

THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD-SYSTEM: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE ON DEVELOPMENT IN THE WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY

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Introduction

The international system is constituted, since its origin, of unequal power relations. A state's power is, therefore, measured by its ability to implement decisive policies both in the economic and military fields. In the last decades, the shift in strategic rivalries led to deep international instability and transformed all landmarks of analytical reference and their notions. As a result, we witness not only international disorder but also analytical imprecision to understand these transformations.

The international system is a historically constructed one. And this is the system that articulated Modern Africa, as well as other regions that became the periphery of the world. Colonialism marked a decisive phase, as it defined the structural bases of the international system. With the advancement of the Industrial Revolution, the exaggerated international competition produced the imperialist wave that founded the political-military conflicts. With the end of World War II, taking into account the differences of the political-ideological discourses, the objective of the development policies was similar in what was then called the Third-World. In this sense, the discussion proposed in this study intends to theoretically support the African studies.

The study of the World-System and the History of the International Relations has been approached in a compartmentalized way, with little integration to the theoretical mainstream of the International Relations. It is

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therefore necessary to engage in an integrative effort to associate it to the study of the World-Systems Theory. This theory, on the other hand, has been treated as the object of a theoretical debate with limited empirical substantiation, only as a sort of subarea of the analysis of capitalism's global development.

The World-Systems Theory emphasizes the study of the global capitalist system and its dynamics, approaching the power relations established in this system. In doing so, it identifies a cleavage between the countries best positioned in the system, located in the center of the capitalist dynamic, and those less privileged, classified as semi-peripherals or peripherals. Based on this, it is possible to identify a parallel between the structure proposed by this theory and the notion of development (although not explicitly), as the use of categories based on the unequal benefits obtained by different states through its participation in the global economy, given the appropriation and organization of the global flows of surplus value, allows us to question the possibility of changing its place in the system. Specifically, it leads us to investigate under which conditions a country could rise to the center of the system and dominate the relationships with the other states. To do so, we must study the processes that led to the configuration of the world-system as it is today.

Furthermore, when reflecting on the structural elements that led to inequality between classes and nations, and the repressive apparatus used to sustain such inequalities, it is necessary to incorporate into the debate the analysis of other categories that explains the historical ruptures of the hierarchy established by the western capitalist world-economy – the Revolutions. Equality and autonomous development (separated from the capitalist world-economy) are not just ideals. They are concrete historical experiences, stemming from the command over the modern conditions of development and largely appropriated by the societies in question.

However, if on the one hand, during the 1990s, through the Washington Consensus, neoliberalism was consolidated as the organizing directive of the capitalist system, on the other it also added new contradictions to the development conditions in the center of the capitalist world-economy. We must, therefore, discuss the intrinsic need of neoliberal radicalization and a new level of dispute between the global capitalist classes. Even though it was elaborated during the 1970s, it is in this moment that the World-Systems Theory must, once again, achieve relevance, given the space opened by the fall of the Dependency Theories and the continuity of crises under neoliberalism.

Capitalist World-Economy: Context and Concepts

Fernand Braudel's thought was central to the elaboration of the World-Systems Theory. Braudel offers the theoretical and conceptual bases that are used to elaborate the understanding of the World-System used in this study, especially regarding its considerations on the spatial and temporal aspects of the capitalist world-economy.

Braudel analyzes how space is presented in the world-economies. To the author, these limited surfaces correspond to “[...] an economically autonomous part of the planet, capable, on the essential, to be self-sufficient and to which its links and internal trades provide some organic unity [...]” (Braudel 2009, 12), while also being the largest space of coherence of human relations and activities, existing since the dawn of civilization. The variation of its limits is slow, because, for most exchanges, surpassing its borders would lead to more losses than gains.

The world-economies have a single center, always an urban pole, a dominant capitalist city, which is in turn surrounded by second-class towns, that support (voluntarily or not) the order imposed by the central city. This one presents “[...] early and strong social diversification [...]” (Braudel 2009, 3:21), with its classes diverging and accentuating the social inequalities, as it often suffers from hunger and inflation. These “world-cities” succeed one another, dialectically, transforming the world-economy, and thus affecting the entire structure, since the elements that support its domain are “[...] navigation, business, industry, credit, political power or violence ...” (Braudel 2009, 3:25), and their different combinations and configurations guide the whole world, while the demands of a constantly renovating system favor specific characteristics.

Following the central city, the world-economy is divided in “[...] at least three categories: a limited center, well developed secondary regions and finally huge external margins [...]” (Braudel 2009, 3:29). Thus:

The center or core contains everything that is most advanced and diversified. The next zone possesses only some of these benefits, although it has some share in them: it is the “runner-up” zone. The huge periphery, with its scattered population, represents on the contrary backwardness, archaism, and exploitation by others. This discriminatory geography is even today both an explanation and a pitfall in the writing of world history - although the latter often creates the pitfalls itself by its connivance (Braudel 2009, 3:29).

The semi-periphery, that the author calls the “runner-up” zone, in particular, presents difficulties in its classification. It is suggested, then, the identification is made through the:

[...] criteria of prices, wages, living standards, national product, per capita income, and trade balances - that is when the figures are available.

The simplest, if not the best criterion, the most immediately accessible one at any rate, is the presence or otherwise, in a given region, of colonies of foreign merchants. If he rules the roost in a given city or region, the foreign merchant is a sign of the inferiority of that city or region, compared with the economy of which he is the representative or emissary (Braudel 2009, 3:29-30).

The zones of the world-economy are organized hierarchically surrounding the center. The types of connection between the different regions are slow to transform, for the trade links that sustain its variety, given the inequality of the trades that take place, are created along centuries and occasionally (re) ordered in favor of an ascending dominant center, that maintains the control of the strategic points of accumulation through any means necessary. The world-economy, closed in itself, depends on “levers” to work well – the commerce and credit are the main ones. The price level in the center itself acts as a conditioner to the entire system. Thus, states in the center must be strong, capable of acting internally and externally in favor of the economic power related to them.

