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Geoculture: Missing in Action

Antonio Gelis-Filho

Abstract

Wallerstein defined geoculture as ‘a set of ideas, values, and norms widely accepted throughout the world-system and that constrained social action thereafter’. Its importance in the full development of the capitalist world-system was made clear many times. Nevertheless, geoculture is missing in literature. A new approach to the concept, aiming to set the basis for further discussion is presented in this paper. The author sustains that world-systems are in fact the assembly of two subsystems of unequal exchanges: the material and the symbolic ones. While material goods are traded, ‘symbolic goods’, of a psychological nature are also traded. The result of the first subsystem workings is a world-systemic structure consisting of a core, a semiperiphery and a periphery, with wealth accumulated in the first division. The result of the second subsystem workings is the acceptance of unequal exchanges as something normal, as ‘the way things work’. Thus, geoculture is the structure of such subsystem of symbolic exchanges at any specific moment. The author emphasizes the role of unconscious processes to the creation and stability of any world-system and discusses some implications of that framework: bounded complexity, radical freedom and the asynchronous evolution of the two subsystems.

Keywords: *geoculture, world-systems analysis, unequal exchanges, bounded complexity.*

1. Introduction. The Paradox of the Missing Geoculture

Immanuel Wallerstein defined geoculture as ‘a set of ideas, values, and norms that were widely accepted throughout the system and that constrained social action thereafter’ (Wallerstein 2011a: xvi). It is an essential concept in his description of the Capitalist World-System (CWS) formation and development. But geoculture, surprisingly, is unfrequently approached in the literature of world-systems theory, making it perhaps one of the few central concepts in Wallerstein's work – if not the only one – that failed to gain a life of its own in world-systems analysis. The fact that geoculture is an important subject in the intellectual framework of world-systems analysis but, in spite of it, is also uncommonly researched, is called here the ‘paradox of the missing geoculture’.

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In this paper, that paradox is the starting point for the presentation and exploration of a new understanding about the nature of geoculture. Such understanding is needed to overcome a contradiction in the concept of geoculture in Wallerstein's own work, a contradiction that could perhaps explain, at least partially, why the subject has failed to attract the attention of researchers. On the one hand, as seen above, Wallerstein defined geoculture in a way that made it clear that he was talking about symbolic factors (ideas and values), materialized in norms (which can also have a direct symbolic basis, as in moral predicaments) accepted throughout the system and that constrained social action thereafter. On the other hand, he has limited the historical horizon of its existence, by restricting it to the period of emergence of a hegemonic political ideology in the world-system, *i.e.*, the emergence of centrist liberalism as the ideology of the CWS during the 19th century. However, in his work, we can find instances of 'sets of ideas, values, and norms that were widely accepted throughout the system and that constrained social action' in other contexts as well.

A different approach is proposed here: geoculture is an essential component of any world-system, and not only of an advanced world-economy as the capitalist world-system. The evolution of a geoculture, it is sustained here, is in itself a central phenomenon in building of a world-system. A world-system is composed of two subsystems of asymmetric exchanges, partially autonomous in relation to each other: the first is the subsystem of material exchanges. The core of the system will accumulate wealth out of those exchanges. A hypothetical picture of that subsystem at any moment would reveal a concrete structure underlying the world-system, one that is composed of a core, a semi-periphery and a periphery. The second subsystem is the subsystem of symbolic exchanges. The core will accumulate cultural hegemony out of those exchanges: the asymmetric material exchanges will be therefore considered 'normal' and the cost for its maintenance will decrease. A hypothetical picture at any moment of that second subsystem, the subsystem of symbolic exchanges, would reveal a cultural structure underlying the world-system. That structure is the geoculture. It is very important to stress here that the subsystem of symbolic exchanges is largely unconscious, a fact neglected by world-systems analysis so far.

The task proposed here is therefore admittedly challenging: not only to present a view of geoculture as the product at each moment of a subsystem of exchanges on 'symbolic' goods inside a world-system, but, moreover, to bring the universe of the human unconscious into our field as well. But, by taking that perspective, geoculture reveals itself as potentially one of the most promising, fascinating and unexplored frontiers in world-system analysis.

2. Geoculture is Important

Geoculture has been part of Wallerstein's work at least since 1991. In his book *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System*, Wallerstein already presents geoculture as an essential factor in the development of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 1991: 4). In the 1995 edition of *Historical Capitalism* (*Idem* 2003a), geoculture is discussed as nothing less than the source of one of the three contradictions that would eventually bring the whole system down (*Ibid.*: 1606–1612).

