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REVIEW ARTICLE

Science & Society, Vol. 65, No. 3, Fall 2001, 386–397

GLOBALIZATION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE*

The study of globalization is a predictive enterprise by its very nature. Partly an effort to identify the possible trajectories of the world economy, partly an effort to influence that trajectory, writing about global capitalism has become one of major “growth industries” of American social science. As a result, the term “globalization” itself has been rendered sufficiently flexible to accommodate a wide range of interpretations. Even among the academic left, globalization is a theoretically empty category, into which scholars mix and stir their favorite concepts. At one end of this continuum is a hard-line thesis of global capitalism as a new stage of capitalism, brought about by an “epochal shift” in which “corporations rule the world” and a new transnational bourgeoisie displaces inter-imperialist rivalries to form a hegemonic global ruling class (Burbach and Robinson, 1999; Korten, 1995; Bamet and Cavanagh, 1994; Robinson, 1996; Sklair, 1991). At the other end are those who see no such shift, and argue not only that capitalism is *not* global today, it has never been *global*, at least not in the sense suggested by the metaphor of the “global assembly line.” At best, we can speak of an “inter-national” system of economic and political relations (Wood, 1999a, 1999b; see also Brenner, 1998; Gordon, 1988; Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Wade, 1996). There is of course a wide range of in-between positions.

This continuum does not correspond to a commitment to class struggle analysis in any direct way. Indeed, within the anti-globalization camp there

* Special thanks to Diana Carol Moore Gildea and to Ben Brewer, Ben Cashdan, Chris Chase-Dunn, Ho-fung Hung, MacKenzie Katherine Lee Moore, and an anonymous reviewer for *Science & Society* for comments on this review essay in draft.

are those who emphasize contemporary class struggles (Wood, 1999b; Moody, 1997) and those whose analysis of recent international capitalism is almost entirely grounded in inter-capitalist competition rather than class struggles from below (Brenner, 1998). Within the globalization camp, there is a *tendency* (but nothing more) for the advocates of a strong globalization position to overestimate the power of capital by virtue of its control over international financial markets and its heightened capital mobility, and to underestimate the power of workers' and other social movements. In contrast, advocates of a weak globalization thesis tend to emphasize the continuing importance of class struggles and the ways that capitalism, as it has globalized, has created new possibilities for anti-systemic movements (Foster, 1999; McMichael, 1996). Significantly, the weak globalization camp has tended to be the most historical, often arguing that the "global expansionary logic" of capital (Mészáros, 1995, 6) was a feature of capitalism from its origins in the 16th century. Many other contributions to the globalization debate have been hobbled by a failure of historical analysis.

Set against the backdrop of these cross-cutting debates over globalization, we can make sense of a major new contribution to the literature. In *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*,¹ Giovanni Arrighi, Beverly J. Silver and their colleagues have assembled a study of capitalist globalization that is as audacious in its predictive enterprise as it is thorough in its historical analysis. Rather than compare successive periods of capitalist development, they have chosen to compare the periods of *transition* between these eras, perceptively noting that whatever new configuration of global capitalism emerges in the 21st century will depend on the outcome of the present crisis of U. S. world hegemony. While the book's overarching analytical framework leans heavily on Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994), which stressed the alternation between phases of commercial and manufacturing expansion and financial expansion from the later Middle Ages to the present, *Chaos and Governance* lends this framework some flesh and blood by focusing on imperialism and class struggles, which the earlier work virtually ignored (see Moore, 1997).

Importantly, *Chaos and Governance* focuses our attention on capitalism as a historical system that has developed over several centuries. It does not use "globalization" as a means of obscuring the importance of imperialism to world capitalist development, and it accords class struggles a central place in its analytical framework. These are substantial accomplishments. At the same time, the book ultimately shies away from the radical implications of its own analyses. While these analyses suggest strongly that capitalism is on

1 *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, by Giovanni Arrighi, Beverly J. Silver, et al. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999. Pp. x, 336.

its way out, Arrighi and Silver conclude the volume with a statement that lends relatively more weight to the possibility of a more sustainable form of East Asian-led world capitalism than it does to the likelihood of a new wave of revolutionary movements and a revival of the socialist project.

