RE-VISIONING MARXISM IN WORLD POLITICS
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WALLERSTEIN’S WORLD-SYSTEMS THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis purports to critically analyze Wallerstien’s world-systems theory, to test its strengths and weaknesses and establish its reliability as a world politics theory, thereby reviving Marxism in general. The study employs a qualitative research method to go deep into the underlying logic of the theory.

In an endeavor to tackle the matter at hand, five criteria of analysis are employed to examine the merits and demerits in specific areas of the theory. This involves looking at the structure of the theory, the period of the emergence of capitalism, the unit of analysis, the coherence of the arguments and processes of the theory and the reliability of the world-systems theory in contemporary world politics.

The main conclusion of the study is that the world-systems theory is reliable when used to explain three themes in world politics. These are global inequality, dependency and sovereignty.

Key Words: World Politics, Marxism, World-System, Inequality, World-Market, Core, Periphery.
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God Bless
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The end of the First World War led to the establishment of the first department of International Relations at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (Burchill and Linklater 2005, p.6). The establishment was influenced by the horrors of the war and scholars wanted to find out why it happened and postulate international norms that states should follow to avoid the recurrence of a similar catastrophic event. Due to a wide range of materials to look at, there were different theories that emerged. The theories developed were scientific tools to help find the causes of world political problems and put out solutions to solve them (Smith et al 2008, p.4). There were three main theories devised, these are Realism, Liberalism, and Marxism. Although there are similarities between the theories their differences are greater and each theory seems to explain world politics from a unique point of view. They see the world from different vantage points hence they are limited to explaining particular problems of the world. For instance, Realism best explains state security, Liberalism looks better at international institutions and Marxism at world inequality and dependence.

However, modern political problems tend to be explained in terms of Realism and Liberalism thereby discrediting the relevance of Marxism in international relations. This is mostly because Realism was vindicated by the power politics of the cold war and Liberalism is relevant because of an increase in interdependence and reliance on international institutions. For this matter, this paper is concerned with re-visiting Marxism to determine its fate in contemporary world politics. Since it would be difficult to analyze all the Marxist theories, the thesis draws materials from Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory.

1.1 Background

The world-systems theory purports to explain social change in terms of economic relations within the international community. The economic relations in the world are a catalyst to the development of the modern society/state. Wallerstein’s analysis of social change is based on two premises. The first is that social change occurs in social systems
(rather than in states or societies) and second, the world-system is the only social system worth analyzing (Duplessis 1988, p.222). Social change is brought about by social relations, which are not confined to national boundaries. To comprehend modern society we have to analyze the social relations that form the world-system. To Wallerstein, the modern world-system is a capitalist world-economy that emerged around sixteenth century in Europe. The world-economy covers a large geographic zone within which there is division of labor, significant exchange of commodities and flow of capital and labor (Wallerstein 2004, p.23). The system focuses on production and exchange of products in the world-market and the participants’ priority is the endless accumulation of capital. The pursuit of capital creates unequal exchange of commodities in the world-market which is then manifested into unequal geopolitical zones; the core, semi-periphery and periphery. Thus the economic relations of the system are reflected in the political relations of the international community.

As noted earlier, Wallerstein’s world-systems theory is classified as a Marxist theory within the international relations discipline. Marxist theories are rooted in the analysis of global capitalism which is argued to be the vehicle of global inequality (Linklater 2005, p.126). Thus to Marxists the main feature of world politics is that it takes place within the confines of world capitalism. In the world-economy the most significant actors are not the states or institutions but classes, and behavior of any other actors in world politics is embedded in class relations (Smith Et al, 2008, p.6). Consequently, the world economy has divided the world into two main opposing classes, the core and periphery.

1.2 Problem Statement
International relations/world politics is a complex field of study with multiple theories that attempt to explain the processes and facts that matter in the international community. Historically Marxism has been less influential in the study of world politics as compared to other mainstream theories such as Realism and Liberalism. As a result most practitioners and students in general tend to ignore Marxism when explaining world events. Consequently, this study attempts to clarify the world-systems theory thereby cementing the relevance of Marxism in world politics. The world-systems theory can explain another dimension of world politics that are not expressed by the other theories.
To bring clarity and relevance of Marxism the paper addresses the following questions; What are the basic concepts employed by Wallerstein in the world-system theory? To what extent are the concepts valid? And how is the theory valid to assess contemporary world politics?

1.3 Aim of Study
The objective of this thesis is to critically analyze Wallerstein’s world-systems theory to determine its relevance within contemporary world politics. The paper theoretically explores the merits and demerits of the theory to reveal its internal logic rather than comparing it to other theories of international relations. The analysis is achieved by looking at five specific questions.

1. What is the overall structure of the world-systems theory?
2. When did modern capitalism emerge?
3. What is the unit of analysis of the theory?
4. Are the processes and arguments of the theory consistent?
5. How reliable is the world-systems theory when evaluating contemporary world politics?

These questions form the basis of the critical analysis as each question is turned into a criterion of analysis to determine strengths and weaknesses of the theory. This procedure is further explained in the methodology chapter.

1.4 Rationale
This study is significant to the discipline of international relations in four main aspects. Firstly, Wallerstein’s world-system theory explains intersocietal political and economical relations that are important in explaining social change and historical development of states. To discuss social change in terms of domestic relations would leave out important realities of world politics. The development of societies or states in general is dependent on the influence of the international community.

Secondly, this study is significant because it aligns Wallerstein’s world-system with Marxist perspectives in international relations. Although it is not explicitly stated by
Wallerstein that the world-system emanates from Marxism, the principles which it follows are similar to connotations of Marxism. Hence this study will explicitly link the world-system to the Marxist theories of international relations.

The third importance of this study is that it links three important themes in politics; inequality, dependency and sovereignty. By virtue of analyzing the world-system, the study implies that the theory entails inequality in world politics and this leads to dependency which then thwarts the sovereignty of states. There is a connection between these three themes and this study explores such thereby adding a new perspective to the understanding of the themes within the international relations discipline and the discussion of globalization.

Last but far from least, this study is intended to spark further debate on issues of inequality in world politics and offer ground for further discussion of the capitalist world-economy. This study can be used as a benchmark by international relations scholars who are concerned with analyzing the modern world-system as well as emerging alternative systems.

1.5 Disposition
In an endeavor to complete the matter at hand, the rest of the paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter two is the Methodology. This is where the chosen research method of the thesis is established and the procedures involving data collection and validity are discussed. The third chapter is Theoretical Discussion. Here the lineage of the world-systems theory is established as concepts are traced from Karl Marx, through the emergence of the world-system theory to Wallerstein. The forth chapter is the Critical Analysis. This is the pivotal part of the study as the theory is put under a microscope to determine its strengths and weaknesses to establish its right place in world politics. The fifth chapter is the Conclusions and Further Research where the implications of the study are stated and conclusions drawn. The chapter also gives recommendation for further research of the world-systems theory.
CHAPTER 2

METHODODOLOGY

This section of the paper discusses the research methodology employed. This involves looking at the overall research design, delimitations of the study, the data collection procedure, data processing and analysis, the validity and reliability of the research and finally, the research ethics that the paper abides by.

2.1 Research Design

World politics is an arena with multiple events that need explaining and it would be difficult to arrive at definitive conclusions if we had no theories. A theory is a simplifying tool that allows us to decide which facts matter and which do not (Smith Et al 2008, p.4). For this matter, the paper is set to analyze the world-systems theory to make it clear so that it can be used when explaining world events. This task is best done by employing a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is more suitable to this study, as in contrast to quantitative research, because it gives room for the researcher to engage in critical thinking when evaluating existing literature and when judging and weighing facts (Patton 1987, p.9). Qualitative method allows a thorough analysis of the literature on the world-systems theory thereby allowing me to have a good understanding of its underlying processes.

