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"Whether it be true of historians in general I shall not attempt to judge, but in this particular case the tendency has been...to take 'capitalism' as an integral concrete phenomenon;... its 'nature' is not in question but only its antecedents or 'causes.' But it is seldom possible for a 'historical' method in this sense to operate without 'sociological' preconceptions."

—[Talcott Parsons](#)

BRINGING IN TRIBE: BEYOND A STATE/CLASS PARADIGM

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Comparative history as a field of scholarship and a method of inquiry has paid particular attention to predominantly class-based societies where social class has historically been considered as the major divide. This is the case in the research of scholars who have considered a broad spectrum of macrostructural issues, such as Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, Charles Tilly, and Ann Orloff, even though they have differed markedly in their interpretation of the relationship between state and class. In political sociology and comparative history, social class understandably has occupied a privileged position in debates on the proper basis for explaining politics and the development of states. There is a range of societies, however, in which the complex, reciprocal and varied relationships between state and society cannot be fruitfully studied in terms of the state/class paradigm alone, whatever its particular emphasis.

The analysis of several non-Western societies requires that we bring the concept of tribe or kin-based solidarities to center stage. Much remains to be understood about the development of societies where kinship historically has served as a fundamental mechanism of social integration and as a basis for social conflict. I refer to these societies as "kin-based" and propose that we include "kin-based solidarities" as a key concept in the study of long term trajectories and in structural approaches to politics, state formation and state disintegration.

Examples of kin-based societies are the Maghrib (or North Africa), the rest of the Islamic Middle East, and Central Asia in different periods of their history. One could include as well parts of China at least until the Revolution. I focus especially on the Maghrib in this discussion, which also has implications for the Middle East as a whole. A key feature of social organization in the history of the Maghrib has been the centrality of the patrilineage and its extension variously referred to as clans, kin groupings or tribes, in social and economic life. A related feature has been the major role played by such groupings in politics. Although classes certainly developed in the Maghrib, the kin groupings exercised a major influence on the process of state formation, which strongly affected policy outcomes on a wide range of issues.

Anthropologists as well known as Berque (1955) in France, Gellner (1969) in Britain, and Geertz (1971) in the US have long discussed the significance of kin groupings in the Maghrib. Historians have shown the role of tribal groups in sustaining or challenging rulership and in mounting anticolonial resistance in the history of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (Clancy-Smith 1994; Le Gall and Perkins 1997). Scholars have also called attention to the importance of tribes as social and political units in other Middle Eastern countries (Eickelman 1998; Shryock 1997; Dresch 1989).

One complication with the use of the term tribe, in contrast to social class which is more or less commonly understood in the social sciences, is that "tribe" resonates differently in different disciplines, in different parts of the world and in different historical periods. Indeed, it has not been part of the vocabulary of mainstream sociology and political science. One alternative is to use the terminology of each local community. Although this might be appropriate for single village and sometimes single country studies, it poses difficulties for comparativists who require concepts that retain their meaning across cases. Conceptualization of tribe should therefore be broad enough to encompass the range of settings one is studying.

In reference to the Maghrib, by tribe I mean primarily "a political entity bound by shared conceptions of common patrilineal kinship that serves as a basis for collective action" (Charrad forthcoming a). Equally valid terms for the Maghrib include patrilineages, kin-based social formations, or kin groupings. Another problem with the term "tribe" is that it sounds archaic, especially to a Western ear, a relic from a distant past, rather than a modern socio-political entity. In fact, kin-based solidarities and tribal loyalties are far from archaic. They have served as a basis for political action in the postcolonial period of state formation following the wave of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century. They continue to do so today in many parts of the world.

