

WORLD-SYSTEM HOLISM AND
COLONIAL BRAZILIAN
AGRICULTURE:
A Critical Case Analysis*

John R. Hall
University of Missouri at Columbia

Within the last two decades, theories about world systems have played a decisive role in shifting the boundaries of discourse on long-term social change. The triumph of world-system analysis was nearly a “bloodless coup”: few scholars were terribly anxious to defend the theoretical bastion of modernization theory that it supplanted; at best they reinterpreted the old theory within the new framework (for example, Rostow, 1975, 1978; Parsons 1977, 213; Moore 1979).

Because the world-system perspective has become so predominant and because it holds such intellectual and practical promise, there is a strong need to examine rigorously its assumptions and assertions. The work of Immanuel Wallerstein already has been subjected to some searching critiques, notably those by Skocpol (1977), Brenner (1977), Aronowitz (1981), and Chirot and Hall (1982). These authors helped clarify the world-system perspective as a theoretical genre by identifying its presuppositions and locating Wallerstein’s particular explanation of the emergence of modern capitalism among an array of such theories. But these theoretical critiques leave open the question of the perspective’s adequacy for substantive historical explanation. The present essay will explore a key assumption of world-system analysis about “systemic holism” on a more focused empirical basis by examining a particular historical complex of development—the origins and character of colonial agriculture in Brazil. Tracing the way in which the holistic approach within the world-system perspective structures the explanation of par-

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ticular historical phenomena will provide a means to assess the validity of the holistic assumption as a basis for the world-system perspective.

In the case of Brazilian colonial agriculture, it will be argued that in contrast to the world-system account, Brazilian social formation can be explained on a more general basis than the functional relationship of production to capitalist accumulation in a world economy. My argument is based on the premise that this social formation involves a patrimonial capitalism that existed in empires predating the emergence of the capitalist world economy. Thus, the phenomenon of underdevelopment that world-system analysts typically attribute to the dynamics of a world economy is more widespread in its occurrence than world-system theory would suggest. Moreover, the persistence of a more ancient patrimonial capitalism in certain cases of modern capitalist colonial settlement must alter somewhat both the understanding of the causal channels by which the modern world economy emerged and theories of the relationship between local forms of production and the world economy. The substantive findings of this study call into question any conceptualization of the world economy that involves assumptions of "systemic holism" and suggest that such assumptions should be abandoned in favor of viewing the world economy as a totality of more loosely coupled and relatively autonomous phenomena that are differentially connected through diverse moments of synchronization and conjuncture.

HOLISTIC ASSUMPTIONS WITHIN THE WORLD-SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

As is well known, the theoretical innovation of the world-system perspective is not directed so much toward understanding the internal dynamics of developed nation-states as it is toward clarifying the relation of this developed "core" of the world economy to other areas of the world. The cornerstone of this analysis is the explanation of the development of nation-states at the core of the world economy, the relative "underdevelopment" of peripheral societies, and the "dependent development" (Evans 1979) of semiperipheral societies on the basis of their patterns of trade with one another. From this perspective, underdeveloped countries are not simply "backward"; rather, they have developed along lines of underdevelopment. Thus, the general character of production in regions of the world that are incorporated into the world economy through trade is held to be determined by their functional relations to the world process of capital accumulation. The modern world system, then, is to be understood via an assumption of holism, whereby the totality defines the nature of the parts as well as their relations to that totality.

It must be recognized that these ideas did not emerge full-blown as a response to developmentalism and modernization theory, nor do they now represent a unified body of thought devoid of theoretical con-

trovery. The intellectual origins of the world-system perspective can be traced to early bourgeois and Marxist work on imperialism, to Paul Baran's (1957) studies of international political economy, and to a variety of Latin American scholars' theories of dependency. The latter range from the dual-economy structuralism represented in the analyses of the U.N. Economic Commission on Latin America (ECLA) and Celso Furtado (1963), through the historicist approach of Fernando Cardoso, to the neo-Marxist analyses of Theotonio dos Santos and Andre Gunder Frank (O'Brien 1975). Ehrensaft has suggested that Frank's apt phrase, "the development of underdevelopment," marks a key synthesis between the neo-Marxist analysis of Baran and the core-periphery analysis of ECLA (1976, 61).

More recently, Frank has attempted "to transcend the 'dependence' approach, but without yet abandoning it or the focus on underdevelopment, and to proceed on towards the integration of dependence and underdevelopment within the world process of accumulation" (1979, xiii). Others such as Emmanuel (1972) and Amin (1974) have deepened discourse on the causes and processes of underdevelopment and accumulation in a way that underscores the continuing intellectual struggles about the nature of the capitalist world economy (see also Mandle 1980).

But these struggles have occurred within the framework of a broadly shared intellectual perspective.¹ Immanuel Wallerstein specifically uses the term *world-system perspective* to encompass the whole range of critiques of the developmentalist perspective, from ECLA to Baran, Frank, and his own (1979, 53–54). According to Wallerstein, it is not liberalism versus Marxism that distinguishes one perspective from another. Instead, the innovation of the world-system perspective is that it is "based on the assumption, explicitly or implicitly, that the modern world comprises a single capitalist world-economy," defined by a single international division of labor. Throughout his work, Wallerstein argues for an assumption of systemic unity. For example, in his critiques of dual-economy theories, rather than positing separate laws and dynamics for separate, but interconnected, economies, Wallerstein asserts the need to conceptualize "one capitalist economic system with different *sectors* performing different functions" (1979, 68, emphasis in original). He goes on to say that there is a need to recognize "the unicity of the system." These kinds of assertions, which run throughout Wallerstein's writings, led Bach (1980) to describe the world-system perspective as based on a conceptualization of the capitalist world economy as a systemic "spatio-temporal whole."