There are three main strengths associated with qualitative research with regard to the aims of this study. The first strength is that qualitative research method is inductive. Qualitative research establishes concepts and insightful understanding of the patterns of the data rather than collecting data to assess predefined models and hypothesis (Begdan and Taylor 1998, p.7). The research influences further analysis of the data to reveal new concepts. The data is analyzed to look at causal patterns or relationships between events and not specifically to prove a certain hypothesis. Thus qualitative method gives room to understand the processes that are explained in the world-systems theory. The second strength is that qualitative method does not reduce objects of the research into variables rather they are viewed as a totality. Patton (1987, p.17) states that “the holistic approach assumes that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts…it also assumes that a
description and understanding of a program's social and political context is essential for overall understanding of the program.” The holistic approach is significant in analyzing the world-systems as its objects of analysis can not be reduced into numbers nor quantified. The research is based on social and political relations of the world hence qualitative research is preferred. The third strength of qualitative methodology is that it is more flexible and open when new discussions or processes are discovered during the research. Qualitative research has some sought of freedom from the rules of standardized statistical testing that do not allow room for maneuver during data collection and analysis (Maxwell 2005, p.22). There is flexibility to include new data that is relevant to the research at any level of data collection or during the analysis in general.

There is one main weakness of qualitative research. There is an inherent risk of subjectivism. The researcher tends to interpret the data with regard to his pre-conceived notions of what is right or wrong. This is due to the lack of recognizing that there are universal truths that can be deduced to explain social life. As a result, subjectivism affects the results of qualitative research and renders them nonscientific. The results depend on the interpretation of the researcher and to remove this bias requires considerable training in the field.

All in all, this study employs a qualitative research methodology that gives room for an in-depth analysis of the world-systems theory to establish its validity within the international relations discipline. The analysis is achieved by looking at the theory from five different perspectives. That is, the structure of the theory, the time of the theory, the unit of analysis of the theory, the coherence of arguments of the theory, and finally, the reliability and viability of the theory.

2.2 Delimitations

There are several Marxist theories within the international relations that can be analyzed to put Marxism in its right place in world politics. Nonetheless, this study prefers to analyze Wallerstein’s world-systems theory because of its underlying assumptions that the world has been divided into two main zones, the core and periphery under the auspices of global capitalism. With the apparent rise of global integration also known as
globalization, the world-system theory becomes more relevant in explaining its underlying mechanism such as a global economy. Thus the study focuses on Wallerstein’s world-system theory which is seen as a pillar of Marxism in this era of globalization.

2.3 Data Collection
The data of this study is collected through conducting a desk research. The majority of the data if from Wallerstein’s book *World-Systems Analysis* that is taken as a primary text of analysis. The world-systems analysis is evaluated back to back with Wallerstein’s articles and chapters from other books that deal with the world-systems theory. Other sources of data include books and articles from academic journals on Marxism, world-systems theory and international relations theories.

Although these are secondary sources of data, the literature is valid because it is sourced from reputable academic databases such as Jstor and Sage publications. In addition, the articles analyzed are from prominent scholars in international relations.

2.4 Data Processing and Analysis
After reading through the aforementioned sources of data, information that is relevant to the discussion of the world-systems theory is organized into five clusters. These five clusters of information are reflected by the five vantage points from which the world-systems theory is analyzed. The information gathered is both positive and negative with regard to a particular perspective of analysis. The first criterion of analysis is the overall structure of the theory. The world-systems theory is evaluated to determine if its structure is in accordance with Marxist conceptualization of what a world politics theory entails. The second criterion deals with data that looks at the period when capitalism emerged. This is significant to validate the theory since its conceptions are rooted in time and space. The third criterion looks at the unit of analysis of the theory. The world-systems theory put emphasis on economic relations above everything else hence the importance of validating such emphasis. The fourth criterion is concerned with the coherence of the arguments and processes of the theory. At this stage the internal logic of the theory is under strict scrutiny to find out if it adheres to Marxist logic and general assumptions of
world politics theory. The fifth criterion looks at the reliability and viability of the world-systems theory. This is the final stage of analysis to find its place within world politics.

2.5 Validity and Reliability
Validity of a research refers to the correctness or credibility of the description, explanations and conclusions of the matter at hand (Maxwell 2005, p.106). It is very important for a researcher to aim for validity of the results otherwise the whole research will be in vain. The most significant threat to validity in a qualitative research is the ‘bias of the researcher’. There is a threat that the researcher selects data and conclusions that fit his pre-conceived ideas of the matter at hand. To avert such a threat, I have continuously used data from prominent scholars within the Marxist tradition and world politics in general, to give evidence to the main conclusions drawn. In addition, I have properly outlined the purpose and analysis procedures to have a high degree of internal coherence of the paper thereby making the results valid.

Furthermore, this study aims to achieve high reliability, meaning that another researcher employing the same research design and procedure of analysis on this same topic ought to arrive at implications and conclusions similar to this study. Reliability is achieved by clearly outlining the procedures of analysis and having reliable sources of information that can easily be accessed and reviewed by another researcher.

2.6 Research Ethics
Research ethics are significant to any study within the social sciences. The first code of conduct is that a researcher ought to produce transparent and accurate results that add value to the already existing body of knowledge. The second norm is that the research should be profound and well presented to reflect the data that is available in the world to explain specific phenomena. Last but not least, when conducting a qualitative research one ought to avoid subjectivism to the best of his ability and present the data from an objective point of view. That been said, this thesis has respected the above ethical guidelines throughout the research process and presentation.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This section of the paper discusses the theoretical underpinnings of the matter at hand. To achieve this objective, the section is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the Marxist theory in international relations and its connection to Karl Marl. The second part discusses the emergence of the world-systems theory within the Marxist tradition. And the last part discusses Wallerstein’s world-systems theory in greater detail.

3.1 Marxism and World Politics

Karl Marx is arguably the most influential thinker of modern times. His writings have resonated across many disciplines of study, from philosophy to economics. Of all his writings the one that acts as a bible for his followers, the Marxists, is a pamphlet he wrote with Friedrich Engels in 1848 titled *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. In the opening section, Marx and Engels (1967, p. 219) contend that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” Modern society has been divided into two opposing classes, the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the wage laborers). This assertion laid ground for the understanding of social relations within the Marxist tradition. To Marx, social relations are embedded in the material conception of life; this is the means by which man produces his own subsistence. The mode of production had evolved overtime and had demarcated the society into the two main classes who engage in nothing less than a disguised civil war, under the auspices of capitalism (Boucher 1998, p.357). Amongst other modes of production that existed in the world such as feudalism, capitalism is the only one that has the capacity to engulf the whole world there by creating a world-market. To Marx, capitalism was the first truly international mode of production and broke down national boundaries to the exploitation of the world-market (Boucher 1998, p.357). To grasp the emergence of the modern states or society we need to analyze that which supersedes it, thus the world-market. The economic relations of society are the motor for all social relations including political.

The concepts of class struggle, historical materialism and the emergence of the capitalist world-market are what align Marx to international relations theories. Marx *per se* did not postulate a world politics theory but his explanation of the aforementioned concepts
makes him relevant to the discipline of international relations. Marxism in world politics is somewhat different from other mainstream theories such as Realism and Liberalism which can easily be vindicated by world events. Marxism is more concerned with explaining or exploring a deeper hidden truth of world events by focusing on economic factors. Marxists claim that to understand world events such as wars or treaties we need to understand the structures of global capitalism and how it operates in the world (Hobden and Jones 2008, p.144). This structure of capitalism is a straight adoption from Marx as global capitalism is seen as dividing the world into two opposing classes, the powerful and wealthy (core) and the powerless and poor (periphery). The core continue to prosper at the expense of the periphery, hence the gap of inequality within the two classes keeps widening. Consequently, Marxist theories in world politics still employ and emphasize Karl Marx’s idea of class struggle in modern societies. However, the conflict has shifted from the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, who are confined by national boundaries to the core and periphery who operate in a world-market without national boundaries (Hobden and Jones 2008, p. 146).

The notion of historical materialism still resonates in Marxist theories of international relations. The main argument put forward is that processes of historical change are ultimately a reflection of the economic development of society (Hobden and Jones 2008, p.145). Thus economic prosperity or change drives social relations which are responsible for social change. Human history depends on economic factors of society. Marx identified two economic factors that drive history, the ‘means of production’ and the ‘relations of production’. There is a close relationship between these two concepts. As the means of production develop, for example, technological advancement the relations of production become outdated hence restrict the full utilization of the new technology. This situation leads to the process of social change whereby new relations of production are developed to accommodate the new means of production. The developments at the economic base of society herald the transformation of society at large (Hobden and Jones 2008, p.146). The material conception of life changes the whole social structure including the legal and political relations in order to fully utilize the new mode of production. Marxist theories rely on economic factors to identify and describe the broader structure of world politics.
As stressed earlier the world-market is a notion that was conceived by Marx and it ultimately links Marxism to world politics. Marx in the communist manifesto argued that the bourgeoisie through the exploitation of the world-market had given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption patterns in every country (Hobden and Jones 2008, p.157). Goods were traded without the confines of national boundaries and industries could import raw materials from the remotest parts of the world. These conceptions of the world-market are adhered to by contemporary Marxist thinkers such as Wallerstein. A close examination of the Marx’s assumptions of the mechanism of the world-market reveals the emergence of globalization of the world economy. And to Marxists global capitalism is the center of all relations of society. All in all, the concepts of world-market, historical materialism and class distinction are at the heart of Marxism in international relations and make up the skeleton of the world-system theory.