On the other spheres of the world-system, besides the economic one, the author notes that:

it would be a mistake to imagine that the order of the world-economy governed the whole of society, determining the shape of other orders of society. For other orders existed. An economy never exists in isolation. Its territory and space are also occupied by other spheres of activity - culture, society, politics - which are constantly reacting with the economy, either to help or as often to hinder its development (Braudel 2009, 3:35).

With the emergence and expansion of the capitalist world-economy, though, “[...] the primacy of economics became more and more overwhelming: it directed, disturbed and influenced the other orders. Exaggerating inequalities³, it imprisoned the various partners in the world-economy either in poverty

³ Braudel (2009) highlights the role of capitalism as an anti-market. If the market presents itself as the place of exchanges, where normal gains would occur, capitalism favors large profits, in a predatory logic.

or in wealth, assigning to each a role it was apparently destined to hold for a very long time” (Braudel 2009, 3:37). This phenomenon is founded on the appropriation and organization of the global flows of surplus value. Thanks to this, the international division of labor is strengthened, for the superstructures that ensure the conditioning of each country to its role are then oriented by the material elements of its relation. Its evolution, thus:

[...] was certainly not the result of ‘natural’ and spontaneous tendencies, but rather an inheritance, the consolidation, historically achieved over time, of a situation dating from some earlier period. The division of labour on a world scale (or on world-economy-scale) cannot be described as a concerted agreement made between equal parties and always open to review. It became established progressively as a chain of subordinations, each conditioning the others. Unequal exchange, the origin of the inequality in the world, and, by the same token, the inequality of the world, the invariable generator of trade, are long-standing realities. In the economic poker game, some people have always held better cards than others, not to say aces up their sleeves. [...] The moral of the story is that [...] the past always counts. The inequality of the world is the result of structural realities at once slow to take shape and slow to fade away (Braudel 2009, 3:37-40).

Some consideration is due regarding the reason the modern World-System came to be in Europe, in the form of a world-economy, instead of a world-empire. The latter, characterized by the domain of an empire over an entire world-economy, would be an archaic structure, stemming from a triumph of politics over economy. Its consequence was, generally, the strangulation of economic expansion. The political formations of Europe, since its Middle Ages, prevented a world-empire there, privileging it to the birth and expansion of capitalism. The fact that many semi-peripheries exist there in proximity, pressuring the center and accelerating its development, was determinant in this sense, there not being such a configuration in other parts of the world.

In the same sense, Amin (1997) notes the presence of proto-capitalist elements in many ancient world-systems, that he calls tributary, and their existence suggests the possibility of transition to a capitalist mode of production. In all cases, however, they were subjugated by the dominant tributary structures, in which power led to wealth (in opposition to capitalism, in which wealth ensures power). The European characteristic of feudal political atomization imposed challenges to the submission of the economy, and the peripheral position of the continent in regards to the other Afro-Euro-Asian world-systems, related to the expansion movement that led to the colonization of America, allowed the fast advancement of the proto-capitalist elements, inaugurating a transition period

characterized by mercantilism. These (bourgeois and peasants integrated into the mercantile system) would come, when combined with the remains of the feudal domination structure, to establish the bases of the absolutist state.

Considering that the establishment of the modern and contemporary world-system is related to the formation of the capitalist world-economy, Osterhammel and Petersson (2005) investigate the process of globalization that resulted in the expansion and planetary reach of the system. The authors argue that globalization begins between 1450 and 1500, since in this period: (a) the Portuguese charted the way into Asia, having established a path that reached Macao already in 1557; (b) a military revolution led to the development of artillery and firearms; (c) the colonization of America allowed the Europeans to create new monopolized political and economic spaces, without facing challenges from previous structures (since they destroyed the indigenous ones); (d) there were “migrations” in fauna and flora around the world, resulting even in the adaptation of entire societies; and (e) the development of Gutenberg’s press allowed for a revolution in communications.

These elements, to the authors, support globalization because they expanded the existing and created new spheres of interaction. One of the main ones was the Atlantic, that became an “European lake”. It was thus, possible to establish plantations in the region, that mobilized the traffic of enslaved Africans, leading mass migrations to a new level. The triangle trade would be the first example of a network connecting Eurasia to America, with profound reflexes in all places its presence was felt, and their echoes reverberating around the world. On its turn, Spain’s silver mining in America was the first truly global trade network, one of the few phenomena capable of penetrating the then insulated Far East.

From this moment on, the region in the world with the most intense interactions was the West, in such a way that even events that would seem to be strictly domestic produced important impacts in the global economy. This region was the center of production of consumption and production goods, from which resulted not only being an exporter of these, but also of capitals and technologies. With this, the inequality of wealth between the centers and peripheries in 1913 reached a proportion of 10:1 (in 1820 it was 3:1). It is noted that globalization did not take place between already established national economies, but parallelly and simultaneously to its formation. It is then important to highlight the reactions it provoked, as protectionism went back to being the norm from 1878 onwards (following the thought of List). The result was the politicization of globalization (since the new barriers were not strong enough to stop the process), which became an element used to strengthen state power, as an instrument to be controlled and utilized in favor of the national

interest (Osterhammel and Petersson 2005).

