Review

Can capitalist 'core' survive the history driving development in the African 'periphery'? Re-evaluating Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems analysis

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This paper in interdisciplinary studies investigated the discursive effects of African development in the face of western capitalism and its hegemonic altruism [1] with close reference to insights from selected African creative art and social 'writings'. It found out that I.Wallerstein's world systems and its analysis are limited in spatial scope and explanatory power because of the conflict between structure and agency, the powerful presence of Africa states despite capitalism, the role of class struggles and the place of culture in the identity politics of Africans.

Key words: Africa's historical development, (neo/classical, neoliberal) capitalism, Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems structure of 'core' and 'periphery', old and new imperialisms, forms of agency, class struggles, cultural discourse, creative art and social 'writings'.

INTRODUCTION

This paper in interdisciplinary studies draws insights from a selected variety of African works of art and social 'writings' based on the context of Africa's developmental history and radical European literature, as Lewis, Rodgers and Woolcock (2008) exhort, in order to re-evaluate Immanuel Wallerstein's (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989) world systems analytical model of capitalist development. Against the grounds of the systems theory that western capitalism is now a totalized order *ă la longue durée*, [2] it explores the ways in which Africa's historical and developmental discourse constituted a *deconstruction* [3] of Wallerstein's version of capitalist development. The paper sets out to show that, as a strategy of capitalist development, world systems analysis had reached a dead-end, by demonstrating how Africa's developmental history represented both an intellectual and materialist objection to such an ontological and epistemological classification. [4] It therefore argues that in order to arrive at a more plausible depiction of developmental realism in the world today, that is, to effect an accurate description of large-scale processes of social change taking place in non-western societies, Wallerstein's world systems analysis can only serve productively as a departure or 'starting point' rather than as an 'essential' way of explaining the current *status quo* of world development. In this light, the systems analysis serves not as a quintessential premise but rather as a critical position from which to explore the more complex national and international contexts of historical development in developing societies, with Africa as a case example. It also demonstrates that literary discourse is best suited to illuminate these contexts of historical development.

It starts from the premise that world systems analysis, by erasing traditional boundaries of the social sciences, bases its teleology on passive and unpersuasive concepts of state, national, class, cultural, gender, racial and individual agency, and, in this way, becomes prone to the limitations of historical and discursive determinism. The paper argues that world systems analysis ignores active historical trajectories in Africa, which the writings portray, and by so doing, it assumes that the evolution of the world system could not have turned out to be any other way (Wendt, 1987: 347-348). In this way, the paper suggests that the analysis reduces historical experience to a single, uni-disciplinary analytical framework, rather than treating it from within the multi-disciplinary framework of traditional disciplines such as anthropology, history, economics, political science, linguistics and sociology. By insisting on a single capitalist world model

of development, the 'core', rather than on the agency of states, cultures, peoples (in short, histories) of societies as discrete units of analysis, it presents a strategic picture that is economically deterministic and historically flawed. The structuralist concept of *longue durée* upon which world systems depends, the paper argues, represents a temporality and an image of world develop-ment that is warped when seen from an African historical developmental context. Its hypothetical framework is therefore that economic accumulation and social change in Africa were shaped less by capital and more by individualistic, class, group, social, national and state factors jointly, rather than by factors independently of one another. Only by looking at the complex interactions among these structural factors, which African writings explain, can concrete ways in which each of them influenced the pattern of development in Africa be illuminated. Of these sets of factors, this paper highlights the role of the state in linking the world system and class forces to the development process.

THE *THRUST* OF STRUCTURE-AGENCY DICHOTOMY [5]

In this section, I argue that, contrary to Immanuel Wallerstein, African works of art show that the history of developments in Africa did not simply follow a reproductive, but more importantly, a transformational logic. Wallerstein locates his idea of internationalization of the capitalist system from the Sixteenth Century (challenged though, for example, by Brenner, 1977), but the problem with this epistemological temporality is that it ignores the critical lesson embedded in the literature, which is that the history of development in Africa was a 'positive' [6] rather than a 'neutral' narrative. The history of development in Africa was so active that it worked to deconstruct the structuration of global development based on 'core' and 'periphery'. Against Wallerstein's model of developmental enunciation, the history of Africa was 'narrated' more as a 'particular' kind of development in its own right rather than as an annexure to the western capitalist *longue durée*. From this light, the major weakness in world systems theory is its assumption that the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Nineteenth century Europe was a universal phenomenon with the same impact experienced in Africa as elsewhere. Indeed evidence of African developments that took place several centuries before and during the Sixteenth Century from the writings such as Ayi Kwei Armah's (1973) *Two Thousand Seasons* and Yambo Ouoleguem's (1968) *Le Devoir de Violence*, shows that while Europe and America were transiting to the capitalist mode of production, the impact of this transition was almost imperceptible in the continent. African societies continued to practice their own ancestral mode of production similar to but different from the Asiatic type and this mode of

production was based on the embeddedness of society into subsistence forms of agriculture, fishing, animal husbandry, black smithing, hunting, trade by barter, etc. [7]