In those two works geoculture is not discussed in itself, but just in the context of broader themes. But in his 2004 Introduction, he has dedicated a whole chapter to it (*Idem* 2004: 60–75). He defines geoculture as central to the (complete) development of the world-system, and locates its emergence in a specific period and place: post-1789 Europe.

His approach to geoculture was summarized in the following lines, talking about the transformations unleashed by the French Revolution and matured during the 19th century:

(...) we need to argue, first of all, that there was something that had not yet been achieved in the historical development of the modern world-system: the creation of what we are calling its geoculture. By a geoculture, we mean values that are widely shared throughout the world-system, both explicitly and implicitly (*Idem* 2011a: 177).

As explained next, only then the 'disjunction between the political economy of the world-system and its discursive rhetoric' needed to be overcome, since the two main 'novelties' brought by the French Revolution – the normality of political change and the people as responsible for those changes – made it necessary. The outcome was the development of the three main ideologies of the modern world-system: conservatism, liberalism and radicalism (*Ibid.*: 177). So, in a nutshell, geoculture, according to Wallerstein, can be understood as a consequence of the junction between the political economy of the world-system and its rhetoric, something that was made necessary only by the French Revolution. It is also the source of ideology, and in his own words, of the first ideologies:

An ideology is more than a set of ideas or theories. It is more than a moral commitment or a worldview. It is a coherent strategy in the social arena from which one can draw quite specific political conclusions. In this sense, one did not need ideologies in previous world-systems, or indeed even in the modern world-system before the concept of the normality of change, and that the citizen who was ultimately responsible for such change, were adopted as basic structural principles of political institutions (*Idem* 2004: 60).

The whole fourth volume of Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System* is dedicated to the discussion of the transformations determined by the emergence of geoculture, whose subtitle (Centrist Liberalism Triumphant, 1789–1914) makes clear which of the three main ideologies that appeared after the French Revolution was in his opinion the ‘winner’. Finally, according to Wallerstein, the geocultural framework developed during and after the Revolution would survive, relatively unscathed, until 1968, when what he calls ‘World Revolution’ dislocated it, ‘unhinging the underpinnings of the capitalist world-culture’ (Wallerstein 2004: 77).

Wallerstein's insight about a geoculture has been reaffirmed since at least 1991. By devoting the fourth volume of *The Modern World-System* to the ‘battle’ of post-1789 ideologies, he made it definitely central to world-systems analysis. Whichever way you look at it, geoculture is important.

3. Geoculture is Missing. Could It Be Because of Its Conceptual Contradictions?

But geoculture is missing. The most important sources in world-systems analysis just do not offer any numerically substantial set of references about geoculture. A search for the terms ‘geoculture’, ‘geocultural’, and ‘geocult’ at the site of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* (2016), whose collection dates back to 1995 (currently on its 21st volume), returns only two references, one of them by Wallerstein, and the other by Derluigian. One of those references (*Idem* 2014: 158) mentions geoculture twice. The first mention (*Ibid.*: 158) is just a repetition of Wallerstein's original concept of geoculture, adding nothing new. The second one (*Ibid.*: 164) mentions the transformation of geoculture in 1968, so again not adding anything new to the debate about the concept. Derluigian's article, however, in its single reference to ‘geoculture’, affirms, interestingly, that:

Immanuel Wallerstein insists that, to the contrary, 1968 marked the second most important revolution in the modern world-system after 1848. Both revolutionary waves, though political failures in their immediate results, shattered the previously reigning world-systemic geoculture and opened the way to the institutionalization of new anti-systemic movements (Derluigian 2015: 456).

That reference assumes Wallerstein's recognition of a form of geoculture anterior to the one that appeared in the 19th century. Unfortunately, no reference is offered for that affirmation. Perhaps, such reference really exists, or perhaps, the existence of a pre-1848 geoculture is just so logical for Derluigian that he thinks it could be taken for granted. Somehow disappointingly, we are informed by him, ahead in the text quoted above, that ‘In the recently published Volume Four of *The Modern World-System* (2011a, 2011b), Wallerstein provides

a detailed and enlightening analysis of nineteenth-century political struggles and geocultural transformations' (*Ibid.*: 456).