Braudel situates, in this context, the temporal divisions within the European world-economy, looking for “[...] the longest temporal unit of reference which can undeniably be said, despite its length and many changes, to have coherence” (Braudel 2009, 3:58). To this end, the author uses the conjunctural rhythms of the economy, stressing the validity of observing variations in the price levels to prove the integration of a specific area in a world-economy, which at the same time makes it possible to study how changes in the center affect the other regions. From the known economic cycles, the secular trend is highlighted:

A secular cycle, like any other cycle, has a point of departure, a peak and a point of arrival, but because of the generally rather low profile taken by the secular trend, the location of these points is somewhat approximate. Of the peaks, one says for instance ‘round about’ 1350 or 1650. From data accepted at present, four successive secular cycles can be identified, *as far as Europe is concerned*: 1250 [1350] 1507- 1510; 1507- 10 [1650] 1733-1743; 1733-1743 [1817] 1896; 1896 [1974?] . . . The first and last date in each case represent the beginning of an upward movement and the end of a downward one; the middle date in square brackets indicates the peak, the point at which the secular trend begins to go into decline, in other words, the moment of crisis (Braudel 2009, 3:65).

We stress, in the analysis of the author, the inclusion of a time frame that antecedes the emergence of capitalism as a world-economy. This occurs given the reference to the price levels, indicating an early integration of the local European economies, related to the increasing importance of commerce following the feudal crises. Because of this, around 1350 a predominant role is assigned to the Italian cities, particularly Venice, in the establishment of the European world-economy. Around 1650, on its turn, Amsterdam emerged as the center of the European flows, and 1817 defined the Britannic hegemony over the capitalist world-economy. Braudel sees in the period inaugurated in 1974 a new systemic crisis, which may lead to a reorganization and definition of a new Center.

It is worth noting, also, that the moments of systemic crisis are not the only ones in which the establishment of a new hegemony is possible. Arrighi (1996) offers a chronology of European hegemonies that includes the powers that organized their domain in positive inversions of the secular trend. Thus, besides the ones already mentioned, are listed as hegemonies the Spanish (emerging around 1500), and North American (originated in the beginning of the 20th century) ones. The cyclical inversion of the half of the 18th century is

marked by the dispute between France and England for supremacy in the system, signaling a moment of particular disorganization of the European world-economy. Such a phenomenon is part of the debate that surrounds the temporal landmark that indicates the ascension of capitalism as a world-economy.

The behavior of the different life spheres through the secular trend varies according to its fluctuation. Braudel notes that, when its trajectory is positive, the whole system is benefitted, and the bases for the configuration of a new Center are founded. Despite this, the increase in productivity leads to a misstep between inflation and wages, worsening the population's living conditions. When it is negative, on the other hand, the countries become more protectionist, leading to greater inequality between regions. At the same time, the slowing down of accumulation brings wages and price levels closer, benefitting the population. The author recalls that before the Industrial Revolution all crises led to a demographic reduction that increased the advantages reaped by the surviving population, but since then this is no longer the case, which may render the crises' effects over the people null and bring their worst consequences against them.

Global Surplus Value: Capital Flows in the Modern and Contemporary Interstate System

This section seeks to explain how the center differentiates itself from other regions. Particularly, it is analyzed how is the distinction between the developed countries and the others is maintained, for which the importance of the transference of surplus value from peripheries and semi-peripheries to the center is identified as determinant to the phenomenon.

Although the appropriation of surplus value is characteristic of the capitalist mode of production in its entirety, Amin (1997) notes that in the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the system, exploration is greater, with part of it being directed to the center. This leads to a division at the world level between an active army (the proletariat of the center) and a reserve army (the proletariat of the peripheries and semi-peripheries). In other words, the condition of overexploitation of work in the rest of the world is able to guarantee better living conditions and pacify the workers of the center.

In addition to resulting in the adoption of different anti-systemic strategies in each region (reformist or social-democratic in the center and revolutionary in the periphery)⁴, this ensures the continuity of a polarization in the capitalist world-economy and the concentration of resources in the so-called developed

⁴ In particular, the question of revolutions will be dealt with in the next section.

countries, which through the international division of labor manage to control and organize in their favor the system as a whole, maintaining its advantages in relation to the others. On the concept of polarization:

[...] at least the following propositions can be seen: a] in general, the exploitation of labor in the peripheries is much more intense in the peripheries than in the center (the differential in the remuneration of labor - wage earners and others - is much wider than the differential in productivity). The product of this overexploitation, which benefits capital, which dominates the system as a whole, is transferred in part to the centers, through trade, and is reinforced by the migration of capital and labor. The dominant discourse, which seeks to deny or minimize the effects of this transfer, is nothing more than an ideological legitimization, which aims to hide the intrinsic links between capitalism and polarization; b] by itself, the transfer of value to the detriment of the peripheries constitutes a force capable of reproducing and deepening the polarization, due to the gigantic negative weight it represents to the peripheries, even though, in statistics, it may sometimes appear smaller, in comparison to the surplus generated by the centers; c] the advantages that benefit the center are not produced exclusively, not even mainly, by the more effective organization of their work (much higher labor productivity); they are also produced by the monopolistic power that the centers exercise in the world division of labor (Amin 1997, 69).

From this, it is necessary to study the cycle of hegemony in the capitalist world-economy, whose succession establishes a dialectical relationship with the evolution of the system itself, transforming it and being influenced by its changes. Based on the understandings thus suggested, it becomes possible to approach how the international division of labor allows the center to organize the world in its favor, appropriating the surplus value of the peripheries and semi-peripheries in order to maintain its own development.

Throughout the history of the capitalist world-economy, a succession of hegemonic states has been identified, which Arrighi (1996, 27) defines as countries that have acquired the capacity to “[...] exercise leadership and government functions over a system of sovereign nations”. The author notes that hegemony depends both on competition between states and on their collective need to assert themselves before their citizens, and can basically find justification in the defense of states against citizens or citizens against states. It is also necessary to have a measure of systemic chaos, so that such leadership can be admitted, contributing to the convincing of the other actors that the acceptance of hegemony is less expensive than unrestrained competition.