3.2 The Emergence of the World-System Theory

Tenets of the world-system theory can be traced back to the writings of Vladimir Lenin. In the pamphlet titled *Imperialism; The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin accepted most of Marx’s ideas and advanced them into his own understanding of how capitalism had changed since Marx’s time. In the 1920 preface of *Imperialism* Lenin (1999, p.9) argued that “capitalism has grown into a world-system of colonial oppression and financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the people of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.” Capitalism had overgrown national boundaries and demarcated the world into oppressors and the oppressed. To Lenin, capitalism had entered a new stage, its final stage with the development of monopoly capitalism (Hobden and Jones 2008, p. 147).

Lenin argued that monopoly capitalism had developed in a structured world-economy with two distinct classes, the core and the periphery. Whereby, the core exploits the less developed periphery. The core is the imperialist who through wars and plunder had collected booty from the periphery states. Furthermore, Lenin argued that the exploitation had shifted as Marx had thought. Now the core capitalists together with their proletariat exploit the periphery societies which the world economy had brought under their control
The class struggle is not between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat but between the core and the periphery states. The bourgeoisie in the core use the profits obtained from the periphery to improve the standards of their proletariat, hence there is a harmony of interest between them to keep on exploiting the periphery.

All in all, Lenin’s analysis of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism paved way for thinking of capitalism as a global phenomenon. His explanations of the core class exploiting the periphery still resonates in the modern world-system theory such as that of Wallerstein. But before Wallerstein, Lenin’s views were further developed by the dependency school with Andre Gunder Frank being its main protagonist. Dependency theory developed mainly as a reaction to the growth of global inequality. The dependency theorists saw dependency as a lack of self-sustaining economic growth of the periphery and this is a result of global capitalist development which simultaneously produced massive accumulation of wealth in the core areas (Blaney 1996, p.460). Even after political independence of the periphery from the core they still raged behind in economic development and had low living standards. This makes them to depend on the core states for economic assistance.

Andre Gunder Frank devised a theory that is analogous to Wallerstein modern world-system. Being a dependency theorist, Frank argued that the developed and the underdeveloped were not separate phenomena \textit{per se} but were all results of one world-system (Wolf 1997, p.22). The two exist in world-system that has developed since the emergence of capitalism. The rise of capitalism had turned the world into satellites and metropolitan centers. Wolf (1997, p.22) contend that “by extracting the surpluses produced in the satellites to meet the requirements of the metropolis, capitalism distorted and thwarted the development of the satellites to its own benefits.” The surplus produced in the satellites was appropriated in the metropolis which led the later being more developed than the former. Thus when we discuss of the concepts of development and underdevelopment, we should think of them within the same scope as they are both a result of the process of global capitalism.
In retrospect, the attempt to bring Marx’s ideas to explain global phenomenon led to the emergence of the world-system theory. The first to fully utilize Marxism in world politics was Lenin, who diligently argued that capitalist monopoly had turned the world into core and periphery zones. Lenin’s ideas were later advanced by Frank in an attempt to describe the concepts of development and underdevelopment. Frank noted that the ‘developed’ progressed because of the surplus it took from the ‘underdeveloped’ thereby widening the gap of world inequality and thwarting the progress of the ‘underdeveloped’. All this happened under the auspices of global capitalism. Lenin and Frank laid ground for Wallerstein to come up with a more concrete and structured world-systems theory.

3.3 Wallerstein’s World-Systems Theory

As noted earlier, Wallerstein’s world-systems theory comes from a long tradition of Marxist thinkers. Wallerstein is a trained sociologist but has had a significant impact on world politics with his world-systems theory. To begin with, Wallerstein described three social-systems that have existed in the world. The first is called mini-system. Wallertsein (1979, p.5) states that “a mini-system is an entity that has within it a complete division of labor and a cultural framework.” This system was found in predominantly agricultural societies. Societies within this system were more self-sufficient hence there was no dominant exchange of goods between societies.

The second system is called the world-empire. In this system the market is more developed and there is a unitary political structure. The world-empire was mostly run by clusters of merchants who engaged in trade (primarily long distance) but were a minor part of the total economy (Wallerstein 1979, p.6). The main characteristic of a world-empire is a single political authority governing the entire world-system. A notable example of such a system is that of Napoleon in the beginning of the nineteenth century (Wallerstein 2004, p.57).

The third system is the world-economy in which the world has been in since the sixteenth century. The world-economy developed in Europe and was accompanied by a full development and economic predominance of the market trade (Wallerstein 1979, p.6). This is a capitalist world-economy. This world-system has a well defined division of
labor and multiple cultural and political structures co-existing together. Hence the modern world-system has a multitude of states with different political systems trading in the world-market.

For an in-depth discussion of the capitalist world-economy, Wallerstein argued that it geographically covers the entire world, including those states that are committed to socialist ideologies (Wallerstein, 1979, p.271). The system has well established structures of a market-economy where exchange of products happens between buyers and sellers. The essence of the world economy lies in the production and exchange of goods and the need for endless accumulation of capital. Hence Wallerstein’s describes the modern world-system as a capitalist economy. It should be noted that Wallerstein talks of a world-market within the capitalist geographic zone and note domestic markets within states occupying this zone.

Apart from having a central world-market where goods are exchanged, Wallerstein emphasized that the capitalist geographic zone has no single political system. The world-economy is not bound by a unitary political structure, rather there are many political units inside the system loosely tied together forming an interstate system (Wallerstein 2004, p.23). The interstate system is made up of states with different political systems or ideologies who meet in the world-market to exchange goods and services. Each state’s concern is to alter the system to its advantage by accumulating more capital than other states.

To tackle the question why the interstate system does not fall apart due to the lack of a unifying political structure or a homogenous culture, Wallerstein (2004, P.24) contend that “what holds the system together is the efficacy of the division of labor.” The existence of the world-market prescribes a division of labor in the production processes of the capitalist economy. The division of labor in the capitalist world-economy divided production into core-like products and peripheral products (Wallerstein 2004, p.28). The products are divided according to the degree of profitability on the world-market. Wallerstein links the degree of profitability to monopolization. The core-like products are those that are produced under quasi-monopolies, while the periphery products are those
that are produced more competitively (Wallerstein 2004, p. 28). When the products meet on the world-market, monopolized products are in a strong position and competitive products are in a weak position. As a result, Wallerstein (2004, p.28) argues that “there is a constant flow of surplus-value from the producers of the peripheral products to the producers of core-like products.” This situation is what is called the ‘unequal exchange’ in the world-market.

To clarify the core-periphery relationship further, Wallerstein states that the monopolizing of production processes depend on the backing of strong state machinery. Once there is deference in state machinery, we get the operation of the unequal exchange which is enforced by strong states on the weak ones, by core states on the periphery (Wallerstein, 1974, p.401). This inequality leads to surplus value to move from the producers in the periphery to those in the core. Wallerstein (2004, p.28) argues that “core-like processes tend to group themselves in a few states and constitute a bulk of the production activity in such states…while periphery processes tend to be scattered among a large number of states and constitute a bulk of production activity in these states.” There is a geographic consequence to this relationship. The capitalist system has divided the world into two main types of states depending on their production processes. These are the core and the periphery. In addition, there are other states that have a mix of core and peripheral production processes and these are called semi-periphery.

