanctions, etc.) by one state against another to obtain the achievement of its political and economic interests.

competition that took place after the post-war period: Asian Tigers (South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan), China, and Japan. Without the Cold War as a backdrop and justification for their arbitrary acts all over the planet, the US fits perfectly into Wallerstein's vision: a leader that nobody follows or respects.

Considering the highlighted factors, it's possible to explain the emergence of "points of friction" between Washington and some countries for example like Iran and North Korea. The losing of influence over Latin America, as we have seen with "leftist" governments like Chávez in Venezuela (1998-2013), Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2007-2017), and Evo Morales in Bolivia (2006-2019) or closer to the "center" as were the Kirchner couple in Argentina (2003-2015) and Lula (2003- 2011) with the election of his successor, Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) in the first decades of the 21st century also reveal the US as a truly declining leadership from a political point of view.

With almost the entire focus of US foreign policy practically directed towards the Middle East since the end of the Cold War, the White House loosened its "control" over formerly "less important areas" of the planet, but which had some prominence on the international chess-board due to the great "communist " threat.

Barack Obama's administration (2009-2017) attempted to reverse this loss of ideological strength through the use of *Soft Power*¹⁷ as the easiest way to regain USA's prestige. But we must not forget that the "leader is still the leader" despite his loss of legitimacy.

17 Term coined by Joseph Nye, professor at Harvard University, to designate the ability of a state to ideologically and culturally influence other nations without the use of coercive means to succeed in defending its interests. It's the opposite of the concept of hard power..

6

“UTOPISTICS”

[...] utopistics involves a profound reconsideration of the structures of knowledge and of what we really know about the way the social world works.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2003, p. 12)

According to Wallerstein, the current systemic crisis of capitalism is the order of the day. This fact leads to the following question: What is to come? Systemic contradictions increase day by day, despite the fact that “few voices” pointed out such problems in a really effective way as Wallerstein and Arrighi, for example.

What would replace capitalism? Until 1990 “real” socialism (or not) was appointed as its substitute. But, what about now?

The North-American sociologist was categorical in affirming that we are going through a transition in the world capitalist system. However, it’s not possible to detect whether the change will be for one system or several systems (WALLERSTEIN, 2003, p. 49). Will it be for better or worse? Wallerstein did not dare to point this out. For a correct evaluation of what is happening and what might happen, Wallerstein elaborated “Utopistics”.

According to him Utopistics would be:

[...] a profound evaluation of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgment to examine the substantive rationality of possible alternative historical systems; is a sober and rational and realistic assessment of human social systems, under what conditions they can exist, and the areas that are open to human creativity. Not the face of a perfect (and inevitable) future, but the

face of a future whose improvements are credible and which is historically possible (although far from inevitable). Thus it is an exercise that occurs simultaneously in science, politics, and morality (WALLERSTEIN, 2003, p. 8).

Utopistics, therefore, is the real need for knowledge of how the social system functions at the present time. Only after this can we elaborate ways to overcome the current historical transition that we are going through¹⁸. The discussion about the future must involve, besides the understanding of what is happening, the perspective of building something “new”. Hence the importance of working with perspectives in the form of the trinomy: science-politics-morality. Wallerstein further states that:

[...] *utopistics* represents an ongoing responsibility of social scientists, but it represents a particularly urgent task when the range of choices is the widest. And when does this happen? Precisely when the historical system of which we are a part is as far from equilibrium as possible, when the fluctuations are greater, when

18 It is, therefore, a quest for the comprehension of the totality as a fundamental substrate for social advancement. And one way forward is to be prepared to discuss the structures of knowledge (WALLERSTEIN, 2002, p. 12). After this process, we will be able to (re)discuss politics and morality under a new social paradigm.

the bifurcations are closer together, when small inputs generate large outputs. Here is the moment we are living now and that we should be living for the next 25 to 50 years. If we want to be serious about *utopistics*, we have to stop fighting about non-issues, and the first of these non-issues is determinism versus free will, structure versus agency, or global versus local, or macro versus micro (WALLERSTEIN, 2002, p. 256-257).

The predatory logic of capitalism is an inherent characteristic of the system, despite the attempts to “tame” its ruthless character whose “successful” example was the European Welfare State¹⁹, of which France, Sweden and Germany are always mentioned, as examples. We should not forget that such social benefits are in reality resources displaced from other parts of the world (societies) in the form of interest, technological and social backwardness, etc.