In this study, the understanding supported by Teschke (2003), Osterhammel and Petersson (2005) and Amin (1997) is adopted, that the first modern capitalist hegemony would have been British. In particular, Amin (1997), when relating the cyclical characteristic of the system with the changes of an innovative nature (economic or otherwise) that allowed an expansion of capitalism on a world level, highlights that seeking such cycles before 1800 implies a disconnection between the economic base and the political-ideological superstructure. For the author, the fundamental aspect of the succession of capitalist hegemonies is the dialectic between the national and the international system. For this reason, the author understands that hegemony can only be observed from the 19th century, under the British, with its financial and industrial domain. Even so, the English position regarding the European balance cannot be disregarded.

Analyzing the consequences of the systemic chaos that culminated in two World Wars, the scholars note that the United States has assumed hegemony. Osterhammel and Petersson (2005) note that they achieved their leadership position without necessarily having consciously pursued it, considering their hesitation in getting involved in world politics and economics. It was eventually obtained not only economically, but also given its cultural traits:

Mass production, mass consumption, and mass culture were the watchwords that were associated with “Americanism” at that time. The ability of American industry to mass produce standardized goods, Frederick Taylor’s scientific management, and Henry Ford’s assembly line production fascinated Europe and promised to create surplus profits that would be shared between employees and the employer. As an engine of mass production, mass consumption seemed to open the door to prosperity and social peace. [...] More controversial than Taylorism and Fordism were the social and cultural changes that were interpreted as part of the “Americanization” that occurred since the end of the 19th century but especially since the 1920s.

[...] The products of the American entertainment industry proved to be much less difficult to propagate across borders. In the American immigrant society, forms of cultural production had evolved that were easy to commercialize because they used idiomatic expressions intelligible across cultural barriers and applied the newest technologies for recording sounds and images (Osterhammel and Petersson 2005, 108-9).

Silver and Slater (2001) also highlight that, with the end of the Second World War, the concentration of military and financial power in the United

States strategically positioned them to assume the status of hegemon⁵, but for that it was necessary to offer an answer to the challenge represented by social dissatisfaction. This would only be possible by not only repressing and undermining the bargaining power of subaltern groups in the American hegemony, but also proposing reforms that would allow them to be co-opted, in a model inspired by the New Deal experience. This not only taught the American elites the importance of state intervention as guarantor of order, security and justice for the people, but also suggested the type of institution to be used to empty problematic social and political issues: “neutral” regulatory bodies, that would transform these challenges into technical problems.

The two most volatile social and political conflicts in the early post-war years were the conflict between labor and capital in metropolitan countries and the anti-imperialist revolt in the colonies. These were reformulated as technical problems of macroeconomic adjustment and economic growth and development - problems that could be overcome by the use of scientific and technical knowledge, with the support of government planning. (Silver and Slater 2001, 213).

Based on this, Silver and Slater (2001) point out that the development theme was a resource used by the United States in its search for hegemony, to remove Asia and Africa, in the process of independence, from socialist influence. In this context, the Modernization Theory arises, which claimed that development took place through a series of stages, according to Western experience, which could be followed by all countries and would allow them to reach, mainly, economic, but also political and social, conditions associated with the countries of the center. With this promise, the Americans sought to co-opt the countries of the periphery, in a movement necessary to assert themselves:

Just as the labor-capital conflict was reformulated as a technical problem, related to the government's ability to reactivate the economy in Keynesian molds, ensuring greater growth and productivity, Truman's “fair negotiation” reformulated the north-south conflict [...]. The concept of development itself was an “invention” of the period that followed World War II - the American response to the need to exercise leadership [...] (Silver and Slater 2001, 215).

In the same sense, Amin (1997) disputes the proposal for the interpretation of development offered by the Theory of Modernization, with the observation of the inescapability of polarization under capitalism, fundamentally

⁵ The one that established its hegemonic condition.

because of the impossibility of three-dimensional integration (goods, labor and capital) of the world market. The author warns against the notion that development cannot take place autonomously, only within the framework of the system, underlining the differentiation between development and capitalist expansion, and doing so he reinforces the unsustainability of the system, from an ecological and social point of view. He considers development a concept critical to capitalism (unlike the one advocated by Bandung, who wanted to “reach” the center, and even that of the socialist states, in which it sought to reconcile a new society with capitalist economic ideals).

It turns out that, since the 1970s, as pointed out by Wallerstein (2003; 1992) and Arrighi and Silver (2001), a series of phenomena point to the erosion of US hegemony. Noteworthy are the rise of economic rivals capable of competing head-on with the United States (at that time, Western Europe and Japan), the worldwide contesting movements of 1968 (which undermined the ideological bases of the Yalta agreement), and the defeat in the Vietnam War. Another landmark of the hegemonic crisis is the financialization of world capitalism, pointed out by Arrighi (1996) as, at the same time, the result and cause of a central insecurity for the loss of legitimacy of the global leadership.

More than the exchanges established between countries, relations between the different regions of the capitalist world-economy take place in the form of appropriation of global surplus value, which allows the center to maintain its advantages over the rest of the system. It is emphasized, based on Amin (1997), the difference between the market and the capitalist market, whose relevance is highlighted when it is identified that the different regions of the ancient world were not isolated. For this reason, too, the author sees in industry the “finished” form of capitalism, as it causes definitive ruptures in relation to the previous model, thus highlighting the close relationship between the capitalist mode of production and the international system. He recalls that capitalism is more than the association of private property, wages and trade, a combination found in many places in the ancient world. “[...] capitalism only exists when the level of development of the productive forces implies the modern factory, which uses heavy mechanical equipment and not artisanal equipment” (Amin 1997, 62). In even more recent times, it is also expressed through financialization, as argued by Arrighi (1996).

