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Globalization, regional conflicts and the future of the nation state from a world-systemic point of view

Globalization became a "catch-all"-term of the 90ies. It is expressed through terms like "world governance", "world domestic policy" or "global village" and outlines more or less the interlacing of the globe with respect to cultural, social, economic, ecological, communicative and/or security aspects. Globalization consequently, is expressed through an increasing inter- and transdependency of the structure of the nation state and is also characterized by new phenomena as for example: a reevaluation of inter-, supra- and transnational organizations such as UN, OSCE, EU, NGO's, etc. Moreover, with the end of the Cold War, a increasing global interdependency can also be witnessed by the multimedia cross-linkage through the internet, the expansion of the world trade agreement from GATT to WTO and the anchoring of different agreements by international law. As a result, in regard to the forthcoming millennium, global strategies should be increasingly developed so as to be able to cope with challenges on all levels.

Since the beginning of the 90ies, peace and conflict studies did also bank on global strategies. The peace experts came to the opinion that in face of global crises like environmental destruction, the economical gap between north and south or the divergent handling of human rights, can only be solved with global designed concepts of conflict resolutions. For this purpose there have been taken neo-functional, neo-institutional and neo-liberal strategies into consideration, which have, regardless of their different implementation, at least one common denominator: The overcoming of the previous "anarchic" world society, which is based on a national state structure of self interest. These very exaggerated plans for pacification of global society, proved to be disappointing in face of increasingly arising nationalisms which were accompanied by chaotic processes. At a too late stage it has been recognized, that during the euphoric atmosphere of the breath-taking integration process of Europe, the end of the east/west conflict leading to the German reunion, the global world-system is characterized by a deep ambivalence between government integration and fragmentation. While the western industrial nations are successful in erecting a sound supra-national architecture of peace, a number of territories, surrounding the European Union, disintegrate and fall into chaotic anarchy. While in Europe the myth of the nation state was considered invalid, it arose in peripheral areas of the globe and subdued the local population. The reasons for these ambivalent and almost contradictory appearances are still unexplained.

Even though approaches exist on peaceful integration and conflict enhanced disintegration, a total explanation for this synchronous and inconsistent phenomenon, still needs to be written.

The world-system theory of the social theoreticians Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1979, 1982) Andre Gunder Frank (Frank; Fuentes-Frank 1990) and Samir Amin (Amin 1992), who attracted attention within their discipline of history,

but not within peace and conflict studies, could offer a possible approach for the clarification of these complex appearances.

The globalization of the world system by the infinite accumulation of capital

At the beginning of the 70ies the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein submitted a convincing historical theory to explain the international state system. Wallerstein disassociates himself from pure governmental explanation of global society and therefore also from the exclusive emphasis of political action by respective state actors. Accordingly, the so-called "households" that form the local, subsistent and self-sustaining microcosm, is the most basic element of the global society, which is embedded in a capitalistic structured macrocosm, the so-called "world system".

Therefore Wallerstein's world-system was established, during the "long 16th century", the period in which so-called "Modernity" came into being. It was in this era that the capitalist economic system, the cartesian view of life, the positivist natural science and the universalistic world view gained acceptance. The following 500 years were characterized by a cyclical sequence of systematic colonization, patriarchalization and nationalization of global society. The origin of this cyclical expansion occurred from the capitalist core, the so-called "First World", followed by the creation of the periphery, the so-called "Third World" and a so-called semi-periphery which acts as a buffer zone between these two hemispheres. The impulse for consolidation and self-preservation of this capitalistic macro structure is the infinite accumulation of capital, which flows from the peripheries to the core-areas of the world-system. This macrocosmological structuring is under no circumstances to be understood as a static structure, but rather as an organic creation which expands (A-phase) and contracts (B-phase) approximately every 50 years in accordance with the Kondratieff cycles.

Wallerstein's core/periphery/semi-periphery-model also is reflected in the microstructure of the world-system, that is in the so-called "households" mentioned above. Initialized by the "Semi-proletarianization" of this subsistent micro-units, the overall system is able to benefit from the non-paid capacity of work as an indirect subsidy for the accumulation process of the core. The outcome is an economic based sexism and racism. Since the majority of labor, in these households, is done without compensation by both the female half of world population and the Non-European people of the periphery (Werlhof 1991).