However, setting up legal-state structures that guarantee social benefits for workers evades the systemic logic of historical capitalism. Therefore, equality for all is not possible, because the system can’t bare such a blow. The first step is to really know the historical system in which we live, knowledge without the “ideological veil”,

19 It refers to the system of social guarantees for the population, implemented mainly in Europe in the post-war period.

the “geoculture” as Wallerstein stated. One of these “realities” to be refuted is the myth that obtaining capital is something common and easily accessible to all, and that to obtain it, all it takes is work.

7

THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD- SYSTEM

A hegemonic power is not an imperial power. It operates in a totally different way - without legitimizing political control over the system as a whole, but with some sense of the moral legitimacy of its dominance, a sense that the hegemonic has to have about itself and that has to be widely, even if never universally, shared. [Its own success creates conditions for its extinction [...]].

Immanuel Wallerstein (2002, p. 256-257)

The global crisis of 2008-2009²⁰ certainly shocked the world, especially as it showed how fragile the world economy was. Rather than pointing out that one country, in particular, is in crisis, we must understand the structural and permanent character of the crisis. The reader may have already noticed that world crises now appeared in shorter and shorter periods and are more intense (severe). Those are the aspects discussed at the economical level.

The planet is also facing signs of crisis. A model based exclusively on the idea of consumption above all else has been causing catastrophes in various regions of the planet with unimaginable effects, some time ago, despite “palliatives” such as “resource-conscious use” or “sustainable development”, practices that would try to proposes other processes of accumulation, alternatives to the “endless” capital accumulation.

What we should note is the “structural nature” of such problems, economic or political, remembering that the two are inexorably intertwined.

20 The international economic crisis had the USA as its epicenter. The Lehman Brothers bank was founded in the second half of the XIX century. The bank declared its bankruptcy and “contaminated” the financial system of the country and the world. The US government, therefore, bailed out its financial institutions with approximately two trillion dollars.

I pointed out that WSA is one of the theoretical constructs that, in our view, possesses the necessary categories for us to overcome the current systemic bifurcation. As Wallerstein pointed out a few decades ago, we are living in this bifurcation.

Advancing into the field of international relations, the WSA contributes decisively to a clearer understanding of the current process that we would be going through. If we are experiencing a process of transition in the current systemic cycle of accumulation, in which the US is still predominant, we can feel today such a process in the international system intensely taking place.

The economic advance of China in recent decades to the top of the international capitalist economy is an important reminder of this transformation. The idea of a unipolar world solidly commanded by the US has lost strength in the face of major systemic contradictions: Increasingly intense economic crises, the loss of “moral leadership” through systematic human rights violations, and the lack of a “unity of action” with its former allies are, among other factors, are the signs of change.

An event greatly invisibilized by the capitalist systemic center, more precisely by the academy and the media, was the transformation of the acronym BRICS into an insertion mechanism for these emerging powers despite their internal

idiosyncrasies. The BRICS are trying to establish themselves as an alternative in the face of the reordering that the entire world system is currently experiencing. The multipolar dimension to this new world reality is the key to understanding the process.

Led most emphatically by China aiming to create alternatives to Euro-Atlantic economic and geopolitical dominance, the BRICS emerged in the first decade of the 21st century from the good economic conditions generated by the demand for natural and agricultural resources from several nations of low-medium technological development. Brazil benefited during this period and accumulated prestige and strength, adding initial strength to BRICS.

At the same time, Vladimir Putin's Russia returned to the international scene and began to consider the BRICS also as an option for better involvement in this period of transition of the systemic cycle. India with the same perception and South Africa coming last, concluded the emerging economies that stood out in that period.

The establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) has led to the financial institutionalization of the group through a point that aggregates its members and, at the same time, expands beyond them. Logically, at least for the moment, it's not possible to suggest its capacity

to compete with the institution of the Bretton Woods Order (IDB, IMF, etc.) which is led by the US and its allies.

However, we should also consider the decrease in the use of the dollar in transactions between the BRICS member countries and the creation of the Renmimbi as a currency for commercial exchanges by China, which had already pointed out the present transformations taking place. The major economic sanctions against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the main examples of which were the exclusion of most Russian financial institutions from the international banking system (the so-called SWIFT) and the confiscation/freezing of the country's resources abroad, signal that there is no longer any point in relying on a system controlled by a few countries.

It's certainly true that at the moment it can't be visualized as a major alternative to replace and compete in global terms with the large, established banks, nevertheless the NDB may present future advantages for countries that do not have access to resources from the US/European axis (IDB, IMF, etc).

In this context of unpredictability generated by the covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine, BRICS has to deal with the demands of consolidation as an institution and international

power bloc, in addition to the countries subjected to the systemic transformations engendered by the US, which fight to keep the hegemonic structure intact.

Although Wallerstein was sceptical about the future of the BRICS, the WSA provides solid material for assessing the relative decline of the US and the emergence of new power blocs that could fill the vacant place left by US primacy (WALLERSTEIN, 2016).