From there, two fundamental characteristics of the modern world emerge, urbanization and the agricultural revolution, exponentially increasing productivity, to the point that the logic of profit becomes the foundation of economic decision, in a context other than artisanal. This leads the author to conclude that the only way to properly study world capitalism is to combine the perspectives of modes of production and the world-system, since the modern

world is based on the capitalist world-economy.

Amin (1997) proposes here an interpretation alternative to others, more orthodoxly Marxist ones, and points out the need to understand its structural relationship with the modern system of states. The author argues that there are three complementary elements of specificity in the modern capitalist world. The first is related to the fact that the law of capitalist value comes to govern the whole modern system, not just its economy. As a result, the rule ceases to be the command of wealth by power, to become the command of power by wealth, stimulating the growth of the productive forces. The second is based on the fact that capitalism is the first truly global system, integrating all the actors involved into an international division of labor, according to a law of world value. This, in turn, leads to a third characteristic, which is the necessary polarization of the accumulation process on a world scale:

I prefer to analyze the world system with the unambiguous concept of polarization, which means that the centers produce this system as a whole and shape the subordinate modernity of the peripheries, in the understanding that this global expansion is not only synonymous with the hierarchical development of modernity, but also with the destruction process of those parts that become dysfunctional or that do not fit into the global logic (Amin 1997, 71).

When thinking about possible changes in polarization, Amin (1997) observes the recent industrialization process of some peripheries, leading him to conclude that the world tends to become globally industrialized, affecting the process of world accumulation. It is identified, from there, that the polarization occurs from other phenomena than the unequal exchange: (a) capital flight from the peripheries to the center; (b) selective migration; (c) the center's monopoly on the international division of labor.

Thus, polarization prevents thinking about the advantage of the centers without referring to their position in the international system, since even their relative deindustrialization is justified by the maintenance of the monopolies⁶, guaranteeing the continuity of the division and highlighting that industrialization is not the foundation of differentiation among the actors in the capitalist world-economy, but these monopolies.

In this sense, the need for continuous capital accumulation is characteristic of the capitalist mode of production, and therefore of the

6 For Amin (1997), monopolies are the instruments that allow the center to exclude the rest of the world from access to wealth. In the contemporary world, they would be "[...] the monopoly of technologies and the monopoly of globalized finance" (Amin 1997, 68).

capitalist world-economy. Since the Industrial Revolution, the advance of the contradictions inherent to the mode of production, fundamentally arising from its property relations, which oppose capital and labor, allowed for its transformation. Teschke (2003) argues that in capitalism classes (owners and non-owners of the means of production) come to depend on the market for their reproduction. This logic justifies the search for profit, which in turn demands constant revolutions in the means of production to sustain itself. The interrelation of these characteristics gives capitalism a very particular dynamic, guided by the contradictions internal to capital and between capital and labor, resulting in “[...] demographic growth, technological development, specialization, productive diversification, and territorial expansion of the market relations” (Teschke 2003, 142).

Thereafter, the extraction of surplus value surpassed market gain as the main form of capital accumulation, not only domestically, but also internationally. Global surplus value is appropriated in different ways depending on the region of the world-economy, with control by the center of strategic points of capital accumulation, through the aforementioned monopolies, that guarantee it the highest profit margins and the mastery over techniques and determining instruments in each period. In this way, the international division of labor is sustained, since the semiperiphery becomes responsible for the production of technology of the previous generation, and the periphery remains fundamentally linked to basic activities. It is reinforced, however, that in the economic activities controlled in these regions by the center, from which the surplus value generated is appropriated and transferred, the level of capital employed can be high⁷, seeking to further increase the surplus value and, thus, the profits obtained.

The center’s dominance over the system, described above, is illustrated by the so-called Seven Oil Sisters⁸, that controlled the global oil industry between the mid-1940s and the mid-1970s, when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was created (OPEC). Until the 1973 oil crisis, which resulted in the nationalization of most of the world’s oil fields, these companies controlled about 85% of the global reserves of the resource, which is the main energy source on the planet. In this way, the host countries of these oil companies, invariably located in the center of the capitalist world-economy (Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States) had a decisive bargaining element at their disposal, allowing them to dictate the economic activity of any country that depended on their exports.

⁷ As exemplified by Brazilian agriculture, particularly in the export sectors, which have a high level of capital and technology.

⁸ Royal Dutch Shell, Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), Standard Oil of New Jersey (Esso), Standard Oil of New York (Socony), Texaco, Standard Oil of California (Socal), Gulf Oil.

It is no coincidence that the identification of authors, such as Braudel (2009) and Wallerstein (1992; 2003; 2009), of the process of degradation of the American hegemony and acceleration of the decadence of the capitalist world-economy from the crises of that decade, which led to a change in the mechanisms used by the center to manage its relationship with the rest of the planet. In particular, there is a trend towards the financialization of the system, a phenomenon that historically marks the maturation and exhaustion of an accumulation model. It is noteworthy, as observed by the authors, that it is the moments of crisis and transition that allow the occurrence of transformations both in the structure and in its components, the states, and it is necessary, therefore, to study how these changes occur.

The Issue of Development in the World-Systems Theory

This section seeks to establish, based on the considerations outlined in the previous sections, what development, in the World-Systems Theory and, particularly, in the capitalist world-economy, represents. It is worth remembering, according to Braudel (2009), that the imbalances between the different regions of the capitalist world-economy are built and consolidated over centuries, drawing together the structure that characterizes the international division of labor and, therefore, the division between center, semiperiphery and periphery. Thus, it is necessary to address the phenomenon of revolutions, which at the same time influence the trajectory of the system and enable the protagonists of the process to evade the bonds of the capitalist world-economy, opening a path for its autonomous development.