In my own work, a focus on state/tribe relations has been useful in shedding light on the formation of postcolonial states in the Maghrib and their policies, especially in regard to women's rights and family law (Charrad forthcoming a; forthcoming b; and 1997). In the Islamic world, family law, also called "law of personal status," concerns basic issues of personhood and has been a highly contested arena. Historically throughout the Maghrib, extended patrilineages, or tribes, with membership extending into the thousands, performed economic and political functions. In the absence of a strong centralized state in the precolonial period, lineages were major actors regulating the life of local communities. Precolonial Maghribi states included in varying combinations elements of rational-legal bureaucracy and patrimonial rulers challenged by tribal formations acting as corporate groups and making claims on power. Precolonial states had some resemblance to the early modern European states studied by Julia Adams in that they too were "patchworks of power" (Adams 1997:4; and 1994). French colonization only brought a partial shift to bureaucratic rule and, in some cases, even intensified tribal power in local areas. As a result of historically specific developments, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco reached independence from colonial rule in the midtwentieth century with markedly different relationships between the state and political forces anchored in tribal kin-based formations.

In my research I found that different relationships between state and tribe shaped the policy of the postcolonial state on women's rights and family law in different ways. In Tunisia, where the power base of the postcolonial state was independent of tribes and lineages, a liberal policy on family law greatly expanded women's rights. In Morocco by contrast, the postcolonial state, which developed in alliance with tribes, promptly promulgated a conservative family law favorable to lineages and unfavorable to women. In Algeria, the government was in partial alliance with forces anchored in kin-based formations and unable to resolve internal divisions. Algerian law was caught in prolonged gridlock until a conservative legal code was eventually adopted.

While political developments in the Islamic world are often ascribed to religious culture, I suggest that we can understand much of what has happened by reference to a history of kin-based organization. Neither culture nor class nor state structures in themselves are sufficient to account for the varied forms of political development in the Middle East. Islamic culture, which has pervaded the Middle East, cannot explain variations over time and across countries. Cultural studies on the Middle East, for all their breakthroughs, often reduce the study of politics to an analysis of discourse about politics by Islamic thinkers. They overlook the importance of coalitions among -- and struggles between -- social forces with different and at times conflicting interpretations of Islam. As elsewhere, states and politics in the Middle East are shaped by contests for power among multiple contenders who find their base in social groups organized along varied and changing lines. Kin-based solidarities and tribal social formations are among the significant social forces. The sometimes class-based, sometimes kin-based, sometimes mixed politics of the area should be studied with a set of conceptual tools appropriate to so complex a social reality. A rapprochement with history and anthropology promises to help direct attention to the role of kin-based solidarities in politics. Bringing in tribe as a central unit of analysis, and including a state/tribe paradigm in existing frames of reference, should contribute to the continuing development of an internationally informed comparative history.

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COMPARING HEGEMONIC TRANSITIONS

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Recent contributions to the *Comparative and Historical Sociology* newsletter have called for a rethinking of the field's core concepts, especially the analytical centrality of the state. David Stark, in a Fall 1998 contribution entitled "New Social Forms in World Society: Beyond State and Class" worries that unless we rethink core concepts such as sovereignty and territoriality, "we will approach our own *fin de siecle* burdened by the legacy of social theory from the previous century's turn."

Indeed, the sense that we are living in a fundamentally transformed social world is widespread, but there is no agreement on what has actually changed, much less on how to understand these changes or where we are headed. Stark himself points out that many of the Section's "historically minded sociologists" will question whether some of the things taken to be "new" are as unprecedented as they first seem. Thus, for example, there is a lively debate as to whether the phenomena associated with "globalization" are really new, or whether they date from the nineteenth century, or the sixteenth century or even earlier. As Stark implies, to ask *and* answer such questions requires drawing on the comparative *and* historical strengths of our sub-discipline.