Comparing Hegemonic Transitions

Arrighi and Silver begin by arguing that the crisis of U. S. world hegemony and the dramatic financial expansion that began in the 1970s are closely related phenomena, bearing a striking resemblance to earlier periods of hegemonic crisis and financialization in the modern world. They contend that many of the features associated with globalization are in fact cyclical phenomena of the world capitalist system. Understanding these historical continuities is an essential precondition to any claim about what is new in the present. To this end, they compare the current conjuncture with the two previous *hegemonic transitions*: the transition from Dutch to British hegemony in the 18th century, and the transition from British to U. S. hegemony in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

What lends this study particular richness is the authors' method. Rather than compare the rise and fall of "great powers," they compare successive hegemonic transitions. Rather than isolate one major process or trend (such as geopolitical competition) and trace its development over time, Arrighi and Silver propose to study and compare the two instances of completed hegemonic transitions and contrast them with the present trajectory of U. S. hegemony, in order to understand the latter's crisis and how it is likely to unfold in the coming decades.

In Arrighi and Silver's conceptualization of hegemony and hegemonic transition, the crisis of U. S. hegemony is a crisis of the work economy. Capitalism has survived recurrent economic crises only through the cyclical restructuring of the system under the leadership of an ascendant hegemon. In this scheme of things, hegemonic powers are "leading complexes . . . of governmental and business agencies" that rise to the commanding heights of world capitalism by developing innovative organizational techniques that are optimal for exploiting the geopolitical and economic structure of the world-system (22). A hegemonic "complex" is consequently far more than *primus inter pares*, as Immanuel Wallerstein (1984, 38–39) would have it. Building upon studies of world politics that have applied Gramsci's theory of hegemony to international relations (see Cox, 1983; 1987), Arrighi and Silver argue that a hegemonic complex is defined not by agro-industrial or military capacities as such, but rather by its ability to deploy these capacities so as to become "the bearer of a general interest" for the world-system (26).

Thus, Arrighi and Silver's conceptualization of hegemony adds a crucial dimension of agency to the history of the world capitalist system. Whereas Wallerstein's account lacks a transformational logic, Arrighi and Silver show how successive hegemonic complexes have emerged to lead the system out of crisis by restructuring the global framework for conflict and competition among states and firms. The history of "the formation and expansion of the modern world system is thus conceived as proceeding, not along a single track laid some four to five hundred years ago, but through several switches to new tracks laid by specific [hegemonic] complexes" (22). The successive restructurings of the world-systems led by these hegemonies, moreover, has generated not only new hegemonic challengers (the British to Dutch hegemony, the American to the British hegemony) but also increasingly powerful *counter-hegemonic* challengers, especially from the working class.

In contrast to many studies of great power conflict, in which capitalism disappears from view (for example, Kennedy, 1987), Arrighi and Silver see hegemonic ascent not solely as an end in itself — *qua* "national power" — but as a means of reproducing the capitalist world economy. This approach has the virtue of explaining why capitalist production and capitalist markets have been restructured on a progressively larger world scale without resorting to explanations based on the logic of capital as an *unmediated phenomenon*. The imperative of ceaseless capital accumulation is always there, but it is mediated and given form through the actions of states, firms, and classes.

The role of these actors is clarified by *Chaos and Governance's* rather novel narrative strategy. Rather than tell the story of capitalism as a whole in a seamless narrative, its main chapters are organized around four "angles of vision" from which to view modern history. The authors have selected these angles of vision according to what they see as the four decisive conflicts of the modern era: the conflict among states, the conflict among capitalists, the conflict between classes, and the conflict between civilizations. In successive chapters, they analyze these conflicts in turn, re-telling the story of modern capitalism from the perspective of each of these mutually conditioning conflicts. This approach allows them to identify the similarities among eras of hegemonic crises, but also the differences, which are explained by analyzing how capitalism over the *longue duree* generates self-limiting contradictions — very much in the spirit of Marx's observation (1967, 250) that the limit of capital is capital itself.

Class Struggle and Hegemony in the Modern World-System

The most compelling and ground-breaking of these studies is the chapter on class conflict in the modern world, entitled (with a nod to Barrington Moore) "The Social Origins of World Hegemonies," by Silver and Eric Slater.

Their thesis could easily be summed up by Marx and Engels' famous observation in *The Germany Ideology* that "every new class . . . achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously, whereas the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly" (1970, 66). Building on the two previous chapters' analyses of geopolitics and business enterprise, they advance three propositions: 1) intensifying competition among states and among capitalists during each hegemonic transition has led, *inter alia*, to financialization and consequently "a rapid and extreme polarization of wealth," which undermined the "social compacts" that were foundational of each hegemony; 2) the sustained commercial and manufacturing growth that resulted from the political and economic innovations and successes of particular hegemonic complexes undermined those hegemonies over the long run by creating new social classes and thereby "transforming the world-scale balance of class forces"; and 3) periods of hegemonic transitions generate "growing intra-elite conflict, in reaction to the intensification of interstate and interenterprise rivalry . . . and to increasing social unrest from below" (151–2).