In the history of African development, individuals like Shaka Zulu in Thomas Mofolo's (1981) *Chaka*, Ousman Dan Foudio, Paul Samba in Azawi Nchami's (2009) *Footprints of Destiny*, Nelson Mandela in Nelson Mandela's (1965) *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, Kenneth Kaunda (1962) in *Zambia Shall Be Free* and Patrice Lumumba in Aimé Césaire's (1966) *Une Saison au Congo*, emerged during their times to more or less 'rationally' direct the continent's developmental processes, whereas in world systems theory, there is no such central 'actor', no 'agency', recounting and 're-narrating' capitalist history as a totalizing experience of mankind's development. Wallerstein's analysis does not give him the facility to explain, for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism even in Europe, and speak less for developmental transitions in African societies. As for how world capitalism develops once it is established, Wallerstein asserts that the system is dynamic, but he provides us with no theoretical explanation of why and how developmental breakthroughs occur. For example, his analysis is silent on what would happen to this system when (hypothetically) the whole world is dominated by liberal markets and every individual becomes a waged labourer. Wallerstein's arguments are very robust on the issue of 'stability' of the world capitalist system; however, this rigid position is unconvincing when seen against the backdrop of recent crises in Wall Street, the US economy, Greece, Ireland, the EU economy and elsewhere in the world.

World-system theorists reify the 'core'/'periphery' structure of the world system, but they are unable, even in principle, to explain its essential properties. This world systems structure is reified by being treated as though it were an object analytically independent of the actions by which it is produced. A solution to the agent-structure problem, then, must engage in reification when it objectifies social structures without recognizing that only human 'action' instantiates, reproduces and transforms those structures. African writings show that reification presupposes at least an implicit conception of the relationship of agents to social structures: they draw our attention to the fact that organizations have reproductive requirements which, for whatever reason, agents passively implement. The problem with reification, therefore, does not concern the inclusion or exclusion of agents *per se* from social scientific theories (since they must be included), but rather the terms of their inclusion into those theories. Immanuel Wallerstein's solution to the agent-structure problem has the same general form, and thus the same strengths and weaknesses, as Louis Althusser's structural Marxist solution. In this light, agents are just people whose causal powers and real interests are produced, and therefore, are explained, by their

relation to the totality of the capitalist world system. Thus, agents whether as states, societies, people, or as individuals, are portrayed merely as *effects* of the structure of the world system in much the same sense that capitalists are *effects* of the structure of the capitalist mode of production, or African slaves were effects of the structure of master-slave relationships (Wendt, 1987: 344-346).

The actors of social change in African developmental history such as Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba, Frantz Fanon, etc, were agents but with changing (radicalizing) social behaviours capable of altering the structural patterns of colonial rule. As already noted, without these agents of change, colonial structures would not have ended; they would have only maintained the *status quo,* that is, only referred to themselves and would not have acted on their own to dispose of themselves. These nationalist writings in which these actors feature show that African nationalists, who were *lumpen* proletarians, acted freely against these colonial structures of capital; their actions for freedom were not constrained by the capitalist structures themselves, their resolve was not deterred by their peripheric 'biographies', nor was their imagination compromised by the 'social prisons' that were constructed by the imperial order.

We would conclude that these 'writings' show us that the internal structures of developmental change in Africa were not always subordinated to the hegemonic structures of imperialism. Indeed, one cannot explain the behaviour of parts of a system by merely relying upon its systemic context as a *causal* factor. For example, in Africa, the rainy season is an ideal condition that causes seeds planted on manured soil to grow into plants; but this does not mean that the very condition would cause seeds planted on sand to grow. The creative *oeuvres* demonstrate that Africa's accession to the era of postcolonial development was not simply a systemic effect from imperial rule, a moment of late capital dependency, but was contingent upon multiple factors, random events, resilient trends, the behavior of indigenous people, and the mutual interaction of intellectual groups, key actors, etc, that had little or nothing to do with capitalism *per se*.