Initially, it is necessary to specify what is meant by revolution. Thus, its interpretation is adopted as social and political revolutions: “[...] separate and comparatively rare historical events, but which, far from being marginal or atypical for the history of states and the international system, are points of transition and formation without which the modern world would not be as it is” (Halliday 1999, 143). The author supports this conception in a tripartite manner, on the contributions of Skocpol, Barrington-Moore and Griewank. Theda Skocpol, for example, defined revolutions “[...] based on the degree of transformation of society and the destruction of the old state” (Halliday 1999, 143). In this sense, the relationship between state and revolution is prioritized, and how international competition has opened space for uprisings, which at the same time transform the social and political structure.

At the same time, Halliday (1999) analyzes J. B. Barrington-Moore’s argument, which suggests that there is no non-violent path to modernity.

Studying the different strategies followed by England, the United States, Germany and Japan, the author notes the violent chapters in their path towards industrialization and liberal democracy, whether domestically, through revolutions and civil wars, or internationally, through interstate wars. “The revolutions were, therefore, not aberrations to a non-violent alternative, but a form of transition inevitably violent to a modern society and, frequently, a form that, on an international scale, was less violent than the German-Japanese alternative” (Halliday 1999, 144).

Finally, Halliday (1999) visits the work of Karl Griewank, who has studied the history of the concept of revolution since its astronomical beginnings. Thus, when clarifying its various meanings, it appears that its contemporary use only became possible after the French Revolution, not fitting into the phenomena that preceded the modern interstate system. It becomes essential, therefore, not only “[...] political or constitutional change, but also the participation of the masses in this process; the central target of the revolutions was state control [...]” (Halliday 1999, 144).

From the triad that supports the author’s thinking, the interest in affirming the revolution as a transition process is evident, since:

The questions of the definition and the historical role of revolutions are certainly central to any discussion of these uprisings in the international context. Almost every discussion of revolutions in IR literature perceives them in a much looser sense to include blows and outbursts of violence, which does not simply dissolve them in a behaviorist spectrum. Most IR literature also assumes that revolutions are moments of collapse, rather than transition [...] (Halliday 1999, 144).

Exactly the perspective of revolution as a transition matters to this discussion, since it challenges structures that seek to place themselves as given. In other words, the revolutionary process challenges and transforms the capitalist world-economy and the interstate system, given its impact on the ideological system that, in each period, dialectically justifies and is supported by the international division of labor.

Regarding development, therefore, the liberal revolutions of the 18th century represented moments of transition that transformed space-time and political and production practices (paving the way for the rise of the appropriation of surplus value). As a result, precepts considered until then as doctrines in the explanation of the world and society have been overturned, with consequent transformations in scientific perspectives, in the field of exact, human and social sciences.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, likewise, decisively marks the 20th century, since all the events that occurred during the existence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and originated therefrom, were to a greater or lesser extent impacted by the challenge it represented to the capitalist world-economy. Even today, its reflexes are felt, either through the socialist experiences that survived its collapse, either through its cultural and intellectual legacy or, simply, as an example of a rupture in the system.

In the same sense, the debate established by the authors studied here, considering the critical perspective adopted, which leads to questions about the current order, participates in the process proposed by Wallerstein (1992) for the elaboration of scientific and cultural alternatives. In a context of crisis and systemic transition, these contributions act in favor of positive transformations in the world-system, since they favor the construction of a fairer model in the distribution of global (material or not) wealth, and, therefore, a more egalitarian one, both domestically and internationally.

It is evident, from the proposed analyzes, that the very idea of development presents itself as an ideological battlefield, since its origin in the aftermath of the Second World War, elaborated by the center as an instrument of attraction of the peripheries and semi-peripheries in the process of independence, passing through the proposals of the Non-Aligned Movement, which suggested the possibility of reaching the center, to the contemporary interpretations, which approach the concept in relation to the most diverse disciplinary and social spheres.

Throughout its history, and in the different proposals, the structural elements that produce the different levels of development verified in the world have often been lost sight of, given that the circumstances and forums in which the debate take place are systematically conditioned. In this sense, Amin (1997) warns that even countries that adopt socialist experiences, by incorporating development perspectives originating from elements of the capitalist world-economy and trying to combine them with the objective of building socialism, are in danger of returning to patterns typical of the structure they aim to combat. The attempt to “reach” the capitalist center can lead to the adoption of practices that favor reintegration into the dominant system, particularly when considering the expansionist tendency and strength of the capitalist world-economy:

[...] the so-called socialist countries proposed, with a lot of confusion, at the same time to “achieve” and do something else (“build socialism”), and had disconnected - in the sense that I gave this concept, that is, they had subjected their external relations to the logic of their internal development. The positive

aspects of their achievements (a paternalistic statism, no doubt, but with a social whole, which guaranteed job security and a minimum of social services, in contrast to the savage capitalism of the capitalist peripheries) stem from his origin (a popular anti-capitalist revolution) and its disconnection; while its dead ends translate at their turn the illusion of “reach”, which implies the wide adoption of the criteria of capitalism (Amin 1997, 72).

Nevertheless, certain socialist experiences, which persist in their challenge to the capitalist world-economy, demonstrate the possibility of effectively detaching themselves from the elements of domination of this system. This is highlighted when their continuity goes beyond the existence of the socialist bloc led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, whose foreign policy facilitated the insertion of these states.

In this sense, it is worth exploring how relations between the countries of the socialist bloc took place. Unlike the configuration of the capitalist world-economy, guided by the appropriation of global surplus value through the international division of labor, the socialist model was based on revolutionary solidarity. Thus, even when incurring losses, exchanges were established that prioritized the well-being of the populations and the success of the partner regimes. For this reason, the fall of the USSR in the 1990s had an impact on revolutionary states with fewer resources at their disposal, in view of the important proportion of aid previously received.