On the same issue of production processes, Wallerstein noted that the production processes change location through time. Core-like processes today will become periphery processes tomorrow. The economic history of the modern world-system is replete with the shift or degrading of products, first to semi-peripheral countries, and then to the periphery ones (Wallerstein 2004, p.24). As time passes, the products in the core states become more competitive as more states engage in the production of the same products. This leads to the replacement of the products by new monopolized products and leaving the competitive ones to the periphery states. For example, in 1800s textiles were produced in very few countries but now textiles are produced almost in every part of the world-system. Thus textiles have moved from being a core product to a periphery product.
Apart from the core-periphery distinction, Wallerstein noted that the notions of universalism and anti-universalism (racism and sexism) are central to the structure of the modern world-system. Universalism means giving priority to general rules applying equally to all persons consequently, rejecting particularistic preferences (Wallerstein 2004, p.38). Universalistic values are positive norms that most people believe in. On the other hand, anti-universalistic values such as racism and sexism are seen as vices and are particularistic. Wallerstein noted that these two contradictions exist in the modern world-system and are essential in allocating power, work and privileges. For instance workers can be hired on merit which is a universal value or their hiring can be based on sex or race which is anti-universal. Wallerstein (2004, p.41) concluded that “this antinomic duo is as fundamental to the system as is the core-periphery axial division of labor.” These values are important because they are responsible for linking the members of society to class status, the state and the system as a whole.

To Wallerstein, the emergence of the modern world-system gave birth to the notion of sovereign states. Modern states exist in a large circle of states called the interstate system. Wallerstein (2004, p. 43) states that “sovereignty is a claim of authority not only internally but externally that is vis-à-vis other states…it was first of all a claim of fixed boundaries within which a given state was sovereign and therefore, no other state had the right to assert any kind of authority-executive, legislative, judicial or militarily.” The fundamental value of sovereignty is reciprocal recognition of the implications of the concept with regard to the interstate system. However, Wallerstein noted that core states tend to overlook the reciprocal recognition of sovereignty and intervene in the internal affairs of other states. Wallerstein (2004, p.55) contends that “strong states relate to weak states by pressuring them to keep their frontiers open to those flows of factors of production that are useful and profitable to firms located in the strong states, while resisting any demands for reciprocity in this regard.” Such actions by the strong states disregard the essence of sovereignty in the interstate system, especially the sovereignty of the weak states. The strong states have better economic and political structures hence find it easy to intervene or coerce weak states to follow their wishes and this is not possible the other way around.
Wallerstein went further to describe the weak states as colonies. By colonies Wallerstein meant administrative units that are defined as non-sovereign and fall under the jurisdiction of another state, normally distant from it (Wallerstein 2004, p.55). The colonies originate as a result of the expansion of the world-system when the core tries to incorporate new zones to have access to new markets and resources. The colonies are governed in the same way as the “mother country” though they are not accorded the status of a sovereign state. The colonial powers justify their authority over the colonies by making racist arguments about the cultural inferiority and inadequacy of the local populace. They also make self-justifying arguments that they want to ‘civilize’ the area. The colonial states were the weakest states in the interstate system and movements of liberation which resulted into independence are seen as struggles to gain a status of sovereignty in the interstate system.

Although there is this exploitative relationship between strong states and weak states, Wallerstein also talks of the significance of the relationship that exists amongst strong states. To Wallerstein (2004, p.56) “strong states are by definition rivals, bearing responsibility to different sets of rival firms.” Although the states are against each other, they have a harmony of interest in holding together the interstate system, and the capitalist world-economy as a whole. The states are pushed in opposite directions in a form of anarchic interstate structure but brought together in a coherent manner by the capitalist interstate system (Wallerstein 2004, p. 56).

The strong states in the modern world-system can also be referred to as hegemonic powers. Wallerstein (2004, p.57) states that “what allows us to call them hegemonic powers is that for a certain period they were able to establish the rules of the game in the interstate system, to dominate the world-economy, to get their way politically with a minimal use of military force and to formulate the cultural language with which we discussed the world.” The rules of the interstate system are those dictated by the hegemonic powers, after the Second World War it has been the rules of the United States. However, hegemonic power is different from a world-empire as it is just a powerful
nation amongst multiple political and cultural structures within the interstate system, unlike the world-empire which has a unitary political and cultural structure.

Furthermore, Wallerstein noted that the capitalist world-economy is a historical system. Meaning that it has a life cycle and as any other system rooted in time and space must at some point cease to function (Wallerstein 1990, p.38). The demise of the world-economy will be brought by its inherent contradictions. These contradictions were first noted by Marx in his critique of modern capitalism. These contradictions stem from its central notion, the endless accumulation of capital. In the short-run the capitalist are concerned with maximization of profit and this is achieved by reducing wage levels and at the same time, it is in their interest to have well paid laborers so that they can buy the products produced (Wallerstein 1974, p.414). Consequently, these two considerations move in opposite directions and make the system to have constant crises; there are intervals of boom and recession of the economy. When the capitalists can no longer keep these contradictions in check to have stability in the system in order to maximize profit, the system shall end.

In retrospect, Wallerstein’s world-system theory emanates from a long tradition of Marxist thinkers including Marx himself. To Wallerstein, the modern world is a capitalist world-economy that has engulfed a large geographic zone of the world. The world economy has a well defined division of labor and multiple cultural and political systems. The division of labor is rooted in the production processes that demarcate the world into core and periphery zones. There is an exploitative relationship between the two zones as surplus moves from the periphery to satisfy the needs of the core. All in all, the world-system theory is significant in analyzing the growth of global inequality and the effects of global capitalism.
CHAPTER 4  
CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The object of this chapter is to go deep into the discussion of Wallerstein’s world-systems theory and offer a critical analysis. The analysis employs the five criteria expounded in the methodology. The criteria of analysis involves looking at the overall structure of the theory, the time/period which Wallerstein places his theory, the unit of analysis of the theory, the coherence of the arguments and processes of the theory and then the reliability and viability of the theory with regard to its applicability to world politics. At the end of the analysis there is a summary of the main arguments raised.

4.1 Overall Structure

As noted earlier, the world-systems theory is a Marxist theory within the international relations discipline. The headline of Marxism is the analysis of capitalism and its main outcome which is global inequality. The analysis of capitalism in world politics is achieved by dealing with social forces (including class relations), states and world order (Burchill and Linklater 2005, p.13). This necessitates the understanding of global politics which is rooted in global capitalism. Consequently, a Marxist theory of world politics should be grounded in the social relations of capitalism to unearth global hegemony or politics of domination which is the norm of the world order.

Wallerstein’s world-systems theory is a theory of society, grounded in the mechanisms of capitalism that bring about social change. The theory attempts to explain the capitalist social system and its mechanisms including among other things, economic growth. The structure of the theory is focused on the social system, which is the world-system and not individual actors in the system *per se*. The world-systems theory is structured as a historical narrative of the growth of capitalism since the sixteenth century. Wallerstein analyzes the emergence of the capitalist social system and its growth. He calls it the modern world-economy which has an emphasis on the endless accumulation of capital. The heart of the system lies in the world-market where commodities are exchanged in unequal terms. Goldfrank (2000, p.170) states that “by ‘unequal exchange’ Wallerstein refers to the processes or mechanisms that reproduce the core-periphery division of labor.” The division of labor is what holds the system together. Consequently, the world-
systems theory is all about the emergence of capitalism and how the world-market functions to keep the system together. The market forces are superior to the political forces as states are mere tools for the dominant classes to distort the world-market in their favor (Goldfrank 2000, p.171). This even applies to issues of diplomacy and war in world politics. States use diplomatic strategies or war to manipulate the world-market to favor the dominant class in the system. All in all, the world systems theory reveals that the modern world is a capitalist world-economy which divides the world into core-periphery relations and that world politics, is therefore, a mere representation of the system and acts to cement the polarization of the world into core and periphery zones.

Although the overall structure of the world-systems theory fits with the premises of Marxism, it nonetheless faces several criticisms. The first criticism leveled against the theory is that it is selective when presenting historical facts. Shackman (1994) contends that “Wallerstein seems to present historical facts which support the world-systems theory view and ignore many other facts which may seem more problematic.” For instance, in Western Europe at the dawn of capitalism the Dutch had an advantage over the British because they built better and cheaper ships. But later the British came to dominate the ship building industry. Wallerstein fails to account for these changes as he does not explain how the British became dominant and what led to the fall of the Dutch. Consequently, the theory is structured to account only for those facts that show the emergence of capitalism without really explaining the causal mechanisms behind it.

Further analysis of the structure of the world-systems theory reveals that the capitalist world-economy is a phenomena happening without political structures. The world-economy thrives without the impediment of state boundaries. The exchange of commodities in the world-market is more important that state boundaries are reduced to nothing. As such the world-economy is seen as external to political structures and power relations that undoubtedly constrain the movement of commodities or surplus across state frontiers (Bergesen 1990, p.72). Wallerstein’s theory denies credibility to politics as it is seen as a mere reflection of the interests of the dominant class in the world-market. The theory lacks the ability to synthesize both political and economic relations of the systems
as they are important when it comes to how commodities move within the interstate system.