CLASS STRUGGLES

The 'narration' of the developmental history in the continent by African writers shows that, contra the rather alienated view of Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory based on categories of structured circulation, namely, 'core', 'semi-periphery' and 'periphery', the social reality in Africa was based on the Asiatic/African mode of surplus value but together with class struggles between the indigenous nobility and republican forces, the white colonial establishment and the colonized, and today, the new bourgeois elites and the mass class. The writers

explain that African developmental reality was not simply a totalized order of dominating capital but was a world where, at national levels, there were conflictual relations between social classes (Bergesen, 1984). The reality at international level was not simply the 'core-periphery' division of labour, but rather global core-periphery class relations that denoted power-dependency relationships.

African works of art show diversified 'languages' of race, class, gender, ethnicity and labour analysis and also point to the fact that these 'languages' cannot be expunged from development as a historical phenomenon. From a macro perspective, world systems analysis misses these details of class conflicts within societies in Africa. The writings show that limitations of economic resources in the continent created class conflicts and class conflicts, in turn, led to the growth of *rifts* in the social *polity*, and *rifts*, in turn, created republican alternatives that promised progression toward an ideal stage of development, in approximately the sense in which Karl Marx postulated a (primitive) communist, idealistic end of history. In fact, in virtually all African writings, there is evidence that republican forces were very active in premodern, modern and postmodern histories. For example, the conflict between Ezeulu, aristocratic leader of Umuaro and Nwaka in Chinua Achebe's (1964) *Arrow of God*, and the clash between the *fon* (that is, chief) of Banso and Tamfu (*fai* Sabum) who creates a different kingdom in Kenjo Jumbam's (1975) *Lukong and the Leopard*, point to the fact that indigenous Africa's economic and political trajectory was heterogeneous rather than homogeneous and was activated by rebellious agents in quest of a better life for their peoples.

At the initial years of the imperial epoch, the linear trajectory of capitalism imposed upon the developmental history of Africa was consistent with Wallenstein's 'core/periphery' analysis. But during the later years of this colonial imposition, the trajectory was renarrated and renegotiated through anticolonial and decolonisation struggles by the emerging industrial and educated proletarian class whether in Odinga Oginga's (1968) *Not Yet Uhuru*, William Conton's (1966) *The African*, Nelson Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom*, or in Kenneth Kaunda's *Zambia Shall Be Free*, etc, against the white bourgeoisie class. As a result, the capitalist agents of imperialism charged with managing the colonial establishment, that is, the primitive forms of the capitalist 'core', ran out of their ideological arsenals and succumbed to the decolonization trajectories of the African labour class. These conflictual trajectories of development diversified into new divisions at the levels of race (Denis Brutus, Alan Paton, Nadine Godimer, Ezekiel Mphahlele,), and nation, gender and ethnicity (e.g. the Negritudist movement of L.S. Senghor, Aimé Césaire and the *Harlem Renaissance* movement). These variables show that development in Africa was not a simple question that could be addressed only at the level of

economic production, the circulation of goods and services, as Wallerstein suggests, but was a matter that took increasing importance at the level even of the *idea* of society that Wallerstein appears to ignore. From this light, and contra the world systems analysis, the western 'core' did not rely only on a chiefly economic strategy of capitalist expansion. Much evidence even from radicalist European poetry suggests that the world system also depended upon the *idea of others* through 'racism' rather than only on capital to expand and implant its roots in other parts of the world where its traces survived. In fact, western history in the past and in the present has been a history driven by racial discrimination. The different 'moments' of capitalism such as the slave trade, imperialism, colonial rule, internationalism and now globalization were contingent upon strategies that were more or less forms of prejudice, bigotry and intolerance than forms of rationalist capitalist development *per se*. Joseph Conrad's (2003) *Heart of Darkness* portrays this strategy of imperialism in colonial Africa. Radical European poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge articulated their concerns over the sustainability of the legacy of the civilizing mission. For example, in the following verse (Keach, William, ed., 1997) 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', ll. 79-82, Samuel Taylor Coleridge reports about the tainted techniques of European colonial expansion,

'God save thee, ancient Mariner
From the fiends that plague thee thus! -
Why look'st thou so?' –   'With my crossbow I shot the albatross.'