The ideological legitimacy of the world-system, the so-called universalism, can also be viewed as a despotism of occidental values and standards. The enforcement of this Euro-centric, "enlightened" values was accompanied in most cases by waves of violence and did not intend to bring "freedom, equality and brotherliness" to the non-European regions, but to create a system of adequate modern values guaranteeing a smoothly integration into the capitalist system. In this fashion, an economic determined disparity became acceptable veiled by cloak of enlightened equality (Wallerstein 1984).

The world-system theory disassociates itself from pure governmental, economic and class-specific approaches of neo-Marxist origins and attempts to offer a flexible, multi-dimensional and polymorphous view of life, instead of the traditional dogma of historical materialism. In this way, the world-system theory offers new approaches to current phenomena of conflicts, where theories of the sociological main stream may fail or only offer inadequate interpretations. Therefore recent peace and conflict research, which remains biased to neo-Kantian civilization-paradigms could potentially find new analysis and explanation models through a world-systemic approach.

State and capital: The ambivalence between capitalist urge for expansion and protection of national markets

As mentioned above the contemporary world of states is confronted by a phenomenon which is both anachronistic and ambivalent. While the western hemisphere is creating a supranational state-structure at a breath-taking rate, re-nationalizations around the capitalistic core cause violent disintegrations. This phenomenon can only be understood, if the integration tendencies between core, semi-periphery and periphery within the capitalistic and patriarchal structured world-system are explained. The capitalist integration of peripheral zones takes place from the core and is accompanied by processes of nationalization and capitalization of respective peripheral societies. From a historic point of view, this integration was realized gradually from commercial capitalism (16th-18th century), under the leadership of the early colonial powers of Spain, Portugal, Netherlands and England, to the industrial capitalism of the European powers in the 19th century.

The principal stage of the commercial capitalism was accompanied in most cases by plunder, lootings and genocide in the colonies while industrial capitalism predominantly caused imperialism and internal social conflicts.

It is obvious that the system of commercial capital, which was set up on a non-equivalent exchange, monopolization and expansion, was dependent on a concentrated and organized social state power similar to close connection between modern state, monopolized governmental power, colonial expansion and the formation of the international market (Siegelberg 1994:53f).

Siegelberg describes a phenomenon, which Wallerstein explains in detail. The nation state plays an ambiguous role within the capitalist world-system. On the one hand, the traditional nation state has the function of protection with regard to the social and economic spheres of influence, while capital itself has a transnational and expanding nature. It is unquestionable, that nowadays not only European powers lead the expanding competition. However, capital expands through the imperialistic state within the traditional form, that is, by monopolistic safeguarding of the new markets and by the territorial spheres of influence. In this fashion, it was also the dominating idea of this time that the capitalist business trend would reach sooner or later its own boundary. As a result every

nation has to safeguard an as great as possible part for itself to protect future prosperity and thus economic control of the earth (Siegelberg 1994:72).

This problematic contradiction between national protectionism and the transnational expansion of capital accumulation caused the well-known period of imperialism, which reached its climax through two devastating World Wars in this century. Therefore, a pacification of the capitalist core can only succeed if a congruence between state power, state territory, state nation and the capitalist zone of influence is set up. Nowadays this happens in the form of the European Union and its economic agreements within the capitalist core.

A successful, pacifistic integration of traditional nation state structures can only be achieved through prevailing élites of nation states who come to a common accord regarding the enlargement of their political and economic field of influence. If this consensus is lacking, the consequence is unavoidably a confrontation in the form of inter-state wars.

However, this conclusion provokes a series of questions: Why does a non-violent integration occur in the core, that is the simultaneous process of going beyond the traditional structures of the nation state, and why does this process not take place in peripheral areas of the world system? Moreover, why did traditional inter-state-conflicts disappear and increasingly civil wars occur instead of them? When and how do government élites decide to pursue a policy process of integration or disintegration?

Wallerstein's analyses could be very helpful for answering these questions.

Chaos and structure in the world system: The ambivalence of integration and disintegration

Wallerstein assumes in one of his remarkable analyses (Wallerstein 1991:167-189), that the bourgeois does not strive for competition, but for a monopolistic position within the free market.

The capitalist might not aim at competition but at a monopoly within the so-called free market to gain more economic influence and power.

For this purpose the entrepreneur might raise himself to a politically higher level in order to be able to guide the market to his advantages. The aim and object would not be the exclusive, infinite profit maximizing process, but the attainment of the so-called "rent" for management. Therefore he has an income not dependent on labor and by means of complete control of economic, social and political processes within his field of influence (Wallerstein 1990:167-189). This quasi-feudal phenomenon is a remarkable characteristic of the capitalist system and consequently shows striking parallels to aristocratic structures (Wallerstein 1990:183f).