The final analysis of the structure of the world-systems theory looks at whether it is really a system theory or not. This argument is advanced by Stinchcombe who believes that Wallerstein’s theory does not fall into the category of a systematic capitalist theory as classified by Marx. When Marx alleged that capitalism was a system, he contended that the dynamics of capital/profit accumulation posed a series of problems to the capitalists and they sought to find solutions (Stinchcombe 1982, p.1395). At the same time, the proletariats faced problems with regard to the relations of production and they too sought solutions. The clash of the solutions will cause a revolutionary change of the system as a whole and the new system will be different. Stinchcombe (1982, p.1395) argues that “this is what a theory of a system look like, not naming poor weak countries ‘peripheral’ and rich strong ones ‘core’.” Wallerstein’s theory is more into the polarization of the world-economy into core and periphery zones rather than analyzing the underlying systematic relations that that the classes in the world-system face. Thus from a strict Marxist point of view, the world-systems theory falls short to account as a system theory with a clash of the main classes bringing about a new order in the world-economy and in the international system as a whole.

In sum, the modern world-system theory was devised as a theory of social change; nonetheless it has had a significant impact in world politics. The theory focuses on the emergence of global capitalism and its ramification, which is the division of the world into two main zones, the core and periphery. This division is a result of a well defined division of labor which is cemented and reflected by the unequal exchange of commodities in the world-market. In terms of the structure, the world-systems theory falls short to present historical accounts of capitalism; it is two selective when choosing facts and not systematic enough with regard to Marxism. Despite these shortfalls the world-systems theory incorporates the most basic premises of Marxism in world politics such as class relations and a hierarchical world order. In addition, its emphasis of economic relations as the basis of the social system and the world-system at large aligns it with Marxist conceptual tools of capitalist analysis.
4.2 Period

The second criterion for analysis focuses on the period Wallerstein claims the capitalist world-economy emerged. This is a pivotal part of the theory as it is in a form of historical narrative hence grounded in time and space. According to Amin (1982, p.47) “Wallerstein states that the dawn of capitalism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which is from 1450 and 1640, not only conceded with the establishment of a capitalist ‘world-economy’ but that these two events were intertwined.” The emergence of capitalism was the emergence of the world-economy in which Wallerstein claims that it’s the period we are in. thus roughly we have been in the modern world-economy for around 500 years.

The world-systems theory stands in the middle of contention as others argue that its conceptualization of the emergence of capitalism is ‘too late’ and others say it is ‘too soon’. Those who argue ‘too late’ focus on medieval practices of trade in gold and textiles or inter-polity political system of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Goldfrank 2000, p.191). The trade practiced during this time shares some certain capitalist elements with the modern world-economy hence to them Wallerstein’ theory is late in analyzing the emergence of capitalism in the world. Those who say that the world-systems theory is too late, on the other hand, argue that the English industrial revolution of the eighteenth century is the proper point of departure for modern capitalism (Goldfrank 2000, p.191). The period argued by Wallerstein marks a period of discovery and merchant capital which is quite different from modern capitalism.

Andre Gunder Frank is one of the radical critics who claim that Wallerstein is too late. He argues that capitalism emerged as early as 5000 years ago (Frank and Gills 1993, p.3) Wallerstein’s conception of capitalism vis-à-vis ceaseless accumulation of capital is a definitive feature that differentiates the modern world-system from earlier systems. Frank questions this assumption and finds similar activities i.e. accumulation of capital to have been happening in the world prior to sixteenth century. What Wallerstein says about the ‘capitalist world-economy’ and the modern world-system’ was equally true also of the medieval and ancient world systems (Frank 1993, p.204). Not only does Frank assert his
stand, he points out a passage from Wallerstein’s article where he negates the uniqueness of the modern world-system. Wallerstein (1992, p.596) states that “many of the previous historical systems had what we might call proto-capitalist elements, that there was extensive commodity production, there existed producers and traders who sought profit and there was investment of capital… but none had quite crossed the threshold of creating a system whose primary driving force was the incessant accumulation of capital.” Although he might have recognized capitalist elements, Wallerstein stands firm that capitalism emerged around 1500s. Frank stress that this is problematic and Wallerstein need to recognize that at different times and many places rapid and massive growth of production and accumulation of capital occurred for more than brief moments before 1500 (Frank 1993, p.205). By virtue of recognizing the elements of capitalism, mainly the accumulation of capital, Wallerstein ought to acknowledge capitalism to have existed earlier than his world-systems theory goes.

In response to the above criticism, Wallerstein contends that there is a misunderstanding in the usage of words. He speaks of ‘world-systems’ and Frank talks of ‘world system’. To begin with, the ‘world-systems’ is plural and it acknowledges the existence of other world systems while the ‘world system’ is singular hence does not (Wallerstein 1993, p.294). The world has been covered by several systems and the modern world-system has been amongst the many i.e. world-empires, but it is the only one that has managed to grow and destroy all others. The second misunderstanding is the use of the hyphen ‘world-systems’ rather than ‘world system’. Wallerstein (1993, p.294) argues that “my ‘world-system’ is not a system ‘in the world’ or ‘of the world’ it is a system ‘that is the world’.” The hyphen makes it one word and entails that the world is not an attribute of the system. While in Frank’s sense they are two worlds hence attributive, it’s like the system tends to cover the whole world. In Frank’s sense there cannot be multiple systems in the world. Consequently, Wallerstein remains firm to his argument that the modern world-system emerged in early sixteenth century.

Eric Wolf in his book Europe and The People Without History argues that Wallerstein’s conceptualization of the emergence of capitalism is too soon. His arguments are grounded in the belief that capitalist production did not come into being until the latter
part of the eighteenth century. To Wolf (1997, p.298) “before the eighteenth century, European expansion produced a vast network of mercantile relations anchored in non-capitalist mode of production.” The commodities were traded using money but had not yet developed the modes of production to be classified as capitalistic. Wolf puts much emphasis on the mode of production and the division of labor as characteristics of modern capitalism and he does not conceive these processes in societies that existed earlier than the eighteenth century. Thus to Wolf, it was too soon for Wallerstein to postulate a capitalist system emerging as early as the sixteenth century.

In retrospect, Wallertstein stands in-between two camps, one side says his conceptualization of when capitalism emerged is too late and others say it is too soon. The account of the time of the theory is grounded in the emergence of capitalism, to be particular, capitalist elements such as endless accumulation of capital and the mode of production. Although it is a tough debate for one to decide when capitalism emerged, it should be acknowledged that capitalist elements might have started earlier as Wallerstein anticipated. These earlier elements were a foundation for the larger, more systematic economy which Wallerstein calls the world-system. And to avoid confusion, it is best to avoid asserting a definitive period for the emergence of capitalism.

4.3 Unit of Analysis
This criterion looks at the unit of analysis employed by Wallerstein in the world-systems theory. The paper takes the unit of analysis as the motor behind the processes expounded in the theory or in other words, the notion that the theory centers on. In Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, the mechanisms of capitalism are the basic unit of analysis employed to evaluate social change in modern society (Goldfrank 2000, p.151). The theory emphasizes on economic factors as the driving force of social relations that have led to the development of modern society. This emphasis is similar to Marxist conceptualization of social change, particularly the notion of historical materialism. The concept of historical materialism entails that all social forces are grounded in material conceptions of life, to be particular trade hence this is the motor for social relations and social change. The world-systems theory which classifies the modern world as a capitalist world-economy conceptualizes social relations in the same way. Economic factors are at
the center of social life and social change hence any other factors, such as political, are subordinate.

The emphasis of the world-systems theory on economic factors has raised several criticisms. The first argument is that Wallerstein neglects the significance of political structures in the international system. The second is that the theory overlooks the importance of the nation-state. Finally, Wallerstein does not acknowledge the use of political-military strategies to shape the international community.