Thus, in order to shed light on the direction and meaning of contemporary global transformations, a first necessary step is to isolate what is really "new" in the contemporary scene from phenomena that are constant or recurrent. We can only do this by comparing current global dynamics with those in past periods of fundamental systemic reorganization. The most common (explicit or implicit) comparison people seem to be making is between the present state of the world and the decades following the Second World War—the so-called Golden Age of capitalism and US world power. This comparison gives the (correct) impression of a fundamental shift—in relations among states, between states and capital, and between states/capital and labor. Most especially, we sense a shift from a period of relatively predictable stability to a period of dizzying and unpredictable instability. This comparison alone may, however, be misleading. In addition, we would do well to compare the present, not just to periods of relative stability, but to more analogous periods of instability/crisis/reorganization of the modern world.

This is the goal of our recently completed research (see Arrighi and Silver et al, *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, Minnesota, 1999), where we argue that we are in the midst of profound systemic change—a fundamental crisis of the world order instituted under U.S. leadership in the postwar period (i.e., of U.S. world hegemony). Moreover, we argue that an enlightening comparison can be drawn with two analogous periods of fundamental systemic transformation in the modern world—the transition from Dutch to British world hegemony in the eighteenth century and the transition from British to U.S. world hegemony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

We compare the *sequences of events* that describe the *process* through which past crises of world hegemony were overcome. To what extent were they similar/different? What might these experiences have to tell us about ongoing global transformations? On a very general level, we describe a cycle moving from hegemony to crisis/breakdown and back to hegemony. But on a more substantive level, we see these sequences not as simple repeats of a cycle, but as describing a long-term historical evolution, as each new hegemon fundamentally reorganized global social relations in order to overcome the limits of the previous world order.

Needless to say, the complexity of the object of analysis presented a design challenge for the research. The solution to the problem of complexity followed by both of the two main variants of world-systems analysis—the political-economy version most associated with Immanuel Wallerstein and the cultural-institutional version most associated with John Meyer—is to conceptualize a systemic totality with its own "encompassing" logic. With this conceptualization, the subunits as independent actors can be largely ignored because their behavior is primarily seen as a product of their differential location within the overarching totality. The larger system has a steamroller-like quality, transforming social relations at the local level along an expected path. The advantage of this strategy (apart from reducing complexity) is that it highlights the very real limits that the totality imposes on the range of possible action open to local actors.

But the disadvantage of this strategy is that it bans from the analysis what have been the actual sources of transformation (as opposed to reproduction) of the system over time. For Wallerstein this problem is sidestepped by assuming a fundamental unity in the organizational logic of the modern world system since its inception in the sixteenth century. For Meyer, it is largely elided by focusing on unidirectional changes in recent decades. In both cases, the possibility of local leadership or resistance that significantly impact on the operation of the larger system itself is excluded *a priori*.

Because of this, we were obliged to find a different solution to the problem of complexity presented by studying the system as a whole over long periods of time. That is, we suspected that leadership and resistance originating in the subunits were crucial to understanding the processes of transformation *of the world system itself*. Our solution was to reduce complexity by focusing successively on different "angles of vision". Each chapter comprises a historical narrative through which we reconstruct (and compare), from a single angle of vision, the sequence of events that define each of the past two periods of transition. Thus, four chapters successively highlight (1) geopolitics and high finance, (2) business enterprises, (3) social cohesion and conflict, and (4) the intercivilizational balance of power between the West and non-West. The conclusion attempts to draw together the patterns as seen from each of the separate angles in order to say something about the dynamics of present transformations.

Rather than try to offer a complete summary of the results of the research, I will focus the remainder of this contribution on a few of the patterns of recurrence and evolution uncovered from the social cohesion and conflict angle, and their implications for understanding ongoing transformations.

Among the contemporary processes that are frequently pointed to as

evidence of a major global transformation is the breakdown of established social compacts, and the rapid and unseemly polarization of wealth within and between countries. Both these trends have been associated with a massive shift of investments away from trade/production to financial deals and speculation. Seen from the wealthy countries of the West, the most notable change is the breakdown of the "mass consumption" social compacts between labor, capital and the state (e.g., the shrinking of the welfare state and the elimination of secure employment in mass production factories.) Seen from the poor countries of the South, the most striking change has been the collapse of the "developmentalist" compact between North and South —the promise that all countries could/would pass through the "stages of growth" necessary to catch up with the wealth standards of the U.S. Beginning with the debt crisis of the 1980's, populist social contracts in the South were abrogated (e.g., shrinking the state, eliminating subsidies and secure employment) as structural adjustment programs promoted solvency (paying back the debts to international banks) over development.