Clearly, the intellectual origins of the world-system perspective are manifold. Some scholars such as Mukherjee (1980), Chase-Dunn (1980), and Ernest Mandel (1980, 53–54) question the conceptualization

of the capitalist world economy as a single, unified system with a holistic developmental logic. Moreover, empirical studies within the perspective are diverse and not always tied to assumptions of holism. But these deviations underscore the predominance of the holistic view. Wallerstein is undoubtedly the foremost theorist of the world-system perspective today, and his conceptualization must be regarded as widely influential. Moreover, his assumptions about the unicity of the world economy as a system are not casual or polemical assumptions; they constitute an attempt to build "strong theory" through the delineation of a basic intellectual position. As such, they deserve close scrutiny to determine their potentialities and limitations for discourse on world political economy.

It is my position that the approach within the world-system perspective that conceptualizes the capitalist world economy as a holistic, unified system too narrowly circumscribes the analysis of peripheral societies because it involves a sort of revisionist Hegelian essentialism. The holistic approach substitutes for the Hegelian *geist* a material "essence"—a capitalist world economy. The parts of the world economy are defined by their relation to the whole, and the whole is located on an unfolding trajectory that is teleologically determined by the becoming of the world economy as a totality. This approach thereby obscures the complexity of core-peripheral relations, the significance of social and cultural differences in political-economic formations, and the nature of the emergence and development of modern capitalism itself. In short, the holistic approach tends to presuppose the nature of phenomena that rightfully should be its central objects of study.

This line of criticism could be elaborated on a purely theoretical basis, but such an argument would provide little concrete understanding of the approach's implications for historical analysis. A more fruitful way to proceed is to consider a substantive explanation within the world-system perspective. If the explanation chosen validly represents the basic elements of the holistic approach to the world-system perspective, then a critique of the holistic world-system elements applies, other things being equal, to the holistic approach in general. If the criticisms raised in the substantive analysis prove warranted, they will not deny the general explanatory utility of the world-system perspective, but they will suggest a need to abandon "systemic holism" as a basis for its conceptualization of history.

THE CHOICE OF A PROBLEM: ANDRÉ GUNDER FRANK, IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, AND COLONIAL AGRICULTURE IN BRAZIL

A strong case for the validity of a substantive critique as a basis for revision of theoretical assumptions can be made only if the critique comes to grips with a central, representative, and strongly held historical

analysis involving holistic assumptions within the world-system perspective. For this reason, I have chosen to consider treatments of the colonization and the economic development of agriculture in Brazil by André Gunder Frank (1969, 143–277) and Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980). There were several reasons for this choice. In the first place, Frank's and Wallerstein's discussions of Brazil's economic development draw heavily on the central motifs of the world-system perspective under consideration here, namely, emphasis on capitalism as defined by the emergence of a world market and on systemic holism as constituted by the world economy. Second, although Frank's initial discussion of Brazil antedates Wallerstein's synthesis by a decade, it is nevertheless a formulation that is defended and elaborated specifically with respect to Brazil and in more general terms by both Frank (1979) and Wallerstein (1974, 126–27 *passim*; 1979, 4, 17, 119 *passim*; 1980; 1981). Finally, the Portuguese colonization in South America and Brazil's subsequent agricultural economic development occurred in a region where no highly developed world empires or world economies existed prior to European colonization. Indigenous precolonial social formations in the region of contemporary Brazil can best be understood as "mini-systems" marked by complete divisions of labor within single cultural frameworks (Wallerstein 1979, 5). Thus, the articulation of European colonialism with the peripheral region was more straightforwardly dictated by colonial interests than in other areas of colonial expansion, such as New Spain, India, and the Orient. Brazil therefore should represent a relatively clear-cut example of holistic world-market and colonial domination. For all of these reasons, the investigation of Brazil's colonization and economic development represents a strong test of the present critique of holistic assumptions within the world-system perspective.

THE HOLISTIC MODEL OF BRAZILIAN COLONIAL AGRICULTURE

The position of Frank and Wallerstein on capitalism and "backwardness" in certain agricultural regions of Brazil—notably the Northeast—can be stated most concisely in terms of Marx's classic formulation of the concept of *mode of production*. This concept distinguishes the forces of production (how production is organized technically and socially) from the relations of production (how appropriation of surplus value occurs).² In these terms, the character of Brazilian agriculture may be understood by considering four separate elements: the forces of production in subsistence activities, the forces of production in commodity agriculture, the "internal" relations of production (the appropriation of surplus within units of production), and the "external" relations of production (the channels and institutions of surplus appropriation and accumulation beyond productive units, if such exist).

Both Frank and Wallerstein (1974, 350) argue that it is ultimately the external relations of production that structure the other elements of the mode of production. In Brazil these relations are capitalist commodity relations from the beginnings of Portuguese colonization, and it is these relations that determine the nature of the rural Brazilian social formation. For Wallerstein, the emergence of the capitalist world economy required a flow of surplus based upon alternative modes of organizing labor in the various zones of enterprise: the forms of local forces of production are prescribed by their functional relation to the world process of economic accumulation (1974, 87).

Frank spells out the argument about subsistence production. He recognizes that Brazilian peasants (and sometimes slaves) have engaged in subsistence agriculture for their own consumption. But where such subsistence activities exist, they are “commercially determined because they are residual to commercial agriculture. They are residual in every way imaginable—residual land, residual finance, residual labor, residual distribution, residual income, residual everything” (1969, 258). For Frank, the subsistence sector “acts as a sort of shock absorber which partially insulates, protects and stabilizes the entire [capitalist] agricultural economy” (1969, 259). It sustains a reserve army of labor, a noncapitalized base for the reproduction and welfare maintenance of labor, and a reserve of land that can be shifted from subsistence to commodity production, depending on market conditions. Subsistence activities are a necessary element of the large-scale producer’s appropriation of surplus: peasants who feed themselves need less in the way of other forms of remuneration, and the profits of those who organize commodity production are thereby increased (Wallerstein 1980, 174).