Thus, the Cuban, North Korean and Chinese cases stand out. Each, in their own way and from different conditions, seeks to build an alternative model, guided by socialist ideals. This proposal is even more important when one considers that such experiences began in the peripheries of the capitalist world-economy, adding to the systemic challenge represented by its revolutions a Third-Worldist varnish.

Therefore, in all cases, there is a search for the internalization of the elements that constitute the center’s monopoly on the capitalist system, finances and technologies. From the moment that such instruments cease to act in favor of the global transfer of surplus value, the reaction of the capitalist world-economy becomes inevitable, with history showing the violence of the processes necessary for the establishment of the relations characteristic to the system. The most varied methods are used in an attempt to reestablish the contested pattern of domination, but embargoes, *coups d’état* and interventions stand out. It should also be mentioned that such measures are not only adopted against countries that pose a direct challenge to the system, through the adoption of contesting ideologies, but to any in which policies are adopted in opposition to the processes of global appropriation of surplus value.

The Cuban experience that began in 1959, for example, has faced a strong reaction from the capitalist world-economy since its genesis, not least due to its geographical proximity to the American hegemony. Thus, the country suffers an economic embargo that hinders economic growth, in addition to constant assassination attempts against its leaders, *coups d'état* and invasions. Despite this, and the limitations imposed by the natural resources available in its territory, the Cuban project has reached high levels of education and health, with the development even of vaccines against cancer, in a feat not yet surpassed by the western powers. In addition, other indicators demonstrate its success in raising the population's living conditions, such as security, housing, food and access to the most diverse forms of cultural manifestations. Also, Cuba demonstrates clarity of its objectives at the international level:

In the Cuban revolutionary logic, the actions launched were aimed at achieving and defending real independence and, fundamentally, social change. Therefore, the external projection should also follow this transformation process. This meant, in the first place, challenging and overcoming dependence and subservience to the United States, which had been going on for more than fifty years. Cubans were clear that they would have to face the isolation and hostility promoted by the Americans. However, this situation could be offset by relations with the USSR. The Revolution meant not only a change in Cuba, but also a change in the way the country came to perceive its place in the world. The Cuban state, traditionally of lesser importance in global affairs, could now (and should) project and interfere in international dynamics, with a view to strengthening its own Revolution. In that sense, foreign policy for Cuba has always been much more than simply establishing commercial and diplomatic relations. External conduct was reflected in the debates and formulation of domestic policies. On the other hand, it also reflected on Cuba's relationship with the two superpowers, a reality that Cubans had to deal with until 1991. Finally, it served as the basis for a new identity, which accompanied the construction of the socialist state and its redefinition as a country of the Third World (Pereira in Visentini et al. 2013, 259).

In the same sense, Visentini (2013) points out that North Korea was born from the intervention of the American hegemony in its revolutionary process. The war that divided the country not only resulted in economic blockades, but also in a long period of non-recognition of its state, which only joined the United Nations in 1991.

Even so, the country gained mastery of highly complex technologies, such as nuclear (both for civilian and strategic use), and overcoming the natural challenges that, combined with the economic embargo, imposed on the region

a shortage of basic goods. In addition, the guarantee of employment and the provision of social services to the population assures a level and dignity of life. In this way, the country's global importance is elevated, since:

[...] in the transition to the 21st century, Korea starts to occupy a privileged space in the field of decisions involving high diplomacy. The four powers with which the two Korean states have to interact more directly undergo changes that affect the destinations of the peninsula, giving the region a strategic character, this time global. China continues to grow stronger, and is now associated with Russia, trying to avoid a huge US ascendancy over the region. This country, in turn, tries to reaffirm its supremacy over its old allies, Tokyo and Seoul. But both are conditioned by economic needs that direct them towards the developing pole of East Asia, since only with a certain degree of autonomy can their development proceed (Visentini 2013, 146).

For its part, the People's Republic of China has not only managed to resist the advances of the capitalist world-economy, but also to establish alternative orders on a larger scale:

The impact of China's global insertion is intense, not only due to the accelerated growth rate, but also due to the country's economic and population weight, as well as its continental dimension. The problem, however, does not concern only the weight of China, but mainly the characteristics of the Chinese project. It is a nuclear power, with immense military capacity, in addition to the fact that it is a model for a development with autonomous intentions. The People's Republic of China, thanks to its military deterrence, nuclear weapons, its own arms industry, aerospace and missile technology, as well as being a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council (with veto power) is the only developing country that is at the core of world power (Martins in Visentini et al. 2013, 116).

Thus, it is noted that the socialist experience in China began in a context of resistance to Japanese imperialism and confrontation with the nationalist project of the Kuomintang. The Chinese Communist Party's proposal gained prominence with its successes during World War II and, after the conflict ended and the confrontation with the Kuomintang resumed, with the Great March. In this, the withdrawing socialist troops continued to spread their ideology, and their persistence eventually became part of the popular imagination.

It is identified that with the victory of the socialists in the Chinese civil war and the consolidation of the People's Republic of China, the capitalist world-economy relegates the country to the same isolation as other revolutionary states

and, thus, until the 1970s, sanctions were imposed on the country that include economic blockade and, even with the reestablishment of commercial relations, several attempts to contain it are carried out, for example by stimulating *coups d'état*. From there, reforms are established with the objective of boosting the economy, given that the construction of socialism demands sufficient material conditions to provide good living conditions for all and to defend the project.

Thus, by controlling its financial market and foreign investment, demanding the sharing of technologies when establishing ventures in its territory, China was able to develop and dominate cutting-edge technologies (such as the 5G internet) and counteract the American hegemony in its strategic surroundings. At the same time, it managed to pursue the objectives announced as a socialist project, fighting poverty, improving the living conditions of the population, reducing inequality between countryside and city and adopting practices that are beneficial to the environment.