Comparison with past hegemonic transitions sheds light on these current transformations. For we found a recurrent sequence whereby the expansions in trade/production that characterized the hegemonic phases eventually reached their limits, and were followed by the "financialization" of capitalism. As in the present period, "financialization" was associated with a growing polarization of wealth that directly and indirectly undermined established social compacts upon which relative social peace had been based. In previous transitions, financialization and polarization were preludes to a "vicious circle" in which mounting social conflict interacted with intensifying interstate competition and warfare, leading to periods of "systemic chaos". These "vicious circles" were overcome, and new hegemonies fully established, only when a new leading state was able to reorganize the system in such a way as to meet at least some of the demands thrown up by the social movements.

Whether the current trends are a prelude to an analogous period of "systemic chaos" is an obvious question. But I leave it aside here except to note that even some of the most prominent beneficiaries of the globalization of financial markets (e.g., George Soros) are expressing concerns that the massive social dislocations being wrought by the resurgence of *laissez-faire* are producing a mounting backlash. Unless new institutional forms of global regulation are established (appropriate to the expanded global division of labor), they worry that a disaster similar to the one described by Karl Polanyi for the early twentieth century is in store for the early twenty-first century.

Patterns in the past hegemonic transitions may also have something to say about the likely form and content of future social conflict. The main force of the rebellions in past hegemonic transitions came from new social actors created or strengthened in the course of the expansion of trade/production in the previous hegemonic phase. Thus, for example, revolts and revolutions by colonial settlers, but also slave populations of the Americas (most notably, Haiti) played a key role in the sequence of rebellions and revolutions that characterized the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century transition to British hegemony. Likewise, in the transition to US hegemony, groups that had been created and strengthened in the course of the British-led expansion were pivotal to the wave of rebellions—the mass production working classes in the North, western educated elites and export production workers in the South. The

demands arising from the labor and national liberation movements were met in a reorganized postwar order by the promises of "mass consumption" and "development"—solutions which are themselves in crisis, and thereby partly define the crisis of US hegemony.

What are the new social forces that are being created and strengthened in the contemporary world? Very briefly, I can suggest two places to look: the movement of women and immigrants into the labor forces in the North; and the rapid proletarianization (sweeping up both women and men) in the South—or what Hobsbawm has labeled "the death of the peasantry". The former movement has already led to an increase in social conflict along new lines with various forms of feminism, multiculturalism, as well as backlashes against them; and conflict along these lines shows signs of increasing. And while the mass production working class may be withering away as a social force in the North, the rapid growth of industrial working classes in the South (especially in East Asia, and most especially in China) is producing new labor movements. Based on our comparative analysis of past transitions, there is ample reason to suspect that these struggles will be fundamental in shaping the social origins of world hegemony in the twenty-first century.

This brings us back to the role of local agencies in world-systemic transformations. The revolutionary challenges thrown up by local actors played a key role in shaping the kind of world order established by each new hegemon. But the agency of the new leading state (shaped by its own history) was also critical in determining the precise nature of the solution. In the case of U.S. hegemony, for example, U.S. leaders saw the world through the prism of their recent New Deal experience and fashioned a reformist global New Deal in response to the revolutionary challenges rocking the world. Our comparative analysis of past hegemonic transitions thus suggests that some combination of local resistance and local experience with governance will shape the contours of the twenty-first century world. More generally, it suggests that deepening our understanding of the present will require comparative and historical analyses that keep in sharp focus both the systemic constraints imposed on local actors by the totality, and the role of local-level agency in shaping the ongoing evolution of that totality.

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