Concerning Brazilian commodity production, Frank argues that “whatever institutional forms were transplanted or grew up in the New World, their content inevitably was mercantilist- or capitalist-determined” (1969, 244). Brazilian commodity agriculture has been organized in various instances via plantation slavery and other forms of unpaid forced labor in demesnil production, by sharecropping, tenant farming, land rental and sale for single commodity production, and through capitalist production using wage labor. Frank (1969, 151) would readily agree that some of these social organizations of production seem more “feudal” than others (1969, 151). But this distinction means nothing; if it did, Frank notes, it would be tantamount to regarding noncash nexus relations of certain surviving forces of production as noncapitalist “by definition” (1969, 234). Wallerstein suggests that vacillations between more capitalistic and “feudalistic” organization of commodity production may be regarded instead as being linked to long-term shifts in the expansion and contraction of the world economy (1980, 147–48). For Frank, the concepts of feudalism and capitalism have to be understood “to refer to

what is really central, the economic and social *system* and its structure itself, rather than applying them also to all sorts of supposedly associated features" (1969, 239, emphasis in original). Viewed in this light, it is the relations of production that determine the organization of commodity agriculture. Simply stated, there is more than one way for capitalists to exploit laborers. "Which of these forms of the exploitative relationship, or their combinations, will obtain in a given case depends above all on the interests of the owner. And these in turn are determined by the capitalist economy of which he is a part" (Frank 1969, 265). In Frank's and Wallerstein's discussions, when the forces of both subsistence and commodity production are analyzed, their structure inevitably is found to hinge on the relations of production by which surplus is appropriated.

The more fundamental question then becomes: are the relations of production themselves capitalist or not? In the holistic approach to world-system analysis, the answer is anticipated already in what has been said about the organization of forces of production. Embedded in each of the forms of production are various mechanisms of surplus appropriation by owners of land and organizers of labor. Capitalist surplus appropriation based on wage labor is an obvious example. But even various noncash nexus relations involve a calculated capitalist exploitation of slaves and peasants—not only in production, but in consumption as well (Furtado 1963). Thus, the assertion that "there is only 'one' capitalism but several forms of owner-worker relations" (Frank 1969, 266) is no reason to seek to explain the differences via other economic structures. Capitalism is uneven in its development, it operates in a variety of circumstances, and therefore its variations in principle can be explained within a capitalist structure of determination. Indeed, the forms of labor organization other than wage labor are necessary to the functioning of capitalism (Wallerstein 1974, 87).

The ultimate capitalist determination is to be found in the broader surplus appropriation beyond the units of production. The striking difference between feudalism and capitalism turns not on the shape of agricultural production, but on the uses to which surplus from that production is put. In these terms, feudalism would involve appropriation of surplus in a "closed system, or one which is only weakly linked with the world beyond" (Frank 1969, 239, emphasis in original). Agricultural production in Brazil does not fit this model. Although certain units of production may seem to have "feudal" features of labor organization and internal surplus appropriation, the owners are oriented ultimately toward rational action in the world market, and their actions "on the farm" are constrained by their situations in this shifting market.

In a consistent way, Frank's and Wallerstein's treatments of Brazilian agricultural organization as part of the emerging capitalist world economy involve the assumption of "systemic holism" that is predomi-

nant within the world-system perspective: the capitalist world economy is regarded as having a single division of labor in which domination of the parts of the system occurs on the basis of their relations to the processes defined at the level of the system as a whole. Frank consistently traces lines of determination in one direction only, from the whole to the part, from the capitalist world economy to the organization of commodity and subsistence production. Wallerstein acknowledges that precolonial social formations have a legacy, but they simply become conditions under which capitalists choose alternative strategies that maximize surplus appropriation (1980, 173). Neither Wallerstein (1979, 68) nor Frank will agree to the existence of any relatively autonomous sectors of a dual economy. "This split-in-the-middle duality, which admits of a separate dynamic for separate sectors and denies a common dynamic to both of them together, negates the very basis and heart of Marxist theory and method. It necessarily prevents any adequate understanding of a single, total capitalist society" (Frank 1969, 241). The world-system perspective provides a clear, consistent, and steadfast position. What remains is to undertake a historiographic survey to determine whether the model of a unified, holistic world system provides an adequate framework for understanding the historical origins and development of the Brazilian colonial agricultural economy.

HISTORICAL ELEMENTS: THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL AGRICULTURE IN BRAZIL

The history of Portuguese agricultural colonization in South America has been reported widely, and there is general agreement about its overall character (Furtado 1963; Prado 1967; Boxer 1969; Castro 1966; Alden 1973; Lang 1979; as well as those works cited by Frank 1969 and Wallerstein 1974, 1980). The debate is not so much over facts, but over their interpretation, that is, whether what is reported fits the model of the capitalist world economy as a holistic system. Let us consider the question in some detail.

Portuguese colonization of Brazil started at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the king's strongest colonial commitments were to the maritime trade along the African coasts and in India. Given the Portuguese state's small size, it was already somewhat overextended at home and in its colonial commitments when it began to push to the west, first to Atlantic islands like the Madeiras (Duncan 1972), then to the northeast coast of South America (Dias 1967b). In its African coastal and Indian Ocean trade, Portugal was able to tie in with preexisting trade networks without engaging in direct production. In the absence of such conditions to the west, Portugal needed to engage in a colonization that could produce goods for export. At the time, however, Portugal was

undergoing a labor shortage at home, where Moorish slaves were being deployed on a growing scale (Prado 1967, 19). Moreover, because Portugal's resources already were committed to other world arenas, the colonization to the west could not be allowed to encumber state finances.