To begin with, Wallerstein’s world-system theory rests on the proposition that economic forces alone determine the genesis of the modern world-system and continue to govern its operations after establishment. This makes the economic factors the unit of analysis of the theory and this raises several problems. Zolberg (1981, p.258) contend that “Wallerstein leaves out the ‘system of the state’ which became more clearly articulated in Europe in the course of the long sixteenth century, but whose origins can be traced back to much earlier times.” The modern states or the system of state existed prior to the economic mechanism of capitalism as argued by Wallerstein. So it could have been better for Wallerstein to include the political mechanisms of the states in his explanations of the modern-world-system. The economy that is emphasized emerged within the confines of the state. Furthermore, there was a strategic political interaction of states in Western Europe (Zolberg 1981, p.258). The interactions shaped the economic relations within Europe and also with other parts of the world. These interactions necessitated the movement of commodities between the states hence helped in facilitating the world-market. Consequently, for Wallerstein to put emphasis on economic factors is to leave out equally important political structures that pave way for the world-market to function smoothly.

The argument that the world-system theory misplaces its unit of analysis is further stressed by Brian McVeigh. Wallerstein seems to negate other social factors that might be of importance to the world-system. McVeigh (2005, p.4) contends that “Wallerstein challenges our conventional units of analysis (such as nation states) and the temporalities that we habitually rely on to frame our understandings of the world.” The world is made
up of nation-states and that the conventional unit of analysis when one wants to think of world relations. In addition, there are several units of analyses that can be employed to trace the historical development of modern society such as looking at class relations and other forms of social relations rather than looking only from an economic vantage point.

The final argument on Wallerstein’s unit of analysis is that his theory neglects the importance of political-military power that has shaped the world’s landscape for centuries. McCormik (1990, p.127) argues that “the world-systems analysis renders political-military power merely as a subordinate extension of economic power, and its use of global unit of analysis- the capitalist world-economy-relegates national state actors to the back role.” Throughout history states tend to use their military power to shape the relations of the international system. The use of force is accompanied by strategic political planning that in turn facilitates the economic endeavors of the states. Hence political-military factors ought to be above the economic factors that Wallerstein emphasizes. The evaluation of the political and military power of the states in the system will enable us to come up with a more comprehensive picture of the relationships that exist in the system and how it developed. In addition, McCormik is in consonance with Mcveigh that the capitalist world-economy does not emphasize on national states hence rendering its conceptualization of the world problematic.

McCormik continues to question the neglect of the states with regard to how each particular state affects the system. McCormik (1990, p.127) contends that “all such deviant ventures by individual nation-states while hardly irrelevant, are nonetheless doomed to failure in the long run, in the humankinds saga of winners and losers, the system always wins.” Wallerstein paints a picture that individual nation-states cannot prosper outside the system. They are part of the system and individual endeavors or projects for progress are futile if they are not inline with the capitalist world-economy. This belief destroys the importance of states as actors that shape and makeup the system. In Marxist jargon, it can be argued that the states are eliminated from the system that themselves created. The fact of the matter is, Wallerstein ought to recognize the significance of the nation-state as units of analysis of the world-systems theory.
These criticisms charged against the world-system theory did not go unnoticed by its advocates. The most compelling argument being that the world-systems theory does not neglect political-military relations as argued earlier. In the course of the capitalist mode of production and social relations, groups pursue both political and military strategies and the winners are those who efficiently combine the two (Chase-Dunn 1981, p.19). Those that are involved in the production process have to master the art of synthesizing political-military power in order for their economic endeavors to be fruitful. So to a great extent these factors are embedded into the economic system and should not be viewed as separate from it. The political-military factors are responsible for cementing the dominance of the core in the system hence they are an important part of the analysis. In addition, the argument that Wallerstein neglects other significant factors such as political structures can simply be refuted by stating that the world-system theory stems from Marxist propositions that say that all social relations are embedded in economic factors. To have something else as a unit of analysis will be departing from the Marxist tradition.

In retrospect, this criterion of analysis has focused on the unit of analysis employed by the world-systems theory. To Wallerstein, the capitalist economic factors are the basic unit of analysis if one is to conceptualize about social change. To come up with a comprehensive theory of modern society and state one need to evaluate the historical emergence of the capitalist world-economy. This assumption follows directly from Marxist beliefs on the influence of economic factors in the social relations of human societies.

This point of view has been criticized from three main angles. The first is the neglect of political structures that are as important as economic structures in society. The second is the relegation of the nation-state which we normally use when thinking about the world system. The third is the negation of political-military power that has shaped social relations throughout history. The overall response to these accusations is that Wallerstein works with a Marxist conceptual toolbox that puts emphasis in economic factors and all others are subordinate. This does not necessarily mean that other factors are insignificant rather they are embedded in the economic system. Wallerstein’s critics must have been looking at the world-system from a different vantage point other than Marxism.


4.4 Coherence of Arguments and Processes

This section of the critical analysis looks at how logical and consistent the processes and arguments of Wallerstein’s world-systems theory are. This takes into account its historical perspective approach, the structure of the theory as well as the unit of analysis. The main arguments against Wallerstein on the coherence of his theory are economic reductionism and misrepresentation of the core-periphery relationship.

To begin with, the world-systems theory follows Marxist logic. The first premise being that there is social conflict among materially based human groups (Goldfrank 2000, p.163). In Wallerstein’s sense the two groups are the core and periphery. These two groups stand in opposition in the world-market hence there is a conflict of interest between them. The second logic followed from Marx is the centrality of the capital accumulation process together with the competitive atmosphere and the class struggle it calls forth (Goldfrank 2000, p.163). The world-system is a capitalist world-economy that has the endless accumulation of capital as its precedent. There is competition in the world–market amongst the producers from both zones, even though the producers from the core always have an advantage. Wallerstein also postulates a class struggle in both zones just as Marx did. He argues that there is a class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat within each particular zone. The core bourgeoisie silence their proletariat by increasing their wages with the surplus they get from the periphery, thus the struggle shifts from within the zones to the world-system. Thirdly, Wallerstein draws from neo-Marxism, particularly the dependency theory. The dependency theory focuses on the core-periphery distinction in order to understand the uneven distribution of world development. Dependency theory rests its arguments in the critique of capitalist mechanism that are said to have generated world inequality. Wallerstein directly follows from these assumptions in his classification of the core-periphery relationship.

The use of Marxist logic in the analysis of the modern world-system has attracted criticism. The first criticism leveled against Wallerstein stems from the emphasis placed on the endless accumulation of capital. The producers in the system are solely propelled by the urge to accumulate capital for the sake of capital. McVeigh (2005, p.4) argues that
“this capital oriented perspective, aspired by Marxist abstractions and generalizations, sounds economically reductionistic and surely there is more to the story than accumulating capital for capitals sake.” Wallerstein tends to simplify that the accumulation of capital had generated the change in technology, inclusion of new areas into the system and contributed to social change in general. However, there is more to these aspects of social life rather than just economic factors. For instance, nationalism is an important factor that has disturbed the international order and motivated social change (McVeigh 2005, p. 4). But Wallerstein sees nationalism not as important as economic factors hence the world-system falls short.

On the same note of economic reductionism, Skocpol raises some compelling arguments. Wallerstein states that the system has expanded through history and now covers almost the whole globe. The expansion of the system is attributed to the expansion of the market that transforms the workers in all the regions into wage laborers there by bringing about the emergence of the capitalist mode of production. Skocpol (1977, p.1078) argues that “the all important dynamic of global expansion itself depends upon the coherence of the technological innovations-themselves unexplained.” Wallerstein tends to neglect the importance of technological innovation that leads to improved modes of production that in the long run leads to the exploration of new markets and resources. This in turn leads to the expansion of the world-economy as a whole. Wallerstein leaves technological aspects unexplained in the analysis of the world-system and this makes it difficult for one to appreciate its importance in the expansion of the system.

The third criticism dealing with economic reductionism focuses on how Wallerstein explains the degree of state strength in the world-system. The difference in state strength which is manifested in the distinction of the world into the core and periphery zones is a result of the differences in rates of surplus appropriation and the expressions of the different world-market interests of the dominant classes (Skocpol 1977, p.1079). The core zones have powerful states simply because there is a lot of surplus gained from the world-market as compared to the periphery zone with weak states. The world-market is dominated by the interests of the capitalist class of the core zone, this made possible by the backing of the powerful state. On the other hand, the periphery interests are not met
as they lack the backing of a powerful state. Skocpol (1977, p.1080) states that “in short, to explain the differences in the state strength, Wallerstein relies upon arguments about economic conditions and world market interests, largely ignoring other potentially important variables such as historically preexisting institutional patterns, threats of rebellion from below and geopolitical pressures and constraints.” State strength is reduced to economic relations. The state is seen as drawing its strength from the appropriation of surplus from the world-market. A state is a historical entity that has its roots in several social institutions; hence there is a multitude of sources for state strength. Reducing the source of states strength to economic actors is not enough to account for the description of the world-system.