The examples cited lead us to reflect on the possibilities available to the peripheries and semi-peripheries of economic, political and social transformation. They demonstrate that it is necessary to think, in a perspective of the geopolitical South, alternatives that allow the overcoming of the problems imposed by the systemic world order, whose structure imposes limits on the autonomous development of countries outside the center due to the need for appropriation of surplus value that sustains their control over the capitalist world-economy through the international division of labor. Thus, it is argued that the path to development passes through the challenge of financial and technological monopolies that guide global capital flows, aiming at greater equality between countries and better living conditions for all humanity.

Final Remarks

Considering, according to Amin (1997), that the international division of labor allows the surplus value of the periphery and semiperiphery to be appropriated by the center, thanks to the monopoly over technologies and finance, it is evident that the capital accumulation flow benefits the center to the detriment of the others, dialectically ensuring the continuity of differentiation between the regions of the capitalist world-economy, since such an influx of resources allows the renewal of the instruments of domination. Likewise, it should be remembered that the semi-periphery also appropriates surplus value in its relationship with the periphery, guaranteeing advantages over the latter.

Remembering Braudel, the advent of modernity leads the economy to influence society, politics and culture more deeply. Marx's propositions

inspire analysis in this sense, underlining the dialectical relationship between the economic structure and the political and legal, ideological superstructure. Thus, the drainage of capital from the peripheries towards the center suggests that the advantages obtained through this process go beyond the material bases, extending to all spheres of society. This happens in a conflictive and contradictory way, as are the relations between the classes, whose role is essential for the construction and reproduction of the capitalist mode of production.

Thus, it is identified that the development of a given region is associated with its capacity to accumulate capital, according to its insertion as a source or destination of flows of global surplus value. In this way, the countries located at the center of the system are categorized as developed; semi-peripheral countries are treated as developing or emerging; and the countries of the periphery relegated to the condition of underdevelopment. The ideological sense of this terminology is also evident, particularly regarding the semiperiphery, since it is referenced in a situation that presupposes the possibility of autonomous development within the framework of the system, a fact not verified empirically, given that the only cases of rise to the center took place via “sponsored”, “by invitation” development, with authorization and support from the center, as previously exemplified by South Korea.

The influence of this process is not limited to economic aspects, but also extends to other spheres of society. That is why the political, social and cultural systems of the peripheries must be influenced, establishing in the superstructure justifications necessary for the flow of international capital. With this objective, international institutions and organizations play a fundamental role, as exemplified by the Bretton-Woods⁹ and the World Trade Organization, which restructure basic questions of the polarization of the capitalist world-economy as technical problems, imposing solutions appropriate to the interests of the center on the peripheries, therefore ideologically partial, under a scientific hue. For this reason, despite frequent attempts by semiperipheral and peripheral countries to appropriate their forums to discuss and build alternatives that benefit them, structural barriers are imposed and limit the effectiveness of the initiatives, as evidenced by the difficulties faced by the least favored countries to enforce its demands in the Uruguay and Doha Rounds of the World Trade Organization¹⁰.

9 The Bretton-Woods system, established in 1944, sought to regulate the world commercial and financial system in a context of necessity of European reconstruction due to World War II. It materialized through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (later divided into the World Bank and Bank for International Investments) and the International Monetary Fund.

10 The World Trade Organization was established in 1995, based on the General Agreement

Thus, at the superstructural level, the drainage of resources that perpetuates the inequality necessary for the functioning of the capitalist world-economy is consolidated. Such an understanding of the dialectical relationship of these processes is in line with Wallerstein (2009) when contesting the divisions between the social sciences, and suggests that tackling the challenges of underdevelopment demands overcoming the systemic imbalances immanent to the functioning of the capitalist world-economy. After all, being fundamental to capitalism, as proposed by Marx (1996a; 1996b), the continuous accumulation of capital, in order to allow the constant revolution of the means of production that sustains the system, and identifying the appropriation of surplus value of the peripheries as an important source of this accumulation, the impossibility of functioning of a capitalist world-economy without differentiation between its regions is evidenced, since such inequality is what allows the extraction of surplus value at a global level.

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on Tariffs and Trade (GATT - 1948), which was incorporated into it. The debates within the institution are divided into the so-called Rounds. The Uruguay Round (1986), which started in the context of GATT, underlines the creation of global protections on intellectual property, ensuring the central monopoly on technologies, while defending the liberalization of financial services and foreign investment. In the Doha Round (2001), the demand for the peripheries and semi-peripheries to reduce subsidies from the so-called developed countries on their agricultural sectors stands out, a debate whose challenges show that, even with the proposal to meet the interests of the least privileged countries, the effectiveness of the forums is limited.

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ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the development in World-System Theory as produced by the flow of appropriation of global surplus value through the international division of labor, creating the divisions between center, semiperiphery and periphery in the capitalist world-economy. It thus aims to explore how the global appropriation of surplus value in the capitalist world-economy produces variations in the level of development of its different regions. To this end, it contextualizes and conceptualizes its elements on its spatial and temporal dimensions. It defines surplus value and the form of its global accumulation, and in this sense explores the succession of capitalist hegemonies, in their dialectical relationship with the system's progress, enabling the approach to the international division of labor, and how the monopoly over finance and technologies allows the center of the system to consolidate a structure that ensures the transfer of capital and surplus value from the other regions to it. It follows that the development of a particular country or region in the capitalist world-economy depends on its ability to accumulate surplus value globally. Additionally, it is observed that the conditions imposed by the system structure prevent initiatives of autonomous development by its parts, being necessary to break with them for such a project to be possible.

KEYWORDS

World-System Theory; Capitalist World-Economy; Global Surplus Value; International Division of Labor; Development; Revolutions.

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