The Brazilian colonization was based on the *sesmario*, a grant by the king to a *donatário* of the lifetime right to settle and defend a *captaincy*, or bounded piece of land. With the *sesmario* came rights to enslave natives, to create towns, to monopolize the development of collective production facilities (like mills), to share in the profits from various export activities, and to exercise civil jurisdiction in most matters. A *donatário* could deed or rent land to (typically wealthy) settlers through the *sesmaria*—a form of land distribution intended to populate the territory with free settlers whose tenancy was conditional on their efforts to improve and develop the land. The terms of a *sesmario* were qualified by a *foral*, which legally asserted the king's ultimate jurisdiction and established certain mutual obligations of the donatary captain and the inhabitants, under the king's rule (Johnson 1972).

Some of those who became *donatários* were of noble birth (Malowist, cited in Wallerstein 1974, 47); but other *donatários* had gained the capital sufficient for the undertaking from bureaucratic service to the state or from military careers in India (Marchant 1942). Because the king needed to promote colonization in a way that did not strain the state's coffers, the ability to finance a captaincy, however achieved, had to be a prime consideration. Thus, the wealthy *donatários* and settlers were not always of noble birth, and the king's actions did not strictly reinforce the Portuguese political order in the colony (Smith 1974).

Perhaps as Furtado has suggested, the king's main motive simply was to hold on to the land and hope for the discovery of gold or other precious materials (1963; see also Prado 1967, 28). Whatever the king's motives, the *donatários* were cast in a position where they had to recoup investments. To do so, beginning in the 1530s, they undertook to develop commodity agriculture by clearing land for their own sugarcane production, by granting *sesmarias* to other wealthy settlers (who in turn allocated land to cane growers), and by building *engenhos* (sugar mills) to process the production from their own and *sesmaria* plantations as well as that of cane growers (Schwartz 1973).

The *senhores de engenho* and their grantees attempted to enslave the Indians; but their efforts were short-lived and not very successful, partly due to the nature of the Indians' tribal cultures and their approach to agriculture (Schwartz 1978). Moreover, if resisting the colonists failed, the Indians of lowland South America (in contrast to their highland counterparts) could simply fade into the jungle and live beyond the direct domination of capitalist commodity agriculture (Hemming 1978, 92–96; Primov 1980; Bradby 1980).³ The Brazilian sugarcane planta-

tions—some 235 of them by 1628 (Verlinden 1970, 24)—thus came to depend in large part on imported African slave labor. Castro (1966, 81–82) and Gorender (1978, 113) argue that slavery in Brazil was in some sense feudalistic, or more precisely, seigniorial (Weber 1981, 51–64) because although agricultural production did not involve a closed economy, it could include subsistence production on the part of the slaves. Conditions of slavery themselves varied with the structure of landholding and production and shifted with changing economic conditions. In some cases, slaves obtained a semiserf status, paying in kind or in work for rights of tenancy (Furtado 1963). There were fluid lines of transition to other forms, for example, to debt bondage or to the status of nominally free peasants who remained the dependent clients of large landholders (Schwartz 1975; 1982; Russell-Wood 1982). Slavery persisted in a variety of arrangements as the principal form of labor organization on sugar, then coffee plantations; and even by the end of the colonial era at the beginning of the nineteenth century, about a third of Brazil's entire population is estimated to have been Negro slaves (Prado 1967, 138).

Through the nineteenth century and the abolition of slavery in 1888, plantation agriculture continued to be based on the land-tenure system and the technology established during the original Brazilian colonization. Prior to the 1880s, Brazilian cane processing remained primitive, even in the face of innovations in the Caribbean. It was this low-technology organization of a slave-based export economy, encouraged by the Portuguese policy of prohibiting local industry, that inhibited the development of either internal markets or industrialization in Brazil (Paim 1957; Novais 1973, 351). In the nineteenth century, British-initiated innovations in cane milling temporarily led to a split in ownership of agricultural production and industrial processing. But eventually the institutional relations centered on “senhores de engenho” reasserted themselves, albeit on a larger scale of *usina* plantations, which were vertically integrated operations centered on modern sugar mills (Diegues Junior 1959; Graham 1968). It was only during the Depression of the 1930s that landowners finally began to lose control of the sugarcane economy to state regulation of land tenure, production, and prices (Hutchinson 1959, 38).

Specific forms of plantation labor exploitation and agricultural organization notwithstanding, the whole sweep of Brazilian commodity agriculture has involved a capitalist orientation toward profitable exports. But at the onset of colonization, Portugal's trading bourgeoisie was in decline, in part because of persecution of Jews and “new Christians” (Jaguaribe 1968, 111). Some of the very earliest donatários were financed by Genoese and Flemish capital (Furtado 1963; Johnson 1972, 213); in one captaincy, lands eventually were given to a Flemish merchant-capitalist who established a successful agricultural enterprise (Marchant 1942,

508). From the beginning, the Portuguese acted as little more than maritime middlemen in the sugar trade: Jews and "new Christians" participated in Brazilian production and processing (Wiznitzer 1960); Italians were involved in the early postexport processing and refining; and in the latter part of the sixteenth century, this activity as well as financing, processing equipment supply, and trade were increasingly dominated by the Dutch, who often used Portuguese "front men." Portugal's high profits from the sugar trade began to decline after 1650, by which time the Dutch had "stolen" the technical know-how to further develop sugarcane plantation agriculture that was already established elsewhere (Boxer 1957, 143; Furtado 1963, 8–20; Diffie 1969; Edel 1969; Mintz 1977; see also Wallerstein 1980, 161ff.). Eventually, Brazil came under the trade domination of an old Portuguese ally, Britain, when the British transplanted the industrial revolution to Brazilian export agriculture in the nineteenth century (Manchester 1933; Maxwell 1968; Graham 1968; Sideri 1970).