These propositions inform, and are derived from, the authors' study of class conflict in successive periods of hegemonic breakdown and consolidation. In contrast to most studies of globalization or large-scale, long-run social change in the modern world, Silver and Slater illuminate the connections between capital accumulation on a world scale and class conflict. This is where they break new ground. Their analysis shows that each new hegemon, by creating the global conditions for rapid capital accumulation through commerce and manufacture, created new social classes that undermined that hegemony once prosperity gave way to stagnation. The Dutch led the way to the Westphalia Treaties (1648) that "protect[ed] the property and commerce of noncombatants" (154) and pioneered the Atlantic triangular trade, thereby creating the conditions for the emergence of powerful white settler colonial independence movements in North America and slave liberation movements in the Caribbean, especially Haiti. During the 19th century, the British created the first truly capitalist global market, which allowed for the diffusion of modern industry and the transportation–communications revolution of the later 19th century, which in turn laid the foundations for the emergence of the modern proletariat and increasingly powerful revolutionary movements in the periphery and (especially) semiperiphery of the world-system. And the Americans, by supporting postwar reconstruction in Europe and the Cold War struggles in East Asia, radically extended the scale and scope of mass production systems, thereby creating a dramatically larger world proletariat.

The contemporary movement of capital to East Asia and the proliferation of “late industrializers” in the region assumes special importance in the Arrighi–Silver analysis. In their view, not only does East Asia pose an increasingly serious challenge to U. S. and European economic power. Perhaps more fundamental than the rise of East Asian capital is the challenge of East Asia’s workers. From the perspective of capital, the latter pose an especially serious problem. It is one thing to include several hundred million European, American, and Japanese workers in a social compact that “trickles down” to these relatively few and privileged workers while excluding the vast majority; it is quite another thing to contemplate the inclusion of two or three times that many workers in East and South Asia.

On this basis of this analysis, Silver and Slater draw some optimistic conclusions. First, capital faces the grave problem of incorporating hundreds of millions of workers into what would be an enormously expensive new social compact. However necessary for renewed capital accumulation, the economic weight of the required social compact is probably too great for capital to bear, particularly with the rise of the East Asian proletariat. This analysis proceeds very much in the classical Marxist tradition, which holds that capitalist development increases rather than undermines workers’ power. Over the very long run of capitalist development, there is a secular trend towards increased workers’ power. The evidence for this increased workers’ power is found in their comparison of the crisis of U. S. hegemony with earlier crises. They contend, quite persuasively, that whereas inter-enterprise competition and financialization fueled class conflict during previous hegemonic transitions, in the period since the late 1960s working-class unrest has been the driving force behind financial expansion and capital’s latest wave of transnational expansion. The increased mobility of capital and a new capitalist political offensive after 1970 disorganized working-class organizations in the core, creating the impression that the working class was no longer a central agent of progressive social change. Arguing against this view, Silver and Slater contend that whatever defeats antisystemic movements may have suffered in recent decades, such weakness “is largely a conjunctural phenomenon” (282) that will pass once the working classes of the semiperiphery, especially East Asia’s late industrializers, reach maturity. Finally, they argue that the feminization and increasingly multi-ethnic composition of the world’s working classes, one result of the post-1945 world-system created by U. S. hegemony, will among other things transform the primarily male, U. S. industrial working class. In so doing, this worldwide process will remove “a central junior partner of the U. S. hegemonic bloc” (216) and implicitly create new opportunities for working-class unity.

Curiously, Silver and Slater do not discuss working-class internationalism, past or present. Given Arrighi’s emphasis on organizational innovation

as the motive force of capitalist history, it is odd that this narrative of class struggle is one relatively unmediated by organization. What of the First, Second, and Third Internationals in the 19th and 20th centuries? And what of the rapid proliferation of internationalist organizations today, embodied in such innovative projects as the growing movement against global trade organizations and trade liberalization, or the Transnationals Information Exchange and the cross-border organizing efforts such as those put together by the United Electrical Workers and the Mexican Authentic Workers Front (FAT) (see Moody, 1997, 143–310)? If it is capitalist development that creates the potential for increasing workers' power *over time*, it is the growing scale of organization that creates the possibilities for projecting that power *across space*. The history of workers' power is therefore best told from two angles of vision: the development of capital on the one hand, and on the other the historical rise of "the ever expanding union of workers" (Marx and Engels, 1968, 18), from local organization to national unions to global solidarity.

East Asia: The Savior of World Capitalism?