In other words, Derluigian seems to understand that Wallerstein's work he mentioned assumes a transformation of a previously existing geoculture. But does he? According to Wallerstein's own words, in the referred work, Volume 4, which I think of as running from 1789 to 1873 [1914], is devoted to the creation (and only at this point) of a geoculture for the modern world-system (Wallerstein 2011a: xiii).

And, lest we forget such initial statement about geoculture, Wallerstein's position is restated at the very last page of text:

To pursue this task, we needed to argue, first of all, that there was something [during the long 19th century] that had not yet been achieved in the historical development of the modern world-system: the creation of what we are calling geoculture (*Ibid.*: 277).

Derluigian seems to have been betrayed indeed by a logical gap in Wallerstein's work, one that lies at the core of this article's main point: geoculture, if it is to be a meaningful concept, must predate the transformations of the 19th century, something that will be discussed in more detail later. Anyway, only two references for geoculture in the whole collection of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* makes the case for a missing concept.

Concerning another main reference for world-systems analysis, the *Routledge Handbook of World-Systems Analysis* (Babones and Chase-Dunn 2012) the situation is not different. 'Geoculture' is not even listed in the index as a main entry. The index's list moves from 'genuine savings indicator' to 'geographically-integrated history research' (*Ibid.*: 527). The only place where the word 'geoculture' can be found in the index is as a sub-heading of the main entry 'knowledge structures', as 'geoculture of historical capitalism' (*Ibid.*: 530). That sub-heading refers to the single reference to geoculture in the whole book, in a chapter where Richard Lee (2012: 105) affirms that 'the geoculture of historical capitalism has been periodically reconstituted through a series of medium-term fluctuations'. Unfortunately, such an interesting hypothesis is not explored much in the text and no specific references to it are provided. Nevertheless, Lee's work will be discussed ahead as a basis to the understanding of geoculture as proposed in this paper. So, in that Handbook we have one single reference to 'geoculture'. But one should think twice before criticizing the editors. After all, they warn us at the book's introduction 'All in all, this handbook arises out of a good-faith attempt to represent world-systems analysis as it is practiced in the field, not as it was laid out by the founders or defined by the editors' (Babones and Chase-Dunn 2012: 6).

And that is exactly how world-systems analysis is currently 'practiced in the field': with almost no reference to geoculture. Another piece of evidence

can be extracted from searching for 'geoculture' in the collection of Review. Only one article (Wilson 2009) has the word in its title. And we are talking here of thirty-five volumes, beginning in 1976, so covering all the period during which the concept has been 'alive'. The question is unavoidable: why is geoculture missing?

3.1. A brilliant but underdeveloped insight?

Perhaps, one of the reasons for the lack of research on geoculture is its conceptual underdevelopment. If we accept Wallerstein's ideas about geoculture, there is indeed not much to be explored: geoculture as such only became important after the French Revolution, and more specifically, only after the revolutions of 1848. As quoted above, he does not even recognize the existence of ideologies previously to the Revolution. And the action surrounding geoculture has essentially ceased after the triumph of centrist liberalism during the 19th century. Only the world revolution of 1968 would change things, but then the Wallersteinian concept of geoculture essentially fades away from history, except something that was brought down by the 1968 events. In other words: geoculture as a phenomenon is something limited to the period between 1789 and 1968. A brilliant insight – the need for a cultural background for a world-system – was largely neutralized by one assumption: no ideologies were needed before the modern world-system late stage of development (see Wallerstein 2004: 60). I sustain here that Wallerstein, by doing that, has taken one single species (the geoculture of the late modern capitalist world-system) for the whole genus (geoculture). I also sustain that in his work itself we have evidence for that fact.

An example is the whole thesis of his book *European Universalism*, where he affirms that 'the struggle between European universalism and universal universalism is the central struggle of the contemporary world' (*Idem.* 2006: xii). In the book Wallerstein analyzes, as an instance of European universalism most remote roots, the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda during the 16th century. They debate about the moral justification of Amerindian exploitation by the Spanish conquerors. Wallerstein, concluding the analysis, writes that 'if I have spent so much time spelling out the arguments of two sixteenth-century theologians, it is because nothing that has been said since has added anything essential to the debate' (*Ibid.*: 11). It is difficult not to see on that 16th debate an example of 'sets of ideas, values, and norms that were widely accepted throughout the system and that constrained social action' (Wallerstein 2011a: xvi). In other words, it is difficult not to see geoculture on it. But then again, according to Wallerstein, only during the 19th century something that deserved to be called 'geoculture' was formed.