Apart from economic reductionism, the world-systems theory is also criticized in terms of its explanations on the relationship between the core and periphery zones. As noted earlier, surplus moves from the periphery to the core zone and this has led to the latter being more developed than the former. There is an exploitative relationship between the zones. On the contrary, it is argued that this explanation is faulty because the core states developed own their own. Chirot (1982, p.208) contends that “the development of the west(core) in the late 19th century was based more on research labs than in law materials or labor in the colonies(periphery).” There was no significant transfer of surplus from the periphery to the core states. The core developed due to the technological advancement of the means of production which meant that they produced superior products than the periphery. For example, after the Second World War Japan and Germany were the fastest growing western states and they managed without having to colonize or exploit the periphery (Chirot 1982, p.208). The growth of the core states depends on their internal structure rather than the appropriation of surplus from the periphery. Thus Wallerstein misrepresents the core-periphery relationship regarding state development.

Another analysis of the world-systems theory shows more inconsistencies regarding the economic growth of capitalism in the sixteenth century. Stinchcombe (1982, p.1394) charges that “it is not clear that there is a coherent and determined pattern of growth toward a final world system with defined characteristics so that one could have a theory of the growth of world capitalism.” The processes argued by Wallerstein are two general
to show a coherent system of the world. There are no clear explanations on how Wallerstein articulates the incorporation of new areas into the system and how this affects the system as a whole. Furthermore, Stinchcombe (1982, p.1394) states that “it is not clear to me that the international influences which Wallesrtein documents piecemeal are of such character as to make economic and political developments in the seventeenth century around the Atlantic sufficiently to be part of a unified story.” The norm is that the world-system tries to explain a large phenomenon of world capitalism but falls short to explain the intricate connections between parts of the system. Consequently, this renders the theory insufficient as far as linking the whole world under the theme of capitalism. For example, how can the polish exporting landowners and Mexican silver mines be tied together to constitute a history of the periphery? (Stinchcombe 1982, p.1395). Wallerstein pays lip services to the relationship of the parts of the system and yet he wanted to emphasize that the world-system has systematic connections in the sense that what happens in one zone affects the other.

The core-periphery relationship as postulated by Wallerstein faces a lot of questions. One of the questions is directed at the explanation of the growth of the system. Wallerstein maintains that in the world-system expands by extracting surplus from newly found periphery areas. The periphery is found by entrepreneurs in the core who invest in the periphery in order to find new resources and markets. The benefits of the expansion are used for the development of the core. This description of the core-periphery relationship is questionable. Firebaugh (1992, p.105) argues that “world-systems theory researchers misrepresent foreign investment variables and that foreign investment from the core countries to the periphery actually was positively associated with economic growth of the periphery.” Thus not all investments are exploitative and not that the core-periphery relationship is always exploitative. The investment in the periphery areas injects necessary elements of economic growth. Therefore, it is dubious to state that the development of the core is dependent on the suffering of the periphery, when in fact the periphery benefits from foreign investment.

Although the argument about foreign investment is more compelling it still does not defeat the fact that there is unequal exchange of commodities in the world-market. Even
if the periphery benefits from foreign investment its products will not be competitive enough at the world-market. As a result there will be a systematic transfer of surplus from the less developed periphery to the developed core (Goldfrank 2000, p.168). The periphery has minimal benefits from the world-market hence the unequal relationship the two zones persist. The coming of foreign investment in the periphery does not guarantee that the ‘unequal exchange’ will disappear.

The final argument on the coherence of the world-systems theory deals with the initial conceptualization of surplus transfer from the periphery to the core. As noted earlier, Wallerstein maintains that capitalism is a system of production for the market where producers aim for endless accumulation of capital. When commodities are traded in the market, surplus moves from the periphery regions to the core. The emphasized use of surplus transfer to explain the mechanism of the capitalist relations is problematic. Wolf (1997, p.297) argues that “Wallerstein focuses much on the processes of surplus transfers rather than the mode of production under which surpluses are generated.” When conceptualizing about capitalism, the mode of production should be given more turf than the surplus transfers. Wallerstein analysis of capitalism collapses the concept of the capitalist mode of production into the concept of world-market vis-à-vis surplus transfers. This is contrary to orthodox Marxism that puts emphasis on the mode of production above other factors of the economic structure. To explain the surplus transfer in the market one ought to look at the mode of production taking place within the system.

In a nutshell, the world-systems theory follows Marxist logic in its evaluation of historical facts to explain the emergence of capitalism and the development of modern society. In addition, the theory has elements of the dependency theory that are used to explain the core-periphery relationship. The use of Marxist logic in the argumentation and processes of the world-system theory has been charged with criticisms from two main angles.

The first is that the theory puts much emphasis on economic factors. It tends to reduce all factors of society to economic mechanism thereby rendering non-economic social factors subordinate. The second criticism is that Wallerstein misrepresents the true nature of the
core-periphery relationship. The critics stress that not all core-periphery relationships are exploitative as throughout history the periphery has benefited from the core in terms of economic growth. Although these criticisms on Wallerstein’s world-systems theory are sound and compelling they are not enough to discredit the whole theory. The theory follows Marxist logic thus by virtue it has to reduce all factors to economic factors and not other factors are subordinate but their function is to reinforce economic mechanism of society. The response on the core-periphery relationship is that even though the periphery had benefited from the core it still had inferior products on the market hence transfer of surplus from the periphery to the core was not eliminated.

4.5 Reliability and Viability

This section of the paper explores the general applicability of the world-systems theory. It attempts to find out how Wallerstein’s conceptualizations of capitalism can be applied to explain world phenomenon. The analysis done reveals that the world-system theory can be applied to explain world events such as global inequality, state sovereignty, and dependency.

To begin with, Wallerstein states that to understand social change and to have a comprehensive social theory one has to analyze the social-system. The system should not focus on internal affairs of the society rather external factors that shape societies under the auspices of capitalism. That is why Wallerstein devised the world-systems theory to evaluate the social relations generated by modern capitalism. The world-system perspective is a valuable starting point for a systematic re-examination of the historical development of societies (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993, p.854). When we dig deep into history we find the first pockets of capitalism in sixteenth century Europe. This was the beginning of the norm of endless accumulation of capital for capitals sake. Accumulation of capital was accompanied by intersocietal division of labor in production processes that led to the demarcation of the world into two main zones, the core and periphery (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993, p.854). Although the system is dynamic coupled with contradictions it has self reinforcing mechanisms that keep it together and make it viable. Once the capitalist system is established, everything reinforces everything else (Skocpol 1977, p.1078). One reinforcing mechanism is the division of labor than necessitate the transfer
of surplus from the periphery to the core thereby maintaining the capital accumulation process that keeps the system alive.

The world-systems theory is reliable when explaining global inequality. The theory reveals that there has been uneven development of the world. The world has been divided into the core (developed) and the periphery (less developed) and this is a consequence of capitalism. The division of labor in world production processes is reflected by unequal exchange of products and the movement of surplus from the periphery to the core. Although this exploitative intersocietal relationship might seem as an anomaly, it is otherwise. Chase-Dunn and Hall (1993, p.874) contend that “peripheral capitalism and core exploitation of the periphery should be understood as necessary and constitutive parts of the capitalist mode of production.” The relationship is necessary for holding the system together and for continual expansion of the capitalist world-economy. As long as the world is still in the capitalist-economic period there shall be uneven distribution of development since surplus shall continue to be appropriated by the core zone. The inequality of the world is not only fossilized by the world-market but also by political coercion which the core powers often exercise over peripheral areas (Chase-Dunn 1981, p.26). Consequently, Wallerstein’s world systems-theory can be used to explain the intimate casual factors of global inequality and how it is perpetuated by global capitalism.

The analysis of global capitalism leads to the next phenomenon that the world-systems theory can explain. This is dependency of the periphery states on core states. The issue of dependency is linked to the concept of sovereignty which will be explained later on in this section. Dependency is mostly associated with economic growth whereby the economy of the periphery is conditioned by the development and expansion of the economy of the core states. Blaney (1996, p.460) states that “dependency is seen as a lack of self-sustaining economic growth and continued low living standards in the periphery despite the arrival of political independence…it is a necessary and continued aspect of the process of the global capitalist development which simultaneously produces an expanding global division of labor and wealth accumulation in the core.” The periphery states lack economic autonomy to develop as they keep seeking assistance from the core. The core helps the periphery either by foreign development aid or foreign investment but
this does not have a significant effect to reverse the unequal relations in the world-market. Consequently, the world-systems theory is reliable in connecting the inequality of the world-market to dependency of periphery states on the core. It goes deep to explain the casual factors of dependency.