The colonial settlement of Brazil and its subsequent development were clearly of a hybrid nature. Given both the capitalist motives of the wealthy settlers and the relation of the commodities produced to emergent European capitalism, it would be easy to conclude with Frank and Wallerstein that Brazilian colonization was thoroughly capitalist. But certain historical comparisons draw this account into question, while clarifying the character of one avenue of early modern capitalist development.

The Portuguese colonization of Brazil indisputably differed from European feudalism in two major respects. First, while European feudalism involved a "parcellization of sovereignty" that lacked an effective political center (Anderson 1974, 148), the Portuguese king maintained an absolutist claim to the territories that he distributed during the colonization of Brazil. Moreover, kingly claims tended to increase over time (Dutra 1973), and from the beginning, the king was the ultimate legal guarantor of settlers' rights. Second, the colonists of Brazil were engaged in commodity production and export trade that contrasted markedly with the economy of European feudalism.

The social organization of early colonial Brazilian settlement that established subsequent patterns of development was based neither on fiefs nor on the mutual obligations of fealty characteristic of occidental feudalism. What it really involved was a distribution of benefices—of land, limited but significant jurisdiction, and income-producing opportunities—on the part of a king who treated "unsettled" (hence non-feudal) territories as part of his own patrimonial domain. The king's interest lay in insuring that colonization, control, and development would remain under his direct administration. The grants were not based on notions of honor and fealty, but on the more political calcula-

tion that the donatário would be capable of loyally and effectively administering his captaincy. In general, any patrimonial ruler has an inherent interest in discouraging subinfeudation of his own domain, which contravenes his direct control over patrimony (Weber 1977, 1102). On this basis, donatários were proscribed from further subdividing their powers (if not their lands), and the sesmaria land grants thus approximated a form of social organization that Weber (1977, 260) termed "prebendal feudalism."

Frank is thus correct in one respect: Brazilian commodity agriculture indeed was not derived from occidental feudalism; the royal Portuguese grants instead took a form similar to earlier instances of state patrimony. At the time of Brazilian colonization, Portugal was already the sovereign of international sugar trade (Amaral 1958, 326); and the Brazilian form of *sesmaria* had served previously as the basis of Portuguese sugar production in the Madeira Islands (Johnson 1972). Verlinden (1970) traces this form back to similar Italian colonization concessions in the eastern Mediterranean, where Europeans first came in direct contact with the sugarcane cultivation brought to the region by Arabs some time after the decline of Rome (Akroyd 1967; Benvenuti 1970). The sugarcane produced through Venetian and Genoese colonization in the Levant was marketed as a commodity in the Mediterranean economy as early as the latter part of the eleventh century. The origins of the form of production employed in the context of the Brazilian patrimonial grants were not those of occidental feudalism: like the system of production that the Italians developed in their eleventh-century colonies, Brazilian production is reminiscent of colonial plantation agriculture during the Roman Empire (Johnson 1972, 214), which Weber suggests had its origins in earlier pharaonic domains in Egypt (1976, 318).

Colonial Brazilian plantation production is marked by the same alternative forms of labor organization that were employed in the Roman Empire, and the factors that determined the prevalence of one or another alternative seem to have been similar in the various instances from Rome to Brazil. The arguments are well established for the modern world economy. As Kay (1974) has shown, the form of external demand can structure the form of manorial (or hacienda) labor organization. Laclau (1971; see also Cardoso and Faletto 1969) agrees that external demand is a significant factor, but argues (against Frank) that predominance of an external market actually intensified "feudal" relations in certain Latin American cases.⁴

Trade interests of landowners appear to structure local social organization in various ways. As long as a cheap source of slaves exists, agricultural entrepreneurs can maintain an adequate labor supply through purchase. When a cheap source of slaves dries up, entrepreneurs may try to maintain a supply through reproduction, often with the

result of creating more "feudal" conditions of slave production (Anderson 1974). In the absence of slavery, landlords artificially create "overpopulation" through monopolization of land; thus labor coercion can hinge on the self-interests of peasants (see Mintz 1977). But the very existence of a peasantry depends on subsistence production, and the agricultural entrepreneurs who benefit from peasants' labor through monopolization of land at the same time make possible (and constrain) subsistence production (Forman 1975, 25). Ironically, then, the very interests that link patrimonial capitalists to an export economy also induce them to try to prevent the local emergence of markets in land, labor, and credit (Schwartz 1975, 150; see also Freidmann 1980, 163).

But these dynamics are not unique to the modern world economy. The balance between plantation monoculture and smallholder production for estate subsistence, and the alternative use of slaves, peasants under various arrangements of tenancy and sharecropping, and even free, hired labor were already considerations of production management during the era of the Roman Republic. Even in the ancient economies, they were issues likely to be resolved on such bases as skill of work required, potential damage to slaves from work (a capital input), cyclically fluctuating labor demands (which incurred high "overhead" if met by slaves), and so forth (Weber 1976, 316ff.; Jones 1956).

That the forms and dynamics of colonial Brazilian plantation production already had existed in Roman times is not simply fortuitous; rather, it reflects an explicit and persistent connection between state patrimonialism and colonial proprietorship. In an arrangement of mutual benefit, territorial occupation and "tax farming" for the state fall into the hands of large landholders who rationally organize production to derive as much private surplus from their prebends as possible (Weber 1981, 56–61). In this context, occidental feudalism actually may be regarded as a historical aberration from the forms of royal and republican patrimonialism found in the successive regimes of the ancient Mediterranean world—an aberration that developed inland on the European continent through uneasy accommodation between surviving Roman and German social, legal, and economic institutions (Weber 1976, 398ff.; Anderson 1974, 128ff.).⁵

On the other hand, the Portuguese colonization of Brazil represents a direct descent and amalgamation of key institutions of the Mediterranean economy—a replication of institutions of patrimonial benefices and plantation economy in a region ecologically suited to their deployment. In three major respects—the commodity (sugarcane), the forms and conditions of landholding, and the organization of forces of production—Brazil's original sixteenth-century colonial settlement followed patterns established centuries earlier in the Mediterranean.