Of course, one could argue that such 16th century example does not point to a set of ideas that encompassed the whole system, as required by Wallerstein's

definition. That is a questionable argument, since the capitalist world-system at that point of time was not global at all. But even if we accept that Las Casas and Sepúlveda were indeed discussing a set of ideas that did not encompass the whole system, is it even necessary to define geoculture, according to Wallerstein? After all, he talks about sets of ideas that are ‘widely’ accepted throughout the system and not ‘totally’ accepted in every single part of the system. It seems fair to say that Wallerstein's explicitly stated understanding of geoculture only as a post-19th century phenomenon is contradicted by his own work.

Also, it is possible to see in the book a defense of his thesis that only after the novelties introduced by the French Revolution a junction of the political economy and its discursive rhetoric was needed. But does the lack of such need makes a geocultural framework really unnecessary? World-systems are power structures. It is not a wild hypothesis to sustain that ‘sets of ideas, values, and norms that were widely accepted throughout the system and that constrained social action’ are needed to keep the axial division of labor (Wallerstein 2004: 98–99) that characterizes a world-system in place, if only in order to lower the costs of that maintenance. Why would elites even need prestige goods as status symbols, after all, if not to smooth the gears of the axial division of labor, something that happened even in ancient (*e.g.*, Blanton and Fargher 2012: 13–14) world-systems? A new approach to geoculture could help to overcome such contradictions.

And, in fact, as noted before, even Wallerstein has occasionally referred to geoculture as something that already existed before the French Revolution.

The historical turning-point was undoubtedly the French Revolution; for the French Revolution brought about two fundamental changes in the geoculture of the modern world-system that we have already noted: it made change, political change into a ‘normal phenomenon [...] And secondly, French Revolution reoriented the concept of sovereignty, from the monarch or the legislature to the people’ (Wallerstein 2004: 51).

Compare that affirmation of the French Revolution as something that brought fundamental changes in the geoculture of the modern world-system, so implying that it was already there, to his already mentioned affirmation that ‘(...) we need to argue, first of all, that there was something that had not yet been achieved in the historical development of the modern world-system: the creation of what we are calling its geoculture’ (*Idem* 2011a: 177). By any measure, we have here a contradiction. Geoculture did not exist before the French Revolution, but at the same time the French Revolution brought fundamental changes in the geoculture of the modern world-system. Beyond any doubt, in world-systems analysis, as a theoretical paradigm or as a knowledge movement, we definitely need to talk about geoculture in terms that are more precise.

4. The Subsystems Inside a World-System and the Concept of Geoculture: A Way out of Those Contradictions?

One way out of geoculture contradictions is to look in different ways at world-systems. Instead of understanding geoculture as something that happens only in some kinds of world-systems (world-economies) and not in other, and even in those systems fortunate enough to need it, only in late periods of its development (post-1789 or even post-1848 modern world-system), as sustained by Wallerstein, we could take an entirely different approach: geoculture is an essential part of all world-systems. I propose here the idea that geoculture as a genus is in fact related to a new concept of world-system: an assembly of two subsystems: the material and symbolic ones.

4.1. Two subsystems of world-systems

The idea that a world-system can be understood as an assembly of phenomena is not new. Lee discussed the modern world-system in terms of ‘arenas’: political, economic and cultural, also pointing towards cycles of development of structures of knowledge that would help the accumulation process in that world-system (Lee 2007: 2012). Wallerstein has classically distinguished world-empires from world-economies based on their political and cultural frameworks. A world-empire is politically unified and culturally fragmented, and a world-economy is politically and culturally fragmented (Wallerstein 2004: 23, 8–99). It is relevant here that Wallerstein differentiates between the possible coexistence of multiple cultures and one single geoculture in a world-economy (*Ibid.*: 23).

But in order to explore the possibilities of the concept of geoculture, we should think about world-systems in a different way. A world-system can be seen as composed of two subsystems of unequal exchanges inside a larger area where an axial division of labor does exist. The first is the subsystem of material exchanges. The second is the subsystem of symbolic exchanges. An analysis of the first subsystem at any moment would reveal a concrete political-economic structure underlying the world-system, a structure that is composed of a hierarchical continuum whose main areas are core, semiperiphery and periphery (*Idem* 2011b: 179). An analysis of the second subsystem, the subsystem of symbolic exchanges, would reveal a cultural structure underlying the world-system. That structure is the geoculture. The core of the system will accumulate wealth and cultural hegemony out of, respectively, the workings of the material and symbolic subsystems. Hegemony and wealth are connected: hegemony makes the asymmetric material exchanges to be felt as something ‘normal’, ‘the way things are’ and the cost for its maintenance will decrease. It is very important to stress two points here. The first is that both subsystems are partially autonomous. It means that they have, up to a point, lives of their own. The sec-

ond point is that the subsystem of symbolical exchanges is largely unconscious, a fact neglected by world-systems analysis so far.