In this verse, the poet portrays a boat with a sail that is clearly out on an expedition to 'discover', with a view to conquer foreign lands in the name of God and exploit them as required by the capitalist 'core' system. Strong winds blow the sails and the boat is driven into what is considered as 'enemy' (fiends) territory where the seaman, out of arrogance, shoots an albatross that comes to share food. Consequently, the gods of the village chastise the crew for their crime. The albatross, which represents friendship, hospitality and tolerance, is wrapped on the mariner's neck to signify the guilt and shame of his ilk. This versified strategy of racism cha-racterizing a common technique of capitalist expansion becomes a symbol of western imperial arrogance and brutality in the name of developmental civilization and points to the fact that the world system was not really about 'economics' in its technically basic sense but was more about racism and *orientalism* leading to exploitation, dominance, chauvinism and segregation (Said, 1993, 2003). [8] Similarly, the US project of global imperialism does not depend solely on the economic realm of incentives, utilitarianism and rationalism in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, but rather on the oppressive power of American and NATO forces through

military technologies like drones used in Pakistan. The history of the world system in the modern epoch, is thus 'narrated' robustly not by the objectivity of free market principles as Immanuel Wallenstein's theory suggests but by extreme right associations, nationalist populists and neo/conservatives, who openly make recourse to racism, intolerance, profiling, threats and high technology or star wars (e.g. ideologically supported by George Bush's 'axis of evil' in reference to Iraq, Iran and North Korea, and zones of 'terrorism' in reference to Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc) as ways of justifying capitalist imperialism and expansion.

The narration in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* shows that European imperialists refused to bestow qualities of human expressivity on Africans, and the author adds that the narration shows that imperialism even deprived them of the capacity of 'language'. The African continent itself was portrayed in the imperialist discourse of the late Nineteenth century as the 'antithesis' of Europe and therefore of civilization itself. In these early years of imperial penetration and exploitation, Africa was seen as a foil to Europe; Africa was reported in discourse as a place of all the negations of progress: at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace was to be manifest. In the same fashion, the writings about apartheid in South Africa such as Alan Paton's (1987) *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Dennis Brutus' (1968) *Letters to Martha*, Peter Abraham's (1989) *Mine Boy*, etc, show a form of capitalist expansion through institutionalized racism rather than through the competitive principles of capitalism.

CONSTRUCTING AFRICAN STATEHOOD BEYOND CAPITALISM

In his essay titled 'The rise and future demise of the world capitalist system: concepts for comparative analysis,' Immanuel Wallenstein posits that national development does not exist from his modern world system, only development of the modern world system. Wallerstein presents an analysis that is consistent with a structural-functionalist scheme, in which the behaviour of components is explained as a *function* of their role within a system. He explains changes in sovereign states as merely consequent upon the evolution and interaction of the world-system But African writings show that his analysis based on the *functionalist* view of political processes is flawed because his view assumes that processes are merely *effects* of economic *causation*. The formation of political states in Africa, the differences in state strength, etc, are explainable not only by economic and world market conditions, but more importantly by greater variables such as local cultural and ideological specificities, historically pre-existing institutional patterns, the history and practice of popular rebellion by the

masses, geopolitical pressures, discourses of legality (Held, 2002) and international constraints, etc. Despite the impact of the global (Giddens, 1990, 2000) and the challenges (Gilpin, 2000) it poses for our communities, the state in Africa was more especially a neo-patrimonial process as represented by life president Wan Nei in Tah Asongwed's (1993) *Born to Rule* responding to the exploitative side of the capitalist system. In Africa, state elites redistributed resources to their populations by using the criterion of ethnic belonging, rather than the principles of rational economics. This phenomenon gave rise to ethnic nationalism, which T.M. Aluko (1970) articulated in *A State of Our Own*. Class politics in the African state apparatus inspired Chinua Achebe (1966, 1987) to write *A Man of the People* pitting the illiterate chief Nanga and the educated Odili and to publish *Anthills of the Savannah* that sets up military against civilian but corrupt regimes. The writings show that, as a unit of analysis, the nation-state in Africa was a legacy not of capitulation but of *resistance* to the capitalist type of US modernization designed from 1945 after the inaugural speech of President Harry Truman, to impose a single path of evolutionary development from 'tradition' to 'modernity', industrialization and mass consumerism but also with prospects of alternating to 'postmodernity'.