Even the factor that Frank considers decisive in distinguishing

Brazilian commodity agriculture from feudalism—production for profit on the basis of exportation—does not set the Brazilian case apart from earlier Mediterranean production. In both the Roman Empire and the Brazilian export trade, the emergence of a true market was inhibited by state controls over trade (Novais 1967; Polanyi 1968, 19). But the quest for capitalist profit was an early feature of Roman plantation production, even though it was connected to a redistributive empire rather than to the price-making markets of a capitalist world economy (Weber 1976, 315ff.; Finley 1973, 58). That the Portuguese king supported similar capitalist endeavors should come as no surprise. As Weber argues, patrimonialism is a form that prospers on the basis of limited trade, while feudalism is distinctly antagonistic to it (1977, 1092); state trade monopolies can be found in numerous ancient societies, just as they persist today in patrimonial, state-socialist, and other societies. In general, patrimonialism causes a lack of predictability and calculability in trade, and this process tends to inhibit growth of trade; certainly, Portugal faced these and other problems of “monarchical capitalism” (Dias 1967a). But under certain conditions, namely the fiscal impetus to cultivate tax revenues and organize monopolies rationally, a transition may occur from the highly regulated profit opportunities of compulsory deliveries based on colonial license toward trade with relatively more free exchange (Weber 1977, 1094–95).⁶ The latter development would seem especially likely where large distances separate a patrimonial ruler from colonial grants. This situation existed with Portugal and Brazil, where the crown’s great difficulties in controlling smuggling fueled the shift from monopolization of trade and licensure of traders to a more flexible, rationalized tariff system (Diegues Junior 1950; Lapa 1968) and the formation of a joint-stock trading company (Freitas 1951). Thus, the capitalistic character of Brazilian export agriculture, like its basis in land grants and mixed forms of slave and tenancy production, mirrors forms and dynamics found in the ancient and medieval Mediterranean economy and the early mercantile expansion of that economy’s patrimonial trade.

In this light, the argument that Brazilian agriculture was not feudalistic, but capitalistic, has a hollow ring. It is technically correct. But the capitalism involved is not a distinctly modern form. Western feudalism itself represented a “turning inward” of estates, away from export production and toward a manorial economy, in a period when political instability following the decline of the Roman Empire made commodity production an uncertain enterprise. For various reasons (not the least of which was their hegemony on the seas), the Italians in the Levant, and later the Portuguese in the Atlantic, were able to reestablish the security of trade that had lapsed with the decline of Rome; and under these conditions, ancient forms of capitalist agricultural production re-

emerged. Thus, the capitalism involved in colonial Brazilian agriculture represents a "historical memory" of ancient forms.

It is nonetheless true that the striking growth of the patrimonial capitalist economy in sixteenth-century Brazil was dependent on a shift from Mediterranean networks to commercial alliances and markets centered in the emerging capitalist world economy of northwest Europe (Rapp 1975). But the dynamics of this systemic relationship do not differ substantially from those in empires that preceded the world economy. Although Wallerstein attempted to draw a fundamental distinction between empire and world economy based on limits to surplus appropriation in the former case (1979, 15; see also Aronowitz 1981, 517), the patrimonial grants and the forms of plantation agriculture found in Brazil are prevalent solutions to the general problem of colonization, whether it occurs within an empire or the world economy. The Brazilian forms of colonial institutions originated in the ancient Mediterranean; they simply were carried beyond the Strait of Gibraltar in a particular constellation and were transplanted to the New World by the Portuguese expansion of its patrimonial trade empire. This colonial plantation capitalism already had prospered at times within the framework of empires, and it prospered equally well in relation to a nascent world economy. Indeed, the patrimonial capitalist forms and dynamics of landholding and production seem to persist so long as some type of relatively stable, wider economic network exists with which they can be integrated.⁷

Wallerstein asserts that it is wrong to conceive of a single transition from feudalism to capitalism. Instead, he delineates three interconnected transitions: the "*transformation of feudal Europe into a capitalist world-economy*," "the subsequent *incorporations of outside non-capitalist systems into the ongoing and necessarily expanding capitalist world-economy*," and the more gradual "*proletarianization of labor and commercialization of land*" in the world economy (1979, 141–42).

It makes good sense to differentiate these three transitions, but in the case at hand, they do not involve the temporal order or institutional relations put forward by Wallerstein. The forms of patrimonial and trade capitalism established by the Portuguese in Brazil were modeled after Mediterranean production that preexisted and bypassed the transformation of feudal Europe; the Luso-Brazilian incorporation into the world economy emerging in Northwest Europe was thus an incorporation of a more ancient patrimonial capitalist colonial formation, not that of a "noncapitalist" system. Moreover, the dynamics of proletarianization and commercialization that Frank and Wallerstein (1979, 7) attribute to domination of the capitalist world economy actually preceded its emergence: because they existed in the ancient world (Weber 1976), it must be acknowledged that they are more general social and economic processes

than those of a capitalist world economy. This interpretation does not suggest that Brazilian agricultural commodity production did not play a "functional" role in the process of accumulation that fueled consolidation of the present world economy, but it does suggest that the forms and dynamics of that production were historical survivals that persisted long after they became connected to the world economy.

The nature of underdevelopment in Brazil thus has to be explained to a significant degree by the nature of the Brazilian colonization itself, not simply by invoking holistic determination. To do so, one need only note that the class structure of capitalist colonization took various shapes at different times and places of the world economy's expansion. For example, in contrast to North America, Brazil's underdevelopment and the persistence of its agricultural formation are a result of its colonization under an archaic patrimonial regime that was suffering a labor shortage (Prado 1967, 137).⁸ Any assertion of the hegemony of the capitalist whole tends to sidestep the crucial point that local formations are mediated by dominant local classes, whose interests are diverse and determined in part by their historic origins.