Moreover, it is important to try to distinguish the concepts of symbol and 'culture' here. A symbol is anything capable of receiving psychological projections. A dog, a book, a song, an anthem, a language, a behavior, a way of solving life's problems, a religion, they are all examples of symbols. Culture, here, means the system of value that is attached to symbols by a specific person. Perhaps, a crude example is one's national flag. If it is true that for some individuals the national flag is a symbol more capable of creating emotions than for others, the national flag is usually more valued by any individual in the modern world than most, if not all other flags. It can be considered as being valuable for bringing deep emotions, or just because exhibiting respect for one's flag is socially demanded. The flag is a concrete symbol. But we can also look at abstract symbols, behaviors, and ways of thinking in the same manner. For each individual the system of value attached to symbols will be probably different from the system of value for everybody else. In that sense, each person has his or her own 'culture'. But individual systems of values will largely overlap, out of shared ancestry, common growing environment, common material reality, interests in common, up to the point that we can talk about 'cultures' that encompass large numbers of people.

If the subsystem of material exchanges is largely responsible for the fuzzy partition of the world-system in core, periphery and semiperiphery, the subsystem of symbolic exchanges is responsible for an even fuzzier partition. Talking about discrete areas probably does not make any sense here. What we have is a gradient that is centered in the core of the system and spills over the rest of world-system, clashing against local systems of symbolic valuation in non-core areas. Inside the core, geoculture is just a part of a more general 'culture'.

Taking Wallerstein's analysis, for instance, centrist liberalism, in post-1789 Western Europe was not 'geoculture'. It was just an important part of the local 'culture'. Only after being exported to the rest of the world, in order to create adequate conditions for that phase of capitalism, it really turns into a 'geoculture': a psychological system of valuation for symbols. Without the psychological domination necessary for a world-system, centrist liberalism would make absolutely no sense in the 19th-century Brazil, Africa or Asia. But in the same way that plantations were needed to feed the subsystem of material exchanges, geocultural transformations were needed to feed the subsystem of symbolic exchanges.

Without the subsystem of symbolic exchanges, a world-system ceases to be such, turning exploitation into mere conquest and plundering of one area by another. Without the subsystem of material exchange, geoculture turns into mere cultural systems, from which non-state religions are probably the most obvious example.

Wallerstein took the species (the 19th-century geoculture) for the whole genus (geoculture). The reasons why that species evolved deserve by themselves more research. But a good hypothesis is that the post-1789 geoculture was needed for breeding another important resource in non-core areas: the consumer, a person willing to spend his or her money on necessary and unnecessary things as well. If I accept, as a person living in non-core areas, even at an unconscious level, that the values of the core are the 'right ones', am I not more vulnerable to the seduction represented by material goods that express such 'superiority'? Looking that way, the French Revolution creates not only the citizen, but also its grandchild, a consumer.

Looking at geoculture from that perspective, a whole new set of research possibilities can be identified for that concept and for the world-systems analysis in general as well. Some of them will be briefly discussed below.

4.2. Geoculture: A picture of the subsystem of symbolic exchanges

The accumulation of wealth by the elite of one area (that exists in the Time Space, and not merely in continuous geographical space) at the cost of other areas is a hallmark of world-systems. The axial division of labor in large, economically relatively self-contained areas characterizes for Wallerstein a world-system. As he pointed many times, it is more or less accidental result of uncountable economic interactions between people. If we define 'economic' here as the collections of solutions that humans employ to solve the problem of limited resources against unlimited human needs, any human interaction has an economic component, directly or indirectly. But any human interaction also has psychological impact. For us, the most important aspect of it is that one's system of value, accordingly to which we attach meaning to phenomena, is always changed by such interactions.