A reflection of this micro-cosmological condition also appears in the macrocosm of the international world-system. On a supranational level, rich industrial nations act in self interests in order to gain benefits and advantages through wielding

economic, social and political influence, which the free market does not allow for. No doubt, the best example of such a aristocratic behavior of rich industrial nations, is the present integration process of the European Union. The ambivalence described above, of national protectionism, leads neo-aristocratic actors to resort on a supranational level, that it manifested through common institutional agreements and their rules and standards. This could also be the cause for the so-called "spill over" effect described in the field of integration theory, which assumes that states initially become economically, then social-politically and finally security-militarily interdependent. This could also be the basis for economic interdependent states, such as the capitalist core to display pacifistic stability.

This thesis consequently also flings new light onto the linkage between peace and democracy, which has been much discussed among peace researchers. Hence, democratic states would never or rarely be at war with each other. In the case that the above thesis is valid, it would therefore be more accurate to state, that actually these quasi-feudal élites, as described by Wallerstein, and not so-called democratic states, get involved in wars with each other. In light of this, the question arises why a pacifistic integration within peripheral areas is not occurring and instead a disintegrative fragmentation takes place.

The world systems analysis rests on the assumption that societal class structure, in the course of the last decades, has changed fundamentally. The previous social stratification, which was characterized by distinct social separations, became porous and overlapping during the process of capitalization. Therefore in contemporary society, it is difficult to distinguish between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, because the conditions of dependence-and exploitation are dominating in both. During the so-called "bourgeoisification" of the former proletariat, a "new middle class" was established, which plays a double role within society (Wallerstein:154-166).

These "semi-peripheral" actors have a high affinity with the bourgeois and disassociate themselves from their proletarian role. These actors might be compared with employees of a great enterprise, who are devoted to their boss, while they, to take the lead, play off their subordinated colleagues against one another.

This microscopic phenomenon is reflected in the macroscopic point of view of the world-system. Instead of the former communist states there have appeared new, economically progressive NIC (New Industrializing Countries), that neither belong to the rich industrial nations nor to the so-called "Third World". They form the new "semi periphery" and therefore are the new buffer zone, surrounding the capitalist cores of Europe, North America and Japan. These governmental actors behave among themselves in a conflictious manner, since they have great ambitions to share the fortune of the capitalist core by disassociating themselves from their economically weaker, peripheral areas. This ambivalent aspiration for integration into the capitalist core, by simultaneous disintegration of the own peripheral areas, might be an explanation for the fact that increasing belligerent conflicts are taking place within states and manifest themselves as civil wars.

The alternating structure of the world system and the transformation of peripheral conflicts

The conflict between core and periphery within the world-system can be viewed on three levels. These are given credit by an universalistic legitimization in each of these cases, in order to veil the actual unequal societal constellation by a semantic equality.

1. On the micro-level of the "semi-proletarian households", this conflict is carried out between semi-proletarized and the semi-subsistent parts of the "households", (e.g. violence within families, suppression and/or enslaving women and children by their "heads of the family"). The patriarchal sense of family represents the construction of an apparent cohesion.

2. On the meso-level the traditional nation state is expressed through the conflict between the bourgeoisified state élites and the subordinated semi-proletarized population.

The legitimization of this structure is the construction of the nation.

3. On the macro-level of the global world-system, the conflict is taking place between the core and the periphery. The universalistic legitimization is represented by the myth of "One World", which is constructed in order to disguise the actual, sexist and racist fragmentation of the world society.

All these levels are vertically linked with each other; the most influential exponent of the lower level is at the same time an element of the one situated above. Within the world system structure, the micro-, meso- and macro level of the world-system are institutionalized within a structure of pyramid shape and form. The decisive element for systemic stability, and therefore its ability of integration or disintegration, is dependent on alternating and cyclical expansion and/or contraction.

These cycles described by a variety of different theoreticians, determine the chronical and structural pulse of the system. The expansion phase (A-phase) is expressed by economic progress, by the creation of a large middle class and by a relatively secured social coherence.