We thus come full circle to the concept of a dual economy; however, it is not the dual economy of feudalism and capitalism, but that of patrimonial versus modern capitalism. Frank correctly argues that capitalism in Brazil is responsible for the development of underdevelopment, and Wallerstein cogently argues that prevailing market conditions may determine whether a producing unit is oriented inwardly or toward the market (1979, 123ff.). But it also is important to observe that a specifically patrimonial capitalism is especially adept at these shifts. In Brazil, patrimonial capitalism promoted underdevelopment by impeding more "modern" capitalist agriculture based on markets in land, labor, and credit.

The "backward" patrimonial capitalist sector of the dual economy persisted in Brazil at least through the Depression of the 1930s and beyond, to a degree, precisely because it is a capitalist sector: it has roots in economic forms established well before the emergence of the modern world economy, and its organization is distinct from modern capitalist agriculture, but its capitalist character effectively shielded its patrimonialist features from transformation through contact with the wider world economy (see for example, Cardoso and Faletto 1969; Eisenberg 1974; Taylor 1978; Evans 1981, 102, 114). Moreover, the particular resilience of a patrimonial social formation was sustained on a political as well as economic front, even in the face of "modernizing" opposition (Pang and Seckinger 1972). Indeed, Brazil as a modern state took on patrimonial features for much the same reason that the Portuguese king had adopted a prebendal patrimonial form of colonization over three

hundred years earlier. In both situations, a shortage of state funds made private administration of state affairs an attractive solution (Uricoechea 1980).

Although the backward sector clearly contributes to the capitalist accumulation process of the world economy, the "development of underdevelopment" cannot be understood simply as the determination of the backward sector by the world economy because it derives in large part from the effective ability of colonial patrimonial capitalists to entrench themselves in capitalist markets and states, just as they had much earlier in empire situations. The peripheral character of Brazilian agriculture, its slowness to develop toward either simple commodity production or modern capitalist agriculture, and the persistence of a semi-proletariat (participating partly in subsistence, partly in commodity production) have been widely noted by otherwise disparate theorists (Prado 1967, 148–79; Frank 1969; Forman 1975, 38–86; Andrade 1980). These features mark an enduring patrimonial capitalist agriculture that sets Brazil apart from the plantation and settler colonial capitalism spawned by the emerging capitalist world economy of northwest Europe.

REPRISE

In an age when positivism is under fire from some quarters, the call to revise a theory's assumptions on the basis of "facts" may seem a bit old-fashioned. Aronowitz (1981), for example, argues that an empirical critique of Wallerstein's historical arguments necessarily fails because it leaves his metatheoretical assumptions untouched. But this essay has made a different use of empirical analysis. It seeks not to offer an empirical critique of a historical argument, but to demonstrate that the historical "facts" violate the very metatheoretical assumptions that Aronowitz finds so unpalatable. In the case of Brazilian colonialism, I have argued that the origins of commodity production and its subsequent lines of development derive not simply from its relation to a world economy, but from the replication and persistence of an "archaic" patrimonial capitalism that originated in the ancient Mediterranean. Some of the more obvious ways in which Brazilian agricultural organization can be explained in part by factors other than the relations of production and its laborers to the capitalist world economy have been specified. Frank and Wallerstein probably would not deny most of these empirical claims. Indeed, they draw on somewhat similar "facts" to make their arguments. But they do not come to terms with the implications of the "facts" for the holistic approach to the world-system perspective. To do so would be to undermine the holistic assumptions—that the world market is the defin-

ing feature of modern capitalism, and that the existence of this market creates a "system" in which the nature of each part is determined by its relation to the whole.

The case of Brazilian colonial agriculture contradicts the holistic assumptions because it reveals cycles and trajectories of agricultural organization that exceed, crosscut, and sustain relative autonomy in relation to the temporal and spatial boundaries of the world economy as a system. A holistic system that does not contain and predominate over its "parts" is conceptually inconsistent and cannot be maintained as a construct for explaining social development. The world-system perspective offers an elegant and insightful framework for viewing historical development, and Wallerstein's striking synthesis has set a new agenda for the study of secular social change. But holistic assumptions within the perspective present obstacles to its further refinement.

How might holistic assumptions be eliminated from the world-system perspective? If it is to accommodate the arguments developed in the present analysis of Brazilian agriculture, certain different presuppositions will have to be established. Recurrent economic action, particularly that embodied in exchange, cannot be taken necessarily to imply the existence of a single holistic and integrated system. At best, it would mark a domain to which a variety of spheres of action are "loosely coupled." Given that spheres of action often interpenetrate one another in "objective" time and space, the boundaries of the capitalist domain cannot be conceptually specified a priori, either temporally or spatially. Thus, it will have to be acknowledged that different spheres of action can articulate with one another in a variety of ways, on different fronts, and with outcomes that involve different degrees of hegemony or balance between spheres.

The task is to understand the complex interplay between colonized and colonizers. It would be foolish to embrace some romantic notion that capitalism does not win out in the near term. But the courses and currents of development are varied, and it would be equally presumptuous simply to assert the unconditional predominance of a holistic, albeit uneven, dynamic of capitalist economic development. The capitalist domain may indeed touch the entire world. But it probably is not pervasive, it does not subsume everything it touches, and its elites are not omnipotent. Therefore, the ways in which other spheres of all kinds—economic, political, cultural—articulate with the capitalist world economy may be of considerable consequence to the peoples and organization of social life involved. The "composition" that results when two spheres interact cannot be assumed to result in the complete hegemonic expropriation and appropriation by the generally more powerful (capitalist) sphere over the social formation and mode of production of the theoretically less powerful sphere (Pascon 1977). Given that the forms of

articulation between spheres and the contradictions that emerge from these articulations are diverse, the capitalist world economy cannot be construed as a totality on a single path of development. It is simply one general domain of social intercourse where various constellations of spheres may come into play with one another.