In a declining Soviet Union, for instance, youngsters (and probably not only they) attached meaning to western blue jeans in a way that today would probably be laughable. Blue jeans represented modernity, freedom, possibility. That relation, in its turn, had a material expression. Smuggling in blue jeans was big business. People took economic decisions based on their desire to acquire that good. A pair of western popular brands could cost the equivalent of an engineer's monthly salary (Rudevich 2014). Why did the Soviet youth take such irrational decisions? Because they were irrational only if one does not take into consideration the psychological value of that symbol. Such valuation process was largely unconscious. Late Soviet Union, beginning with Brezhnev's rule, was a stagnant economy. The speedy – if bloody – industrialization of Stalin years, the technological conquests of the 1950s and perhaps 1960s were long gone, at least from the perspective of younger citizens. Still a closed society, Soviet Union was no longer hermetically sealed from Western influences –

if it had ever been – due to communication technology, international commitments, Western travelers. Most probably, at that point in time, some people at least – trendsetters – were able to make and spread the connection between blue jeans and a future that was more or less unavoidable. But why blue jeans? And why the already ongoing decline of the West, somehow already announced loudly by the world revolution of 1968, was not perceived as such? After all, Cuba, just a few hundred miles from the US, and much less powerful than the Soviet Union, where blue jeans and other western stuff are certainly not unheard of, was able to keep its system going for much longer, if somehow changed as well. Not to mention North Korea, bordering two of the most advanced industrial economies in the world, where a totalitarian regime survives.

The answer is that the connection between material and symbolic systems is just partial. They have largely autonomous biographies. A failure of orthodox Marxism was the radical preponderance of material conditions over human history. Probably not a single sociologist, Marxist or not, would question that connection. But the concept of geoculture brings into the equation the complex system represented by the psychological forces.

Of course, when sustaining the centrality of psychological forces in the symbolic subsystem of a world-system, one should remember Durkheim's warning:

In one word, there is between psychology and sociology the same interruption of continuity that does exist between biology and physics or chemistry. Therefore, every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, one can be sure that the explanation is false (Durkheim 1894: 62).

Durkheim's warning is valuable. 'Societies', 'countries', 'world-systems' do not have a psychology. People do. The subsystem of symbolic exchanges is therefore not a 'mind of the world-system'. It is just the ever-changing cultural result of uncountable interactions between humans, each with his or her individual psychology, which, of course, is often influenced by groups, by the environment, and by each person's own life experiences. But if enough people inside a world-system accept 'the way the world works', in other words, if they accept as normal a system of psychological dominance, such world-system has a good chance of keep working more or less in the same way for at least a little longer, material reality allowing. But as it happens in any complex system, the symbolic subsystem is also chaotic, with all the characteristics of chaotic systems, including abrupt bifurcations, non-linear relation between inputs and outputs and complex causality. In fact, in the same text quoted above, Durkheim himself seems to have recognized at least tangentially the existence of the symbolic subsystem, when he affirmed that 'society is not just a simple sum of all

individuals, but the system formed by their association represents a specific reality that has its own characteristics' (Durkheim 1894: 61).

4.3. Why we need the 'geo' of geoculture: Semiperiphery as the place where things happen

Chase-Dunn was quoted by Harris as having noted that 'transformations in large social systems tend to originate in semi-peripheral zones' (Chase-Dunn *et al.* 2015: 164–165; Harris 2015: 419). One way of looking at it is by perceiving the clash between 'symbolic goods' that characterizes the subsystem of symbolic exchanges. Inside a world-system, the core will impose to other parts 'a set of ideas, values, and norms that will be widely accepted throughout the system and that will constrain social action'. But that set is never 'completely finished' nor will it ever be the same in two different positions in the TimeSpace.

As an area starts to function as a core to an incipient world-system, unequal material exchanges start to take place. But at the same time unequal cultural exchanges also start to take place. Wallerstein has explained, for instance, why a historically short delay in industrialization for serendipitous (from a historical standpoint) circumstances essentially doomed Poland to the condition of semi- if not fully fledged periphery (Wallerstein 2011c: 94–102). Elsewhere, he explains how the resulting material changes were transplanted even to the ethnogenic myths, moving from an ethnocentric Sarmatian common origin to an also mythical conquering *noblesse d'epée* (Idem 2011b: 143–145). How much of that transplant was deliberate and how much was 'felt as sensible'? More research was needed to answer that question, but it is reasonable to suppose that both sources were present. Hobsbawn in his *The Invention of Tradition* has demonstrated how 'ancient' traditions often have a much more recent origin than imagined (Hobsbawn 2012).