In Africa, the introduction of capitalism did not lead to the spread of capitalism *tout court* in every single 'artery' of family circles and sector of public life, such as the state. Rather, capitalism failed to infiltrate into the bounded structures of statehood and statecraft. Wallerstein 'collapses' both spheres, namely, capitalism and statehood, in his world system analysis without considering the fact that the realm came under a different set of pressures, behaviours and regulations that had nothing to do with capitalism. Even when Africa came into contact with the forces of international capitalism, the structures of statehood operated as autonomous modes of production. The political sphere of the state did not absolutely derive from the economic base that world systems analysis alludes to (Scolpol, 1997; Zolberg, 1981). The Wallersteinian analysis makes the claim that realities of the political sphere were determined by the capitalist base. African writings show the contrary, namely, that one cannot explain the political realm as a simple part or derivative of the capitalist economy. The motivations that directed actions in the state arena were autonomous: state politics responded to pressures that were different from market behaviours. For example, what motivated the creation of the nation state in Nujoma's (2001), *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* and Pepetela's (1996) *Mayombe* was anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and cultural nationalism rather than free market capitalism.

The whole gamut of Wole Soyinka's writings such as *The Road* (1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (1967), *The Interpreters (*1970*), Madmen and Specialists* (1971)*, Opera Wonyosi* (1977)*, Before the Black Out* (1974)*, A Play of*

Giants (1984)*, From Zia with Love* and *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (1992) also show that the African world was evolving as a system of civil societies and nation states (Kaldor, 2003, Keck and Sikkink, 1998). The system of societies, nations and states cannot be simply equated with the Wallersteinian world system (Florini and Senta, 2000). Soyinka shows that what is emerging is a global continental society, an association of black peoples, nations and transnational and diasporic communities, who share the core values of an ancestral communitarian ethics[9] and are increasingly being integrated and regulated by a form of global democratic governance. Africa is made up of societies of open economies but also of closed cultures. Africa's nation-states are still the basic unit of political organization, which try to retain their autonomy from being eroded by global flows of goods, people, ideas, cultures and services (Appadurai, 1996). At the moment, there is no world system as such in Africa and no single African polity; and yet, despite this fact, Africa is not a continental anarchy nor a system of sovereign nation-states. It is a multi-polar and multi-layered system where states are controlled whether by the United Nations, African Union, leaders of a world civil society such as NGOs, collective social movements, ethnic communities with chiefs, local elites and vested political interests, diasporic communities that occasionally send back remittances to their families living in villages and towns, new public spaces and trans-national communities that are emerging with new interests.

Christopher Okigbo's (1971) *Labyrinths, with, Path of Thunder*, Bandele-Thomas' (1991)*The Man who Came in From the Back of Beyond*, and Ola Rotimi, (1977) *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again,* also show transnational corporations operating side by side with major religious communities, cosmopolitan elites, village people, etc, and pursuing common goals of peaceful co-existence, social justice, human rights and democratic governance; but they equally treat themes of Islamic religious fundamentalism, political domination, and economic exploitation. Religious and nationalist movements are active in African countries like Nigeria, Algeria, Somalia and Egypt and they operate beyond the control of states, not to speak of terrorist groups and international *mafias*, which are also very active in the global arena. The writings such as Meja Mwagi's (1973) *Kill Me Quick* also show that there is a disillusioning process of trans-nationalization of social classes, [10] which identifies with a global bourgeoisie, a world working, peasantry class, etc. each with its own forms of political representation in collective movements. On the one hand, the national, ethnic, religious, cultural divisions among the oppressed classes prevent the formation of a united revolutionary movement. On the other hand, there is no world polity where political conflict can be generalized and political demands can be transformed into policy decisions, but only separated political arenas - such as international forums of inter-governmental organizations and summits of world

leaders - where movements can act and make themselves heard and visible through the global media. Although globalization is having an impact on the sovereignty and autonomy of nation-states, this effect is not to the extent that it is often asserted by scholars of different ideological orientation (Albrow, 1996; Strange, 1996; Ohmae, 1995; Reinecke, 1998; Thurow, 1999). For example, they argue that the choices of nation states in the world are contracting and they would have to adopt neo-liberal economic policies in order to compete in the world market. They fault the impersonal forces of capitalist markets with being more powerful than states, and argue that globalization means the end of nation-states as autonomous actors in international relations. But they exaggerate the demise of nation states without distinguishing between states with quite great levels of power (like the US, Germany, Israel and the UK) and states with little influence (like Chad or the Comoros Islands). Some African writings such as Abdourahman's (2006) *Aux Etats-Unis d'Afrique*, show that the erosion of state sovereignty may be as a result of growing global interdependence and interconnectedness, and it takes a variety of forms, which are not necessarily effects of capitalism. These forms range from the permeability of national frontiers to 'illegal' immigrants and the threats of transnational terrorism such as in Andre Brink's *An Act of Terror*, the constraints set up by international monetary institutions on the economic policies of national governments, the impact of transnational corporations' strategies on workers and consumers, the problems of coexistence in multiethnic societies and the difficulties faced by authoritarian regimes in filtering out information from the global village.