If the chapter on class conflict and world hegemonies is *Chaos and Governance's* most compelling essay, the chapter on "Western Hegemonies in World-Historical Perspective" is the most puzzling, and the most disruptive to the analyses developed in the three previous chapters. Here, Arrighi and his contributors survey European involvement in Asia from the 16th century to the present, with special emphasis on the rise of East Asia to its alleged position of centrality in global accumulation processes today. Theirs is a provocative analysis that illuminates clearly the ways in which the incorporation and subsequent peripheralization of Asia into the capitalist world economy between the 16th and the 19th centuries was crucial to the hegemonic power of the Dutch and British empires. They argue effectively for the position that northeast Asia was either not peripheralized (Japan) or peripheralized incompletely (China), and that the incomplete subordination of East Asia to Western imperialism was decisive in the rise of East Asia after World War II.

So far so good. What is so puzzling about this chapter is that its conclusions contradict much of the analysis developed in the previous 200 pages. Arrighi and his colleagues suggest that East Asia's "geo-historical heritage" (read civilization) offers hope for a more sustainable form of world accumulation. In their words, this "geo-historical heritage of comparatively low production and protection costs gave the region's governmental and business agencies a decisive competitive advantage *vis-à-vis* the United States. They argue further that East Asia's "dependence . . . on other regions of the global economy for raw materials, high technology, and cultural products

. . . augur well for the future of . . . [a more cooperative] global economy.” While holding out the possibility that this heritage may undergo a profound transformation in the present hegemonic transition, they suggest that “if [this heritage] is preserved, the East Asian expansion may eventually open up for world society a more economical and *sustainable developmental path* than the United States did.” Second, they argue that the decline of the United States as the leading economic power and the assumption of that role by East Asia (especially Japan and the overseas Chinese diaspora) has produced a novel situation in the modern world-system. This novel development is the bifurcation, or spatial disjuncture, of politico-military power and economic power. In this reading, the Americans have the guns and the East Asians have the capital (Japan, the Chinese diaspora) and the labor (mainland China). They argue for the possibility that a “plurality of states acting in concert with one another . . . [might have a] chance of developing a new world order” (269–270, emphasis added).

These are deeply problematic arguments. In the first place, the claim that East Asian civilization offers a more sustainable form of capitalism seems highly questionable in light of the ecological devastation that has followed in the region’s rapid industrialization. South Korea, for instance, is home to some of the most toxic cities in the world, relies on nuclear power for more than half of its electricity consumption, and is a world leader in per hectare pesticide use (Foster, 1996).

Second, East Asia’s dependence on other regions for raw materials does not seem likely to promote cooperation. One of Arrighi’s central theoretical claims about the nature of capitalism might be summed up thus: “If you have capital and you want more, you must have guns.” Capital accumulation is impossible without a state (or some comparable organization) to provide “protection services.” The only capitalist organizations to provide their own protection services were the chartered joint-stock companies of the 17th and 18th centuries, and a return to this model seems unlikely, given the analysis presented in the second chapter. In this earlier chapter (“Transformations of Business Enterprise”), Arrighi and his colleagues argue that the trend since the 18th century has been towards increased *specialization* of business organizations in strictly capitalist activities; if there was considerable overlap between state functions and capitalist functions in the early modern era, since that time the trend has been towards increasing separation of, and specialization in, those functions. Lacking adequate protection services, it seems likely that East Asia will be squeezed by the United States, whose military power could be deployed to assert control over strategic natural resources. As the authors argue persuasively in the first chapter (“Geopolitics and High Finance”), the United States has centralized military power to an extent unprecedented in the modern world, so much so that the bal-

ance of power mechanisms that gave order to the modern interstate system in the three centuries after Westphalia have been superseded. Certainly, one of the ways U. S. power has been exercised over Europe and Japan since World War II has been U. S. control over Middle East oil supplies — although this item is omitted from their analysis.

