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WORLD-SYSTEMS, FRONTIERS, AND ETHNOGENESIS:

*Incorporation and Resistance to State Expansion**

I INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the European world-system necessarily entailed incorporation of new areas and peoples. In the process it created borderlines, boundaries zones, or frontiers between its various components and the external world. World-system analysis, which was developed to explain the dynamic expansion of the European based modern world-system, has paid insufficient attention to how local forces and actors shape the process. In particular, the study of the roles of gender, race, ethnicity, and interactions with nonstate peoples have been somewhat neglected (K. Ward 1993; Hall 1989a, 1989b, 1996a, 1996b).

Recently, several writers have extended world-systems analysis into the distant, precapitalist, past (Abu-Lughod 1989, 1993; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1991, 1997a; Frank and Gills 1993; Peregrine and Feinman 1996). While disagreeing on many points, all agree that systematic intersocietal relations preceded the formation of the modern world-system in the long sixteenth century (1450-1640 C. E.), and all world-systems tend to expand and absorb new areas, and often new peoples. Thus, the role of world-systemic processes in the formation, transformation, fossilization, and obliteration of borderlines, boundary zones, or frontiers is also ancient. These processes remain relatively understudied and undertheorized.

Our understanding, our ability to theorize and explain, past patterns is severely curtailed by such slighting of the study of frontiers. In the language of statistical research, our sampling of the relevant "universe" has been systematically biased. Thus, we have not been able to understand "core" processes due to underattention to those occurring on the far peripheries and in ancient times. World-system structure and dynamics must be studied in all places and all times if we are to understand the evolutionary dynamics of the system itself, and understand what is truly new at the turn of the second millennium of the common era. That is, far peripheries are as relevant as the

core. This is not a matter of political correctness or humane inclusiveness – though they are important – but a matter of valid theory-building.

I have argued many times (especially 1989a, 1989b) that some processes can be best, or maybe only, studied on the far peripheries for the simple reason that is where they occur most often and most visibly. Peter Sahlins begins his masterful study of the French-Spanish “fossilized” boundary with an epigraph from Pierre Vilar which is particularly useful here: “The history of the world is best observed from the frontier” (1989, p. xv). Hence the study of borderlines and frontiers is indispensable to understanding the modern world.

My goal in this paper is to begin to develop a world-system analysis based account of frontiers. I summarize much of the work done from this perspective, illustrate the points with various examples, and suggest many issues and topics for further discussion. I hope to persuade readers that a comparative world-systems perspective on the formation, transformation, fossilization, and obliteration of borderlines, boundary zones, or frontiers is vital to our understanding of them. I do not, however, claim that a comparative world-systems perspective can explain everything. In short, a comparative, historical world-system perspective is a necessary, but not sufficient requirement to understand the dynamics of borderlines, boundary zones, or frontiers.

I begin the account with thumbnail sketch of world-system analysis, a brief recapitulation of the major findings of its extension into the ancient world, and the elaboration of the analysis of world-system incorporation. I then turn to an account of frontier dynamics, illustrated with various examples. I conclude with a discussion of theoretical and empirical problems which need further study.

2 COMPARATIVE WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

According to Immanuel Wallerstein, a world-system is an intersocietal system which has a self-contained division of labor. Thus it is a “world,” but not necessarily global. It has some degree of internal coherence, and is a key unit of analysis within which all other social structures and processes should be analyzed (Chase-Dunn 1989; Shannon 1996; and So 1990; Wallerstein 1974a, 1974b, 1979, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995).

A world-system must be studied as a whole. Thus, the study of social, political, economic, or cultural change in any component of the system must begin by understanding that component’s role within the system, whether it be a nation, state, region, ethnic group, class, gender role, or nonstate society. World-systems analysis has a dual research agenda: (1) how do the processes of the system affect the internal dynamics and social structures of its components; and (2) how do changes in its components affect the entire system? (Bach 1980).

A world-system has three components: (1) a core which employs advanced industrial production and distribution, has strong states, a strong bourgeoisie, and a large working class; (2) a periphery which specializes in raw materials production and has weak states, a small bourgeoisie, and many peasants; and (3) a semiperiphery which is intermediate between core and periphery, in its economic, social, and political roles and its own internal social structure. Core capitalists use various sorts of coercion to promote unequal exchange and accumulate capital which leads simultaneously to core development and peripheral impoverishment.

By the 1980s archaeologists found that world-system analysis, while suggestive, could not be used without major modifications (Hall and Chase-Dunn 1993; Peregrine 1996). This led to the extension of world-systems analysis to precapitalist settings. Christopher Chase-Dunn and I (1991, 1995, 1997a, 1998a, 1998b) have argued that such extension requires that many of the assumptions of the theory of the modern world-system must be transformed into empirical questions.

Several findings of this work are germane to the discussion of borderlines, boundary zones, or frontiers. First, world-systems, or core/periphery structures, date back at least to the neolithic revolution (approximately 10,000 to 12,000 years ago). Second, these core/periphery structures are a major locus of social change. Not all change can be explained from the world-system level, but system processes are a crucial part of all social change. Fourth, these world-systems, have themselves, evolved.

Fifth, world-systems have several types of dynamic cycles. All world-systems pulsate, that is expand and contract, or expand rapidly, then more slowly. All state-based world-systems (that is since about 3,000 B.C.E.) have cycles of rise and fall of core states. A typical, but not universal process is the displacement or conquest of the dominant core state by a semiperipheral marcher state (Chase-Dunn and Hall, Ch. 5). In the capitalist world-system this becomes the hegemonic cycle wherein one core power displaces others in succession: the Dutch, followed by British, followed by United States. State-based systems also seem to oscillate between public and private dominant forms of capital accumulation (Arrighi 1994). (Capital accumulation refers to amassing wealth in any form; capitalist accumulation to "the amassing of wealth by means of the making of profits from commodity production" (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997a, 271)). Precapitalist tributary systems, range from very private forms of accumulation, feudal systems to very centralized forms, a centralized empire. The modern capitalist system ranges from accumulation sponsored or fostered by states to accumulation concentrated in private holdings. We are currently in the more private phase of this cycle.