In African countries, state power was reconstituted and transformed, with its functions re-articulated and re-embedded in complex transnational, but also regional and local networks. Global flows stimulated a variety of adjustment strategies through national policies that required a rather active state. This was neither the neo-liberal minimum government nor the waning state, but the 'developmental' state that was asserting itself. The economic crises and the terrorist attacks of recent years 'catalyzed' new forms of state 'intervention' such as direct control over business and financial transactions and anti-terrorist laws that set constraints on the free circulation of ideas, people and goods. As Tah Asongwed's (1993) *Born to Rule* shows, in Africa, many national governments competed with each other through industrial policies aimed at creating the most favourable conditions for foreign investment. These policies included corporate and fiscal laws, creation of good infrastructures, flexible labour force, efficient public administration and so on; however, at the same time, as Shadrach Ambanasom's (2008) *Son of the Native Soil* shows, these governments maintained control over basic development strategies. The real and pragmatic decision to develop Akan or Anjong village depends entirely upon the local

government at Mbame headed by the vulnerable mind of the D.O. (p. 65) rather than on some directives from the capitalist 'core' (World Bank, IMF, etc) in the west. This is consistent with what Rosenau (1997) points out rightly, which is that the state is not yet demised, but is rather reconstructed and restructured. Keohane (2002) is also right to argue that the concept of state sovereignty is less a question of territorially defined borders than a matter of resource for a politics marked by complex transnational networks of competitive national and regional systems. National sovereignty is increasingly being challenged by transnational forces, but nation-states will remain key actors in global governance for quite a long time. The example of the US government which ironically came to the rescue of the historically discredited neoliberal dogmas of Milton Friedman by bailing out corporate institutions and failed banks, is still fresh in our minds.

Most of the policies that can regulate and control market processes can be effectively implemented only at the national and state level. For example, the role of the judiciary in tracking down illegal market behaviour such as corruption is uncontestable. The bureaucracy is useful in reducing inequality of opportunities and in minimizing undesirable outcomes of market processes such as unemployment. In these respects, the state is still very necessary although it is changing. Whatever the degree of erosion, the transformation of the state and its power continues to evolve. From this light, it is difficult to deny that states continue to constitute the primary source of communal identity for most people in Africa. Even in African countries where economic sovereignty is eroded by global forces, such corrosion is compensated by popular demands by the people for a more active state that controls immigration, negotiates agreements in international governmental organizations, addresses environmental problems and so forth. While global influence is real, sovereignty in Africa is not eroded to the extent of preventing nation-states from being proactive agents of development. The continuing power of national identities in Africa as reflected in its multiple oral literatures and traditions: Swahili literature, Somali literature, Igbo literature, Anglophone Cameroon literature (Ambanasom, 2009), Afrikaner literature, etc, represents a major 'obstacle' to the formation of a universal global capitalist society. This is so because the notion of a global capitalist order does not come with a set of universally acceptable identities, values and norms as well as widely accepted and enforceable institutions. As these ethnic literatures show, people and communities in Africa define their identities in idiosyncratic ways: not only do they cling to values that are antithetical to values of others, but they also compel other communities to conform under duress to their own preferences, which is an existential question of 'seeing' and therefore a matter of social 'language' (Saro Wiwa, 1992). Indeed, Wallerstein himself, who studied for many years in Africa knows that we are still far away from the Kantian idealistic

republican state, a unified global polity, with a single citizenship for all individuals, who are endowed with the same rights and duties. We are also not in a position to achieve a united empire, a federal Union of the world's states, in which societies are subjected to a hegemonic authority, a centralized chain of command. It would be possible to conclude that the 'political person' was not simply absent from the centre of African development, as world systems theory suggests; the political force intervened in powerful ways to ascertain that market forces were not the only ones in control.

FROM ECONOMIC TO 'CULTURAL BASE'

Immanuel Wallerstein's analysis tends to neglect the cultural dimension, by reducing it to merely an 'official' ideology of states, an agency of economic interest. The Eurocentric principle behind Wallerstein's analysis is heavily prejudiced and does not reflect the African reality nor stand the test of thorough scrutiny. By positing a world-system that surfaced up some 500 years ago in Europe, the analysis envisages Europe as an *already privileged site* from which global development should be assessed In this way, Wallerstein's systems analysis allots to the 'west' an active destiny as main 'driver' charged with moving the rest of passive, totalized history of the world forward, through continual progress in areas such as science, technology, the capitalist economy, industry, etc. The rest of the world is allocated the 'passenger' role, which requires them to wait and see where the 'driver' is taking them to. This Wallersteinian Eurocentric emphasis gives one the impression that his theory is merely an intellectual strategy to set up an ideal global system of power and exceptionalism for the material and ideological benefit of the west (Dussell, 1998).