Third, it is not altogether clear that the present bifurcation of military and economic power between the United States and East Asia is a new structural feature of capitalism. Didn't the transition from British to American hegemony produce a situation in which the British navy remained powerful while world capital flows began to center on the United States in the decades before World War I? Is it so far-fetched that Japan could rearm quickly? Moreover, it is curious that the authors do not consider the parallel between this bifurcation, and the spatial disjuncture of military and economic power that characterized the origins of capitalism in the long 16th century. As Arrighi argued in *The Long Twentieth Century*, it was precisely the success of the Genoese in externalizing their protection costs — in contrast to the Venetians — by striking an alliance with the Iberian powers that constituted the decisive innovation leading to the emergence of capitalism. But lacking an organizing center where state and capital could cooperate to create a dynamic “national” economy as well as assert leadership and provide order to the world-system, capitalism could emerge but not stabilize in the long 16th century. Hence, the Genoese-led world economy was, to borrow a phrase from Braudel, “vast but weak” (1961, 260). As *Chaos and Governance* demonstrates so effectively, the system stabilized only when military and economic innovation concentrated within a single state, with the rise of the Dutch to world hegemony in the 17th century. Today, it seems as if we are returning to a situation uncomfortably similar to the pre-Westphalian era. Could it be that capitalism is coming full circle? Having emerged in a period where more-or-less “stateless” capital was ascendant, it seems possible that capitalism is returning to this pre-1648 situation in which the carriers of guns and the carriers of capital are locked in an uneasy (and unstable) alliance. The chief difference between the long 16th century and the end of the long 20th century is that in the earlier era the instability resulting from conflicts “internal” to the system could be resolved by means of extending its geographical boundaries. Geographical expansion was so crucial because it entailed an expanding economic pie for states and capital alike, thereby creating the basis for an international order and a renewed cycle of capital accumulation. The foreclosure of further geographical expansion by the early 20th century thus exacerbates the instability created by the present crisis of U. S. hegemony and the strong possibility that no single national organizing center will emerge to take its place.

Fourth, the perspective on world capitalist development outlined in the first two chapters is grounded in the idea that capitalism alternates between material expansion and financial expansion. Two processes sustain capital accumulation over the long run: 1) organizational and technical innovation, and the resulting geographical expansion and intensification of the capitalist social division of labor; and 2) the resurgence of interstate conflict each time material expansion comes to an end, whereupon the states begin to borrow huge sums of money to fuel their competitive struggles, which tend to culminate in world wars. What then has changed about this latter process to promote such a degree of cooperation among a plurality of states to substitute for the world governance heretofore provided by a single hegemonic state? Has the centralization of military power in the United States — which may or may not be temporary, and may or may not be decisive in curbing inter-state conflict in other forms — altered irremediably and fundamentally the territorialist logic of power in the modern world?

Finally, why hold out hope for East Asia's promise of a more sustainable capitalism when a less utopian alternative has just been offered in the previous chapter: the possibility that the emergence of an increasingly large and militant industrial working class in East Asia — “most especially in China” (216) — will assert demands, possibly in concert with other workers around the world, that are unlikely to be contained, or at least contained for long, by a new “social compact”?

Conclusion

Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System is a major advance in world-historical studies in two major ways. First, Arrighi and Silver demonstrate that world-systems analysts can produce a study of capitalism that incorporates at once the political economy of geopolitical conflict and high finance, imperialism, and class conflict. With remarkable clarity Arrighi and Silver have constructed a history of world capitalism that explains its development in terms of human agency rather than the inexorable (and mysterious) logic of capital. Theirs is a story of conflict among and between states, firms, and classes. (And to a lesser extent, between the civilizations.) Certain elements of this endeavor are certainly problematic, but at least they are problematic in a provocative and often original manner. The general project itself is beyond reproach. Too often the history of capitalism is told in a rather bloodless and mechanical fashion. (Indeed, this was the primary shortcoming of the otherwise magnificent *The Long Twentieth Century*.)

Second, by engaging in a thoroughgoing *historical analysis* of hegemonic transitions, Arrighi and Silver are able to sort out the new from the old in

the present transition, and thus bring the reader a new perspective on world capitalism today. My principal objection is that the main thrust of their analysis is not pursued to what I see as its logical conclusion. At its core, *Chaos and Governance* suggests that the world economy is in the midst of, or heading rapidly towards, a profound crisis, not simply of American hegemony but of *capitalism as a historical system*. If we accept their analysis, it seems more reasonable for the left to organize on the basis of capitalism's tendency to create ever-larger and more powerful working classes whose demands are fast outstripping the system's ability to accommodate it than to look towards East Asia's "sustainable" and "efficient" capitalism.

However one comes to terms with these contradictions, I recommend this book without reservation. Students of capitalism, past and present, avoid this book at great peril. For those who lack the patience or time to read *The Long Twentieth Century*, *Chaos and Governance* is a more than acceptable introduction, although no substitute in itself. But the merit of *Chaos and Governance* goes far beyond its accessibility to an immensely rich theoretical perspective on four centuries of modern world history. It represents a significant advance in the world-historical study of capitalism, pointing the way toward, and challenging Marxists especially to develop, an approach that balances social agency with social structure, and understands the recursive interrelations between the two. As such, it merits inclusion on the same bookshelf alongside the great works of historical sociology.

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