The sixth finding is most relevant here. World-systems typically have four sets of non-coterminous boundaries (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997a, Ch. 3). The narrowest is the bulk goods exchange network. Somewhat larger is the network of political/military interactions. Larger still are the network of prestige or luxury goods exchange and a

network of information exchange (See Figure 1). Only on isolated island systems or in the late 20th century have these four boundaries coincide. Indeed, what is often discussed as “globalization” is, in this view, the convergence of these four boundaries with the limits of planet earth. The ways in which these networks are nested and overlap is a matter of continuing empirical and theoretical research.

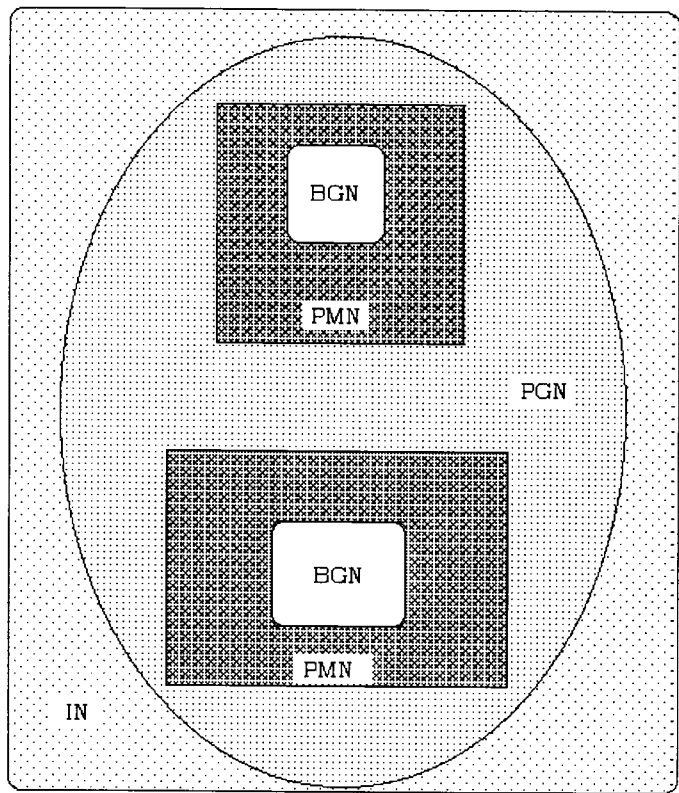


Figure 1: Spatial Boundaries of World Systems

3 WORLD-SYSTEM INCORPORATION AND GROUP (TRANS)FORMATIONS

When a world-system expands new areas are incorporated and borderlines or boundary zones, in short frontiers, are formed and transformed (Wallerstein 1974b; Hall 1996b; Hopkins, et al 1987; Markoff 1994). Here Richard Slatta’s metaphor of frontiers as membranes is quite useful (1990, 1997, 1998). Viewed from a global perspective a frontier is relatively narrow and sharp. Viewed more closely it is a broad zone with

considerable internal differentiation both spatially and temporally. In either case, the permeability of the membrane varies with respect to the types of goods, groups, and individuals and the direction of their flow through it. In this sense, a borderline, or boundary is, as Peter Sahlin argues (1989), the result of often long, complex, and highly politicized process of negotiation. Furthermore, the tonal quality often persists long after a precise boundary line has been accepted.

In the history of the western United States frontier has often been used to refer to areas with a population density under two persons per square mile. Donna Guy and Thomas Sheridan define frontiers "as zones of historical interaction where, in the brutally direct phrase of Baretta and Markoff (1978:590), 'no one has an enduring monopoly on violence'". They continue, "Frontiers were, in a most basic sense, contested ground" (1998b, 10). They go on to recap the history of controversy about this term. My own definition is, "a region or zone where two or more distinct cultures, societies, ethnic groups, or modes of production come into contact," and I would add, often conflict (Hall 1997, 208). Borderlines, for me, are the political markings around which such frontiers, or boundary zones form. Following Peter Sahlin (1989) the boundary, or borderline marks a politically negotiated delimiting of state sovereignty, which typically is surrounded by a zone of interaction that persists long after the line has been drawn. For purposes of this essay I will use the term "frontier" because as Guy and Sheridan say, "no other term suffices" (p. 10).

Incorporated areas and peoples often experienced profound effects from incorporation, and occasionally devastating ones, even when the extent of incorporation was relatively limited. They also react against and resist these effects to whatever degree possible. This resistance rebounds back to the overall system and often shapes its policies and actions. These interactions also reshape the ethnic landscape. Frontiers are zones where ethnogenesis, ethnocide, and genocide are common. To concentrate solely on one set of actors and ignore the others is to misunderstand fundamentally these processes. Thus, the study of incorporation entails close attention to local conditions, actors, and actions. To explore this more fully it is useful to summarize the analysis of world-system incorporation.

4 WORLD-SYSTEM INCORPORATION

Because my studies of the region that became Southwestern United States demonstrated that the effects of incorporation have important, interactive effects long before colonization is complete, I extended Wallerstein's dichotomous concept of incorporation to a continuum that ranges from weak to strong (Hall 1986a, Hall 1987, 1989a). I also argued that changes in the degree of incorporation affect those incorporated, and conversely their reactions shape the incorporation process.¹ At the weakest extreme of incorporation are areas external to a world-system. With slight contact an external

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