Dependency leads to the third theme; sovereignty. These two concepts are connected that when periphery states depend on the core states they are liable to losing their sovereignty. Blaney (1996, p.462) argues that “sovereignty starts as a claim about the right of each political community (conventionally organized as states) to rule itself and concomitantly a denial of any political authority above states.” This rule calls for reciprocal recognition. When weak states seek help from the core they give them the right to enforce their values on them thereby impeding their sovereign status. It is difficult for periphery states to be sovereign in the world-system because economic factors run across state boundaries. Not only are the states penetrated by external economic forces but they are part of the organized hierarchy of economic power, the capitalist-world economy (Blaney, 1996, p.468). Consequently, the inclusion of the periphery in the system is coupled with lose of sovereignty vis-à-vis non-interference from external actors. Krasner (1999, p.8) argues that “more powerful states have engaged in intervention, coercing public authorities in weaker states to accept externally dictated authority structures.” The powerful states use coercion to cement their dominance in the world thereby giving no chance to the reciprocal recognition of sovereignty. All in all, the world-systems theory portrays a good picture of how periphery states lose their sovereignty at the expense of the capitalist world-economy.

In sum, the articulation of the division of labor in the production process of the capitalist world-economy which leads to the demarcation of the world into two main zones gives Wallerstein’s theory a good edge to explain world inequality, dependency and state sovereignty. These three concepts can be evaluated either separately or as connected. The inequality of the capitalist economy divides the world into many periphery states and a few core states. This situation leads to the many to depend on the few for economic support. The dependency opens the door to intervention and coercion by the core states hence thwarts the sovereignty of the periphery. The explanations of these three concepts
that are pertinent to world politics hence render Wallerstein’s world-systems theory reliable.

4.6 Summary
In summary, this chapter has critically analyzed Wallerstein’s world-systems theory. This has been achieved by evaluating the internal logic of the theory from five criteria of analysis. These are the overall structure of the theory, the period of the emergence of capitalism, the unit of analysis of the theory, coherence of the arguments and processes and finally, the reliability and viability of the theory. Throughout the analysis strengths and weaknesses of the theory have been exposed with regard to each criterion.

To begin with, the overall structure of the world-systems theory fits with the premises of Marxism in international relations. Although the theory was devised as a theory of social change it has had an impact on world politics due to its emphasis on the analysis of the world-system rather than individual actors in the international system. In addition, the theory maintains that there is class distinction and a hierarchical system in the world which are essential elements of Marxism. This makes the world-system a well structured theory within the Marxist tradition.

The second criterion looked at the period that modern capitalism is believed to have emerged. Wallerstein argued that modern capitalism emerged in sixteenth century and this has been dismissed by other scholars. Wallerstein stand in the middle of two camps, one camp says capitalism emerged earlier and the other says it emerged later than sixteenth century. After critically analyzing the literature available on this issue, it is still not clear when capitalism really emerged. Hence there is no definitive conclusion of when capitalism emerged and it is still a contentious issue amongst scholars concerned with capitalism.

The third criterion focused on the unit of analysis of the world-systems theory. The unit of analysis is the motor of the processes identified by the theory and to Wallerstein the world-system is driven by economic relations, the capitalist world-economy. The main criticism leveled against the emphasis of economic structures has been that the theory
overlooks the importance of the nation-state, the military and political structures as motors of social change. Since Wallerstein takes his concepts from Marxism it would be difficult for him to focus his theory on other aspects of social relations other than economic.

The fourth criterion has looked at the coherence of the arguments and the processes of the world-system theory. This takes into account its internal logical consistencies and shortfalls. The theory precisely follows Marxist logic in its analysis of historical facts to determine the emergence of capitalism. Wallerstein uses economic reductionism in his explanations which other scholars see as problematic. They argue that other important factors of social life are reduced to economic variables hence they are not well articulated.

The fifth criterion dealt with the reliability and viability of the world-systems theory with regard to being a world politics theory. This looked at how well the theory explains world politics. The analysis has revealed that the theory is at its best when explaining global inequality, dependency of the periphery on the core and issues of state sovereignty. All these phenomena are significant to world politics. Furthermore the world-system theory shows the link or chain of processes between the three themes hence adding a new dimension when analyzing them. As a result, the world-systems theory is reliable within the world politics discipline.

All in all, the use of the five criteria to analyze the Wallerstein’s world-systems theory allowed the breaking down of the theory into different parts to have an in-depth analysis. Each part of the theory was evaluated to determine its merits and demerits.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is the conclusion where the implications of the study are stated and conclusions drawn. The second part gives a recommendation for further research on the world-systems theory.

5.1 Conclusions
In conclusion, Wallerstein’s world-systems theory is one of the most compelling theories of international relations. It is a theory that can best be used to explain three themes in world politics. These are global inequality, dependency and state sovereignty. This is derived from its propositions that state that the modern world is a capitalist world-economy that has a well defined division of labor. This division of labor is reflected in the polarization of the world into two main zones, the core and periphery. The core is composed of the developed countries and the periphery, the less developed ones. The uneven distribution of development in the world is attributed to this demarcation of the world and it is directly linked to the world-market mechanism of unequal exchange. When exchange occurs between products of the two zones surplus moves from the periphery to the core thereby making the former economically backward. To improve their living standards the periphery states depend on the core for economic support. And this gives room for intervention or coercion to change their internal affairs thereby thwarting their status as sovereign states. Thus all political relations of the world mirror this unequal and exploitative relationship between the core and the periphery.

The world-systems theory has an upper hand in explaining the above dimensions of world politics. Unfortunately, because of the wars that have happened in the past centuries, the domain of world politics is concerned with evaluating issues such as war, security and freedom. That is why the Marxist theories in international relations have been ignored and preference is given to Realism or Liberalism. My take is that each theory has a dimension that it best explains and for the world-systems theory it is global inequality, dependency and sovereignty. Hence are all significant tools of evaluating world politics.
These conclusions are a product of a critical analysis of the world-systems theory. This has been made possible by using five criteria of analysis which were developed after conducting a qualitative research. The first criterion focused on the structure of the theory and noted that Wallerstein’s conceptualizations follow Marxist patterns. The second tool of analysis has been employed to determine the period of the emergence of capitalism. Surprisingly, the findings are that there is no clear period when capitalism emerged and this is still a contentious issue amongst those concerned with explaining the growth of capitalism. The third criterion focused on the unit of analysis of the world-system theory. The theory is centered on economic factors and maintains that other social forces are reflections of economic relations in societies. The focus on economic factors limits the theory as it overlooks other important factors in world politics such as nation-states and military strength. The fourth tool looked at the coherence of the arguments and processes of the theory. The findings are that the internal logic of the theory is consistent though its emphasis on economic reductionism limits its scope. Not all relations can be reduced to economic variables. The fifth criterion looked at the reliability and viability of the theory in contemporary world politics. It is found that the theory is reliable when discussing themes such as inequality, dependency and sovereignty. It gives a new perspective for analyzing these themes as they are viewed as results of the same process of the pursuit of capital in the world-market.

All in all, the five criteria of analysis managed to go in-depth into the theory to determine its weaknesses and strengths. When the weaknesses are negated the Wallerstein’s world-system theory is a good device to be used in world politics, especially if one wants to find out the facts about global inequality, dependency of the periphery states on the core and sovereignty status of the periphery. It is acknowledged that the theory does not exhaust all aspect of world politics as it only looks at world relations and events from an economic point of view.

5.2 Further Research
I acknowledge that this study did not exhaust all we can know about Wallerstein’s world-systems theory and Marxism in general. Most of the theoretical conceptions have been
dealt with, what is missing is to apply the theory to an empirical case to illuminate its implications. Hence I would like to see a further research that combines the notions of inequality, dependency and sovereignty to specific case studies. For example, a research could be conducted to determine the rate of surplus transfers from the periphery to the core states. This can be achieved by looking at trade agreements and patterns between countries from the core and periphery. Such a study would add strength to the world-systems theory in world politics as it will validate the concept of ‘unequal exchange’ in the world-market.
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