Wallerstein describes that since 1973 until the present day, a phase of intensified contraction (B-phase) is occurring with the following consequences: an acute competition among the core, that is, each trying to maximize its profit margins and minimize its unemployment at the expense of the other; a shift of capital from seeking profits in production to seeking profits in financial manipulation; and squeezing governmental balance of payments, resulting in debt crisis of the Third World, the former socialist bloc, and the United States. (Wallerstein 1993:3f).

The real fragmentations within this structure are veiled during the progressive A-phase of the system, but they manifest themselves during the contraction (B-phase). This results in the consequence that the instability of the world system is

highest at the low point of this period on each level, and therefore an immense restructuring in the semi periphery is to be expected. This restructuring can lead to the phenomenon, that former core areas may descend to the level of the semi periphery (e.g. southern and east zones of Europe) while vice versa formerly peripheral areas rise up to the semi periphery (e.g. NICs) which is in most cases accompanied by belligerent quarrels.

The construction of the nation: Genesis and future of the national state within the world-system

To forecast the future of the nation state as it exists in the international system, it is necessary to clarify the principle role of states and their national legitimacy. From a world systemic point of view, the primary function of the state within the capitalist world economy is to expand trade advantages within the free market – which means to restrict the "freedom" of the market. This becomes generally approved by respective governments, as long as a state profits from that "distortion", and it becomes disapproved as soon as it declines within this competitive system (Wallerstein 1990:150).

From this point of view, it becomes obvious that the state, within the world-system, is misused by prevailing élites, which use the state and its nation to consolidate their domination and exploitation.

The state is playing an ambiguous role in the international free market. On the one hand, it is a guarantor for the protection of economic spheres of influence and therefore an instrument of traditional power politics, on the other hand, the self-protecting nation is in contradiction with the unopposed expansion of capital. Therefore, the nation in itself and the boundless capital are incongruent and produce unavoidable areas of tension.

There are a lot of possibilities for already existing oligopolies to take advantage of the state, e.g. by limiting the product- or the labor-market; and by hindering people to establish organizations which aim to influence government policy . The state is also able to take action outside its given territory, e.g. within supra-national agreements on trade and transit. One of these actions can also be warfare. (Wallerstein 1990: 150f)

From this point of view it is obvious, that the connection between state and capital holds a conflictious potential. As a result, the nation state can only escape this dilemma when it is once more defined and established on the transnational terrain of capital.

Etienne Balibar proceeds on the assumption that the nation and therefore the nation state does by no means represent an ethnic identity as commonly believed or taken for granted. Balibar argues that the consciousness of the nation has never been expressed by a people's will, but is a construction made by the prevailing class in order to consolidate the domestic structures of power and the

exploitation. The world economy is no self-adjusting or stable structure, but a system of compulsions, which is subordinated to its inherent contradictions. From a global point of view, it is necessary that the control of capital, which circulates in the process of accumulation, is occurring from the core; but the manner in which capital concentration takes leads to permanent conflict (Balibar 1990:111f)

This "nation form" addressed by Balibar is used by the prevailing class for obscuring the domestic fragmentation and therefore for the formation of an apparent coherence. The construction of the nation excludes "the other", who does not belong to this ethnically defined identity.

Ethnicity is an essential internal legitimization (ethnization of the nation) and external (racism) of capitalist exploitation of the national-state.

Wallerstein assumes that racial classifications are an expression of the antinomy between core and periphery, while national classifications arose initially as a competition between states.

It could be said that with "race" and racism each of the areas of the center and that of the peripheries are united in their fight against each other, while with "nation" and nationalism the areas of the center and those of the periphery are separated. Both categories express a claim for benefits in the capitalist world economy.(Wallerstein 1990:102f).

Moreover, as a result of this explanation, it becomes obvious that construction of the nation is never defined statically, but may be substituted in its definition. Former citizens of Yugoslavia have been replaced by Croatians and Slovenians and might be someday become Europeans. The "construction of nations" (Balibar 1990) is flexible and is open to change thus adaptable to the current state of territorial capital accumulation.

No doubt, the disintegration of the former multicultural state of Yugoslavia might be the best example how a capitalist core (Slovenia, Croatia) with a distinct ethnic population was able to legitimize its economic disintegration from the periphery (Serbia/Montenegro) and vice versa also the periphery from its center.