Similarly, Wallerstein's construct, with the help of Geopolitics and International Relations theories, provides tools to analyze the economic reality of the BRICS, as well as the formal aspects of power, in terms of hard and soft power, provides tools to analyze the economic reality of the BRICS, as well as the formal aspects of power, in terms of *hard* and *soft power*.

The BRICS members face the challenge of maintaining a viable but unconfirmed utopian purpose as a consolidated economy based on the strategic triangle formed by China, India, and Russia. This will require increasing trade between the countries and catalyzing the spillover effects of being part of the bloc, especially through the further expansion of the New Development Bank.

For some time, China has been advocating for new members to join the BRICS and BRICS

PLUS as a manner to increase the organization's global influence.

In July 2022, Moscow manifested its interest in the expansion of the group, through Argentina's candidacy, this however without taking away the founding countries prerogatives, as stated by the Russian President's aide Yuri Ushakov (Sputnik Brazil, 2022).

In the framework of the 14th BRICS Summit (2022), held virtually on June 23rd and 24th, Argentina and Iran announced their candidacies. moreover, Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have announced their interest in the membership, which, if established, will imply a new reality not only at economically but also at geopolitical level.

The countries of the bloc, which are considered to be on the rise, will need to (re)emerge in the face of the covid-19 pandemic crisis and its aftermath, which is nowadays another structural element on the geopolitical chessboard.

7.1 The Ukraine Crisis

In February 2022 Russia began a military campaign with the aim of “*de-militarize*” and “*de-na-zificate*” Ukraine, according to Vladimir Putin’s words. In fact, the invasion was the “second act” of Russian actions after annexing Crimea in 2014. The reasons alleged by Moscow were the arrival of NATO near its borders, through a country with great historical ties to Russia, and therefore the virtual entry of Kiev into the Western military alliance.

Wallerstein, in 2014, engaged in an analysis of the annexation of Crimea by the Russians. According to Wallerstein:

The conflict over Ukraine illuminates the danger of NATO. The U.S. sought to create new military structures, obviously aimed against Russia, under the pretext that they were intended to counter a hypothetical Iranian threat. As the Ukrainian conflict unfolded, cold war language was revived. The US uses NATO to pressure Western European countries to accede to anti-Russian actions. And inside the US, President Barack Obama is under heavy pressure to act “forcefully” against the so-called Russian threat to Ukraine (WALLERSTEIN, 2014).

The existence of NATO as a military alliance originated in the Cold War against a specific enemy like the USSR (which ceased to exist in 1991) has lost its meaning. However, Wallerstein (2014) provides us with his insight for a possible explanation. According to him:

So why the expansion of NATO rather than its dissolution? This again had to do with intra-European politics and the US desire to control its supposed allies. It was under the Bush regime that then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke of an “old” and a “new” Europe. By old Europe, he was referring especially to the French and German reluctance to agree with US strategies. He saw Western European countries moving away from their ties with the United States. His perception was correct. In response, the US hoped to clip the wings of the West Europeans, by introducing Eastern European states into NATO, which the US considered more reliable allies (WALLERSTEIN, 2014, online).

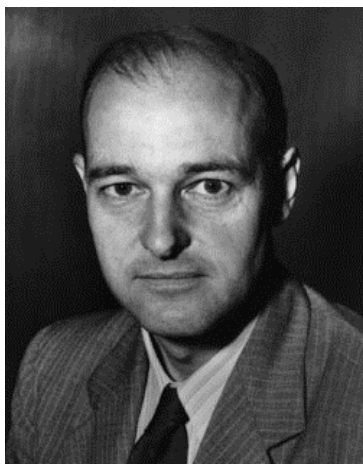
In an attempt to move towards the elucidation of this process, from a geopolitical approach, Moniz Bandeira, in his book *Desordem Mundial* (2016), made a masterful analysis of the scenario of competition between the great powers within the international system. Besides robust bibliographic and journalistic support coming from a great volume of research, his text offered important explanations for the analysis of the

causes of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the Russians. According to him:

[...] Ambassador George F. Kennan, the architect of the Soviet Union's containment strategy, wisely warned that "expanding NATO would be most fateful error of America policy in the entire post-cold-war era". One might expect the decision," he added, "to inflame nationalist tendencies, anti-Western and militaristic in the opinion of the Russian people and had an adverse effect on the development of democracy in Russia, as well as risking restoring the Cold War atmosphere to East-West relations, and decisively impede its foreign geopolitics in the opposite direction of what the United States would like. [...] (BANDEIRA, 2016, p. 113).