But the reality, proven by paleontologists, is that *homosapians* came from Africa and even Neanderthal Man, who lived in Ice Age Europe before the latter, had his ancestral origins in Africa. Consequently, it makes logical sense to argue that the first global world-system emerged about 5000 years ago in Africa (Frank and Gills, 1993, 2000), although Wallerstein would retort that this was communalistic and non-capitalistic. While for world systems theory, the 'cultural' superstructure derives from the economic base, the history of development in Africa shows that the cultural arena was an autonomous and central reality (Aronowitz, 1981). From this light, the theory may be considered as devoted to the 'grand narrative' of economism and Eurocentrism [11] rather than to the 'total history' of development as it claims. The history of Africa's development was a major *locus* of insurgency against the dictatorships of the slave trade, colonial rule, internationalism and now the free market. Not only has the cultural sphere continued to have a long lasting intellectual utility in Africa's battles against what is

perceived as the increasing totalitarianism of neoliberal capital, but it has evolved to the point of becoming social reality itself. This is a point which is unfortunately almost absent in Wallerstein's world systems theory. As portrayed by the writings, culturalism is not merely a construct of liberalism or conservatism; it is an autonomous narrative capable of acquiring a life of its own. Chinua Achebe's (1958, 1964) *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, Daniel Fagunwa's (1968) *The Forest of a Thousand Demons: A Hunter's Saga*, Ousmane Sembene's (1973) *Xala*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo's (1967) *A Grain of Wheat*, Tsisti Dangerambga's (1989) *Nervous Conditions*, Ama Atta Aidoo's (1968) *Our Sister Kill Joys*, Jamal Mahjoub's (1994) *Wings of Dust* and Buchi Emecheta's (1979) *The Joys of Motherland*, do not look beyond the redemption of Africanity plagued by the ills of capitalism. Much of these writings remind us of the American fiction of the 1920s in which the concern was to find a dignified life for people in society. African fiction is driven by the most cherished goal of cultural freedom, grace and glamour, without the intrusion of outside agencies of domination and exploitation. In these writings, the cultural notion of Africanity is enunciated as a 'blind' love for the indigenous, for what is stable, certain and replicable over 'flows', movement, splits, etc.

The human subject appears to be swallowed up by grand generalities in the world analysis. For instance, Wallerstein points out that many scholars have relied on the 'industrial proletariat,' the 'rational individual,' the 'political man' or on a discourse specific to a particular culture to play the role of the main actors on the stage of global history. However, he writes that for world-systems analysis, these are merely products, rather than 'primordial atomic elements' (Wallerstein, 1974: 21). Of course, in a certain sense, these are 'products', but they also most definitely involve human agency and subjectivity, which deserve a more forceful recognition. Particularly the 'artist/chorus' techniques used in oral African creative art (Ndi, 2009) in all the regions of Cameroon, in particular, and the continent, as a whole, show that each African was an agent, an actor, engaged with one another in the production of an autonomous cultural order with its own social, ideological and historical discourse. These agents/actors were not just products of an economic process (given that even a process is motivated by human rather than by lifeless agents), they embodied primordial cultural essences. Armah's novel *Two Thousand Seasons* tells a story built upon primordial cultural essences, which he simply calls 'the way', and at other times in his work he calls the worldview 'our way'. Wallerstein's analysis pays attention chiefly to social and therefore ephemeral structures whereas new gender, race, population and environmental questions inspired by cultural essences ('our way') richly evidenced in the oral and written literatures, social 'writings', cultures and traditions of the African world have been central to determining the developmental course of

the continent.