Consequently, the answer to the question regarding the future of the nation state seems to be obvious: The future of nation state depends on the ability of adaptation, its constructed legitimization and the current logic of capital accumulation. In other words: On the one hand, in areas, where economic cores within state structures (e.g. Former Yugoslavia, Former USSR) form a political periphery (e.g. Croatia, Slovenia, Chechnia, etc...), one might expect re-nationalizations; on the other hand, in areas where domestic fragmentation has been adapted (e.g. states of a feudal-capitalist and aristocratic nature within the capitalist core), there is pacification be reckoned with.

Reconsidering Immanuel Wallerstein: The importance of world-system theory for the contemporary and future field of peace and conflict studies

Wallerstein's theory has been criticized since its presentation in a three-volume work "The Modern World System" (Wallerstein 1974, 1979, 1982). In my opinion, it is not the essential question, whether Wallerstein is inaccurate in dating the chronological and spatial genesis of the system, or if its approach might be too economical, too deterministic or too fatalistic or if the author tends to idealize pre-capitalist society.

It might be more useful, to emphasize the importance of his world-system theory in contemporary social sciences and especially in the future of the field of peace and conflict studies. Immanuel Wallerstein points to this in one of his earlier works:

"World-system analysis` is not a theory about the social world, or about part of it. It is a protest against the ways in which social scientific inquiry was structured us all of us in the middle of the nineteenth century. This mode of inquiry has come to be a set of often questioned a priori assumptions. World-systems analysis maintains that this mode of social science inquiry, practiced worldwide, has had the effect of closing off rather than opening up many of the most important and most interesting questions.

In wearing the blinkers of the nineteenth century constructed, we are unable to perform the social task we wish to perform and that the rest of the world wishes us to perform, which is to present rationally the real historical alternatives that lie before us"(Wallerstein 1995:237).

This change of paradigms and the basic discussion within the social sciences, that Wallerstein mentions above, seems to be also relevant for the contemporary academic discipline of peace and conflict studies, which is confronted with "neo-liberal capitalism" as well. Werner Ruf thinks of such strategies in a very disillusioning manner:

"Globalization is the expression of that form of disorder which characterizes the world society after the planet has been totally capitalized, developed and underdeveloped in large parts, after valueless areas have been uncoupled and social antagonisms pass through the continents like waves of migration and break against the fortress-cliffs of prosperity."(Ruf 1994:207).

Even the theory of neo-liberal institutionalism which has been discussed in recent years and which emphasizes the importance of great institutions of global society, has reached its limit.

Here we can find again a palliation of the UN Security Council as a moral and neutral global authority, whose monopoly of power might be extended to not only keep peace but also in order to render a successful management of world crisis.

This illusionary and romantic view of the UN-Security Council ignores that currently this committee reflects, since the proclamation of the "New World Order", in an especially blatant manner the enforcement of (old) national interests. Therefore it is guided by no means by the "insight of the élites". (Ruf 1994:196).

Werner Ruf agrees with the world-systems analysts who criticize the prevailing, affirmative and mostly symptomatic strategies of conflict resolution, which neglect or ignore the structural causes of our world problems. Considerations of this kind are finally nothing more than a discharge of the respective "historical logic of political unreasonableness"(Krippendorff), which always pretended to have the ability to set up structures with the aid of power and military. This logic implies the consistent renunciation of the analysis of the real causes of conflict.

However, during times of the globalization of conflicts, the ignoring of analysis of the cause becomes increasingly difficult since the main causes of conflicts today, indeed, worldwide hunger and misery, under-development and environmental destruction, disparities and the formation of social antagonism, are caused essentially by that global, fordistic model of growth, which produced the redistribution from resources for the benefit of the north and to the disadvantage of the south (Ruf 1994:216).

The cause why most peace strategies have failed with regard to the precarious situation of global society, might be based on the fact that the majority of peace and conflict investigations believe in those almost unquestionable paradigms, which Immanuel Wallerstein and other world-system theorists have realized as the cause for the contemporary condition of the world: Euro-centric consciousness, governmental thinking which is limited to state actors, the belief in modern progress, universal-occidental values and the perception of capitalism as a sole form of a functioning economy.

This might be the most important aspect of world-systemic point of view with regard to a new structured social science and therefore to a restructured peace and conflict investigation: It will be valid to de- and reconstruct the above-mentioned paradigms of European modernity, only by taking into consideration a plural-universalistic and a transdisciplinary view of the world, which includes human beings, nature and non-state actors (Wallerstein et al 1996:83-99).

Only, with regard to the forthcoming millennium, will a new peace science, in light of the above cling, be able to manage the future problems of our global society.

About the author

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