In fact, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 should be seen through this prism, as opposed to the shallow and ahistorical narrative of the Western media.

Image 8 - George F. Kennan



Source: unknown author, 2005 - Public Domain - available at Wikimedia Commons digital repository.

George F. Kennan (1904-2005) would make another statement in 1998, reinforcing the problems of NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, declaring it a "tragic mistake (BANDEIRA, 2016, p. 115).

Another reason for NATO's active post-Cold War persistence would be the interests of the military complex and the chain of corruption (commissions and profits) and the financial system (BANDEIRA, 2016, p. 115). In other words: billions and billions of dollars in deals for US banks to finance the purchase of *made in USA* weapons.

The fact is that after the end of the USSR, certainly, Russian action in Ukraine in 2022 would be a historical fact in the new relations between Moscow and the West. Such an event will certainly promote a reshaping of world power from the perspective of the declining US influence. China's support in not strongly condemning the invasion and providing economic back doors for Moscow was an important aspect of the new international scenario. India's role should also be mentioned by not having changed its economic relations with Russia. The two countries resisted US and EU pressure for sanctions against Moscow (FRONTLINER, 2022, online).

The pressure from Washington and the EU to *"cut off Russia from the global economy"*, in the words of the then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson²¹ in 2022, where he pointed out what was at stake: the geopolitical suffocation of Russia, and consequently of Vladimir Putin's government. The British disposition regarding economic sanctions against the Russia is the stance of a country that has always behaved as a US pawn in Europe.

21 UOL. (2022, February 24). Boris Johnson announces economic sanctions against Russia over Ukraine invasion. <https://noticias.uol.com.br/internacional/ultimas-noticias/2022/02/24/boris-jonhson-sancoes-economia-russia.htm>.

In a broad panorama, Washington's control is no longer the same. We are experiencing major transformations in the international geopolitical arena. Will the US be able to achieve its goals of remaining at the top of the global command in the 21st century?

CONCLUSION REMARKS

Another important aspect is that World Systems analysts are, as a group, better trained than most social scientists today to deal with these issues as an interrelated totality.

Immanuel Wallerstein (2002, p. 239)

World-Systems Analysis is an important tool to understand the current stage of capitalism and the Social Sciences from another perspective. The real fact is that the basis of our societal problems is historical capitalism that for at least 200 years has degraded and dilapidated the conditions for the survival of human beings on the planet.

We are experiencing a historical process of great importance: The environmental crisis, the democratic crisis, the return of the fascist discourse, and racism, among other factors,

manifest that the system is suffering its contradictions. The diagnosis and some solutions have already been pointed out.

These events develop along with the analysis of the decline of Washington's power visualized by Wallerstein and Arrighi in the last decades. The re-emergence of old and new players in the international system and the increasingly constant challenge to the US now occur with greater intensity. To first disregard China's economic advance at the end of the 20th century, and now to simplify Beijing's geopolitical capacities exclusively as a mere "threat" to "Western values", is of very great conceptual poverty, valid for a general public that is unaware of the complexities of world politics and international relations.

The originality of Wallerstein and Arrighi's analyses, in my opinion, is to consider the countless variables that exist for the understanding of historical capitalism today. Aspects of economics, politics, culture, and geopolitics, for example, as a whole, are fundamental in this process. In the field of international relations, his contribution is very relevant.

As the reader has noted, WSA can be used in many ways and in many fields to analyze the current moment of systemic transition: the BRICS -even with its asymmetries- gradually taking

shape, the possible expansion of the group, the assessment of the importance of the Sino-Russian partnership that openly defied economic sanctions against Russia and guaranteed Moscow an important “breath”, a gateway, from the US/EU encirclement due to the invasion of Ukraine.

For some time, hierarchies and their legitimacies are being challenged (class, race and gender) with direct results for a new perspective on the Social Sciences in Wallerstein's view (WALLERSTEIN, 2002). In the face of the events we are living through, when asked whether he was optimistic or pessimistic about the future, Wallerstein had a standard answer: 50-50. “This is my answer... fifty-fifty, and it depends on us” (WILLIAMS, 2013, p. 209).

All that remains now is for us to work utopistically on elaborating the future while we live through this process of transition; or, as the North-American sociologist used to say, in this period of bifurcation.

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Este livro é composto nas tipografias

Noto Sans & Lato

The aim of this book is to present an overview of the thinking of the leading exponent of so-called World-Systems Analysis (WSA), Immanuel Wallerstein, in a clear and concise style, incorporating new realities and reflections of the last decade.

We should point out that this is not an easy task, as the theoretician has navigated between the diverse areas of human thinking with ease, I hope that this purpose will be fully achieved.



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