CONCLUSION

We should therefore suppose that world-system analysis is based on the false presumption that there is an objective world which is lying 'outside there' and, therefore, can be quantitatively understood. Wallerstein's perception of the world is a strategic extension of classical Marxist social theory, which held that all spheres of human activity, particularly, the state and the cultural sphere, are determined by the economy. Although the later Karl Marx was sophisticated enough to hypothesize a superstructural level that goes beyond economics, for Wallerstein, however, the economy is the most important explanatory factor of history: But the theory cannot explain how and why in the sixteenth century, the European world-economy metamorphosed into a capitalist world–economy, given that past world–economies existed without becoming capitalist. It cannot account for the competitive pressures that triggered and sustained this transformation; since these competitive pressures could only have been 'political'. Consequently, the theory disembeds the 'political', cultural and ideological from the economic sphere and its explanatory power becomes vulnerable to these 'discursive' parts of history (narrated so well by African literary works portraying social contexts) that it sets out to explicate. By reducing socio-economic structure to determination by free market opportunities and technological possibilities; and 'collapsing' state structures and policies to a question of dominant class interests (Sklair 2001), it ignores potential variations in these determinisms in a fashion that is associated with crude Marxism. Variations may engage with class structures, trade networks, state structures and geopolitical systems of changeable, autonomous logics and overlapping, historical times. The presentation of a single, all-encompassing system that comes into being in one stage and then remains constant in its essential properties is unconvincing.

Wallerstein's preconceived model of the capitalist economy is Lukácsian in essence and draws from a conventional Marxist ontological and totalitarian revisionism that has demonstrated its limitations as far as the Africa context is concerned. The world systems analysis is excessively capitalist-centric (Stinchcombe, 1982). Its teleological reasoning, based on the assumption that capitalism is sufficient to *cause* the world system, is not borne out by evidence from the African developmental context competently depicted by the writings. Surely, there is more to the story of development than merely accumulating capital for capital's sake (Martinelli, 2003; Martinelli, 2005; O'Brien, ed. 2000). The analysis is overly ultra-Durkheimian;[12] it considers that all *variables* outside the Eurocentric scheme are residual *errors* that are marginal to the world system design. Wallerstein's

theory is an 'abstraction' that flies in the face of the African historical and social reality even though he claims it is an attempt to avoid 'abstract model building' (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Chase-Dunn and Hall, 1997). When applied to the multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 2000) of Africa, that is, the pre-modern, prehistoric, modern and postmodern contexts of Africa, especially as elucidated by African indigenous, creative and social 'writings' (Ndi, 2009; Frank, 1998), it shows a new whole developing world asserting its own historical discourse of development against institutionalized inequality right from local levels (Randeria 2003; Hurrel and Woods, eds. 1999). For example, Africa is 'revillagizing' itself in ways that challenge world city standards and capitalist concepts (Sassen, 2000). This is consistent with what is happening at a larger level, where the world is actively remaking itself through new *locales* of the civilizational confrontation (Huntington, 1996) and the split in the idea of a single dominating 'global' and cosmopolitan order (Therborn, 2000; Beck, 2002).

Notes

[1] *hegemonic altruism*: a certain paternalistic and pastoralist attitude that the 'Core' expresses toward the 'Periphery' in order to justify control.

[2] *ǎ la longue durée*: the extensive, history of mankind

[3] *deconstruction* is used in the sense in which the poststructuralist/ postmodernist Jacques Derrida uses the term, to refer to '*undoing*', showing the limits of a concept, philosophy, theory, etc, by pointing to ways in which its critical paradigms contradict its claims to the 'truth'

[4] *an ontological and epistemological classification*. a classification that takes into account intellectual, scientific and historical origins.

[5] *structure-agency dichotomy*: the social order as opposed to individuals within it who give life and spirituality to its existence.

[6] *a 'positive' rather than a 'neutral' narrative*: a narrative that 'brings forth' and is therefore poetic, that is, creative rather than stagnant and historical.

[7] *embeddedness of society into subsistence forms*: the indigenous system in which the economy is intertwined with social forms of life as opposed to the capitalist mode of production in which the economy alienates from society thereby disembedding itself from social needs.

[8] *orientalism*: a School of thought intellectualized by Edward Said and others that analyses knowledge's, images, etc of Eastern nations and cultures, especially as preferred by western imperial powers, as tainted representations of Arabs (and Africans, e.g. as lazy, sexually promiscuous, stupid, criminals, terrorists, etc) in order to justify colonial rule and economic penetration.

[9] *ancestral communitarian ethics*: values like unity, solidarity, notion of roots, the cosmic trinity based on an unapproachable, Creator God, the ancestral domain and

the sphere of the living and the dead, etc.

[10] *trans-nationalization of social classes*: classes that have taken on new identities across nations, such as Caribbean Britons living in London.

[11] *economism and Eurocentrism*: the Marxist theorem that economics is the foundation of all human history. This intellectual philosophy underpins Wallerstein's idea of Europe as capitalist leader of the world, particularly, countries like the UK, Holland, Italy and France where *laisser faire* capitalism began.

[12] *ultra-Durkheimian*: the functionalist/structuralist insistence on social order.

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