Of course, one can argue that the Polish aristocracy acted in an absolutely conscious way in order to create the new myth of conquering nobility. From this, one could suppose that the symbolic subsystem deals with immaterial goods exactly like the material subsystem deals with concrete goods. But that would be a mistake. The symbolic goods exchanges are largely unconscious. A personal experience, like the first trip abroad, for instance, changes a person in many ways. Not all of them, however, are under conscious control. One can develop a taste for further travelling; others can find it unattractive. Among those that learnt to love travelling, the impulse for a next one could be to a similar country, but some could discover that they would love to visit a more exotic location. Some consequences can be completely unrelated to what first comes to mind when thinking of travelling. The fact is the myth manipulation by the Polish aristocracy could work only because of a combination of material and cultural changes, which it furthered. But without noticing, they would posi-

tion their country as a peripheral actor in the world-system. That, as far as we know and as far logic suggests, was not an intended goal of the aristocracy at any moment. The geocultural ways that world-systems work are the result of very complex interactions between material and psychological reality, and unwanted consequences of political and geopolitical actions are very common.

The most relevant point here is the fact that ‘symbolic goods’ are ‘exported’ from the core to the non-core areas. The systemic aim is clear: to create, develop and maintain the right conditions for the benefit of the core's elite, even if that means also tolerating weaker elites in non-core areas. But why not having only core and periphery? Why a semiperiphery is also needed?

The concept of semiperiphery is another development of world-systems analysis. Dependency theory had already split the world into a core and a periphery (Hettne 2006: 137–139). But Wallerstein understood the importance of such area in the workings of the capitalist world-system:

The semiperiphery, however, is not an artifice of statistical cutting points, nor is it a residual category. The semiperiphery is a necessary structural element in a world-economy. These areas play a role parallel to that played, *mutatis mutandi*, by middle trading groups in an empire. They are points of vital skills that are often politically unpopular. These middle areas (like middle groups in an empire) partially deflect the political pressures which groups primarily located in peripheral areas might otherwise direct against core-states and the groups within and through their state machineries (Wallerstein 2011a: 350).

But beyond that perspective, semiperiphery is also the place where the cultural battles are more intensely fought. In a typically peripheral society, very little resistance can be offered to the geocultural expansion of the core. It does not mean that some peripheral cultural expressions are not to be tolerated. For example, the whole idea of exotic and mysterious places with different habits was an important part of Orientalism, the ‘discursive production’ by Westerners that was part of unequal power relations (Buchanan 2010: 353–354). But any local cultural production by peripheral countries that could threaten to stop the expansion of the world-system would not be accepted.

It is in the semiperiphery, where societies that are candidates to the core or ex-members of it meet, it is there that real cultural and material resistance can be found. I have elsewhere described the *abandonat*, a loose semiperipheral social group characterized by its strong support and identification with values that can be traced to the core of the world-system, by a lack of identification with the masses of their own countries and by its mostly middle-class roots (Gelis-Filho 2018). As mentioned previously, the semiperipheral middle classes face a much less stable situation in their countries than the situation faced by the middle classes in the core, even if it can be argued that the latter is changing to worse. Lacking the economic power derived from vast wealth and political

connections when compared to the local elites, always threatened to fall down back into the suffering lower classes, one of their main psychological and social defense mechanisms is to be strongly committed to what is often described by their members as being the superior values of the core.

The recent semiperipheral 'springs' and 'colored revolutions' are examples of how strong the cultural clashes can be in the semiperiphery. One possible explanation for those events, is that they are the expression of the abandonat desperately trying to cling to its historical strategy when the core, so much worshipped by them, exhibits sign after sign of being in relative decline. The constant call for help from the core, that can be heard in the streets of São Paulo, and that has already been heard in Moscow during the 'pussy riot revolution', in Istanbul, Cairo, Kiev and elsewhere, are perhaps not a signal of a renewed strength by the core, but instead of countries drifting away from the 'world-system as usual' to a new geopolitical positioning that scares the abandonat more than anything else.

Thus, semiperiphery is a 'breeding ground' for the concrete expression of psychological tensions in the world-system. It is the place where the 'tectonic plates' of world-systems clash. As it happens with the real side of that analogy, also here 'earthquakes' happen, with all its unpredictable, uncontrollable and irresistible release of accumulated energy.