At a metatheoretical level, the reconstruction of the world-system perspective just outlined substitutes a differentially connected set of spheres, both within and beyond a capitalist domain, as constituting a world social formation. Such a reconstruction does not assume any single and universal objective time; it acknowledges instead multiple streams of history in relatively autonomous spheres that occasionally puncture, interpenetrate, or come into conjuncture with one another (Hall 1980). Any given sphere has a multitude of relatively autonomous "histories," and when streams of history of two such spheres come into conjuncture, the consequences can be traced for both. But because of their independence, apart from their conjunctures and interpenetrations, the diverse streams cannot be conceived as constituting a systemic unity. Thus, the world-system perspective becomes reconstituted; it is a conceptualization of the emergence of hegemonic economic complexes of various types, their subsumption of some economic, political, and cultural spheres that preceded them and their articulation with others that coexist with them, and the multiple contradictions that thereby emerge.

"History" is just a conceptualization, but it is powerful in its capacity to shape our understanding of the past and our world. By abandoning systemic holism as a basis for the world-system perspective, we come closer to grasping the stuff of history and our own existence, for we are no longer encumbered by the teleology of a reified conceptual object—"the" capitalist world system.

NOTES

1. Bach (1980, 296) claims that interstate dependency theory and the world-system perspective differ from one another in their conception of the relation between whole and part. But the theory of world capital accumulation both implicit in and emergent from dependency theory would seem to belie this claim. As Haru (1981) has shown, world-system theory largely replicates the assumptions of dependency theory on a world scale.
2. In Hindess and Hirst's (1975) conceptual exposition, the forces of production are the articulated elements of labor and its processual social organization, the instruments of labor (that is, tools), and the raw materials on which labor and its instruments act. Relations of production involve the ways in which surplus created through labor is appropriated and distributed. The relations of production are assumed to be dominant, and they specify an articulated dialectical combination of the relations and forces of production in a single mode of production. In a later study, Hindess and Hirst (1977) avoid assuming the predominance of any given element in a social formation, thus breaking with most previous versions of Marxism.

3. Obviously, the lives of the Indians who sought out regions of refuge were affected in both subtle and dramatic ways by their ongoing intercourse with traders and missionaries who worked the ultimate boundaries and “external arenas” of the world economy. Moreover, many Brazilian Indians were mobilized into labor forces in the forest-collecting and river-transport industries in the hinterland, beyond established colonial agricultural settlements (MacLachlan 1973). But conversely, even today neither economic nor political hegemony has been completely established over the Indians. During the past decade, the Brazilian government has continued to encounter pockets of violent resistance to the incursion of roads into the jungle that are being built by Brazilian military engineers for “economic development” and consolidation of a territorial state.
4. Compare Takahashi (1976, 76–77), who cites Kosminsky’s analysis of capitalist developments and their intensification of feudal exploitation in certain regions of thirteenth-century England.
5. For a discussion of the geographic distribution of feudal and other modes of production in regions of medieval Europe, see Hechter and Brustein (1980) and Anderson (1974, 154–72). Anderson notes the unique history of Portugal (and Spain, to a lesser degree) based on the relative strength of the state and the church over the nobility, and the relative absence of subfeudation in comparison to other regions of Europe. (See also Jaguaribe 1968, 108–12; Gorender 1978, 110–18). These differences, as well as the significance of the *sesmaria* as a form of land settlement in medieval Portugal (Rau 1946), ultimately beg the question of whether the region of Portugal should be characterized as feudal in the first place; and they go a long way toward explaining the patrimonial character of the Brazilian colonization. For an insightful discussion of how, in a parallel case, the Spanish *reconquista* of the Iberian peninsula bypassed feudal relations and strengthened the patrimonial regime, see Sarfatti (1966).
6. The existence of such trade does not mark a complete transition to rationally organized modern capitalism, although the existence of a free market is a necessary component of it (Weber 1977, 164–65; Collins 1980). As Foweraker (1982) has noted, the colonial extension of trade is a form of capital accumulation in which political intervention is especially pronounced.
7. The patrimonial capitalist origins of Brazil represent a special case of historical diffusion, but Latin American colonization in general has been compared fruitfully to the so-called second serfdom of Eastern Europe (Kay 1974; Meade 1978). In the latter case, an already established and previously feudal mode of production came under the orb of the world economy, but landlords monopolized exports and forestalled emergence of a trading bourgeoisie. Warriner (1969, 226) has observed that the result was a greater impoverishment of agricultural workers than tends to occur under either feudalism or capitalism. On the ambiguous position of an entrenched landed class and its long-term consequences for capitalist development, see Weber (1946) and Kula (1976). Wallerstein emphasizes that it was incorporation into the world economy that precipitated “coerced cash-crop labor” in Eastern Europe (1974, 226). But the decisive point remains that a surviving landed class of an *ancien régime* successfully obstructed the emergence of a capitalist form of agricultural production.
8. For a similar contrast of Spanish and English colonization in the New World, see Lang (1975). Frank disputes this kind of differentiation, but only via a vulgarization of Weber’s thesis concerning the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism (1979, 25–91). The more important issue, it would seem, is the form of capitalism itself—patrimonial or modern. As both Dunn (1972, 59ff., 65) and Graham (1981) argue, here lies the precise difference between Luso-Brazilian and northwest European forms of colonization, even those involving slavery. In a perhaps overdrawn, but interesting, study that counters Frank (1979), Moog (1964) has explored the cultural bases of the divergence.

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