4.4 Unconscious aspects of geoculture: Bounded complexity and radical freedom

The unconscious, as described by Freud, has a good claim of being the most influential non-technological discovery for the last two hundred years. But such concept has never been important in the field of world-system analysis, even if 'structures of knowledge', 'culture', 'geoculture' and related subjects are established concepts in the field. That is a lost opportunity. The connections between human psychology and political economy are numerous and extremely influential. Marxism has explored a number of those, be it 'commodity fetishism', 'alienation' or 'emancipation'. Years before Wallerstein, Adorno and Horkheimer, two founders of the Frankfurt School, have already analyzed the contradictions of the industrial civilization paying special attention to the role of culture (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002). Another member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, has also explored those frontiers, for instance through his concept of 'repressive desublimation' as a very efficient tool for domination (Marcuse 1994). Althusser, with his investigation of the ideological state apparatus (Althusser 1970) and Lacanian analysis of politics and ideology (*e.g.*, Lacan 1991; Stavrakakis 1999; Žižek 1989, 1997) also offer good examples of how an unconscious-informed analysis of geoculture could bring new developments to world-systems analysis.

Besides the 'Freudian' unconscious, we can talk today of a 'neuroscientific unconscious'. Kahneman, Tversky and others have studied the ingrained biases and irrational decision-making processes that humans share as a species, a characteristic that is distributed across the species as many other inherited traits (*e.g.*, Kahneman *et al.* 1993; Kahneman 2011; Santos and Rosati 2015). Interestingly, it has been shown that some of those ingrained biases can be found also in other primate species. Working with rhesus monkeys, Blanchard and colleagues (2014), concluded that 'like humans, rhesus monkeys appear to overweight the peak and end point of an episode. In this way, the heuristics that humans use to think about and evaluate the past appear to be shared by other nonhuman primates as well'. So, we can point here for a distinction between a 'biological' ('Kahnemanian') unconscious and a 'biographical' ('Freudian') unconscious. Both of them can be interesting for the world-systems analysis.

Two examples of the potential for unconscious-informed research in world-systems analysis: 'bounded complexity' and 'radical freedom'. By bounded complexity I refer to the fact that the unconscious structure of the human mind, when expressed by groups, creates patterns of behavior that are, perhaps, behind repeated historical cycles in the history of human groups. The symbolic subsystem of a world-system, therefore, if complex, has a natural break in the amount of complexity that can be produced: the fact that unconscious drivers of human behavior follow patterns that cannot be overcome. Otherwise neither psychoanalysis nor the neuroscience of the unconscious would be possible. The other side of that coin is 'radical freedom'. No amount of coercion or manipulation can completely determine human reactions. Even when subjects are willing to collaborate, those unconscious drivers will eventually unleash individual behaviors that break the most solid of the political orders, and that will then 'contaminate' other people. Would those unconscious drivers be part of the answer to Jones' question, pointed by Wallerstein?

The vital question... is how did a world of static expansion give way to one of intensive growth? (Jones 1988: 31; Wallerstein 1992: 565).

4.5. Asynchronous evolution of the two subsystems: Implications

One of the most interesting aspects of the two subsystems hypothesis is the asynchrony between them in the TimeSpace. Since they are partially autonomous, they follow relatively independent paths, if constantly informed by each other. Why is it relevant? Well, it gives, potentially, a basis for dissimilar developments in originally similar situations. It creates a theoretical basis for the wild variation of collective responses in different points of a world-system to very similar material conditions. Moreover, one subsystem can survive the other, something that can be dramatic in transitions. Nazism, in that sense, can be understood as the result of a surviving German mindset that had been working

towards the conquest of geopolitical hegemony, but a mindset that after the First World War was absolutely disconnected from the material reality of a defeated power that Germany was. A mindset deprived of any real possibility of turning into the kind of 'traditional' hegemonic nation, like Britain was, turned then, vicariously, to the attempt of building a world-empire, as described by Wallerstein (2003b: 184–201). That world-empire, the Nazi Reich, then, is an example of asynchrony between the two subsystems.

And which of the current 'strange phenomena' happening in the core of the world-system are themselves examples of a symbolic subsystem surviving its material counterpart?

5. Conclusion

Geoculture is important. Geoculture is missing in action. In this paper I presented a new approach to the concept of geoculture, since I believe that such useful concept must be further developed, especially in times of systemic bifurcation when small inputs can determine huge outputs, not all of them desirable. Many among those small inputs will derive not from carefully planned action by major players, but by spontaneous action from below, often caused by psychological reactions of people that feel lost in the fog of the collapse of the world-systemic symbolic order around them. Understanding and exploring the symbolic subsystem of the world-system can open new doors to world-system analysis, doors that can help our paradigm to be even more helpful to scholars and activists during our now already obviously extreme times.

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