

## **Giovanni Arrighi**

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I was born in Milan (Italy) on July 7, 1937. On my mother's side, my family background was bourgeois. The son of a Swiss immigrant, my maternal grandfather rose from the ranks of the labour aristocracy to establish his own factories manufacturing textile machinery and later heating and air conditioning equipment. My father's background was more mixed. The son of a railway worker and trade unionist, my father migrated as a technician from his native Tuscany to Milan and became an employee of his future father-in-law—i.e., he married the boss' daughter. This created tensions that eventually resulted in my father setting up his own (comparatively smaller) business in competition with my maternal grandfather.

In spite of the tension and competition, the relationship between the two men was characterized by mutual respect and common anti-fascist sentiments that greatly influenced my early childhood, dominated as it was by the war, Italy's switch to the side of the Allies in 1943, Nazi occupation of Northern Italy, the Resistance, and eventual arrival of the US and British armies. My family's positions towards these events set the boundaries of all my subsequent political orientations and, above all, instilled in me a life-long commitment to struggle against racism in all its forms. Even when I later turned against my class background, this commitment remained the overwhelming influence on my work and life.

When in 1956 my father suddenly died in a car accident, I decided to keep my father's business going against my maternal grandfather's advice, and in the hope that it would help, I chose to study economics at the Università Bocconi. Hardly touched by the Keynesian revolution, Bocconi was then a stronghold of the kind of abstract, mathematically grounded neo-classical or neo-liberal theories that were going out of fashion in the 1950s but would regain prominence in the 1980s and 1990s. These theories did not help in running my father's business. Having realized that there was no choice but to close it down, I spent two years on the shop floor of one of my grandfather's firms, observing and collecting data on the organization of the production process which later became the basis of my dissertation entitled "Determinants of efficiency in a mechanical industry."

This study convinced me beyond reasonable doubt that the general equilibrium models of neo-classical economics, while elegant, were irrelevant to an understanding of the production and distribution of incomes. Based on the dissertation, my supervisor appointed me as an *assistente volontario*, an unpaid teaching assistant position that in those days was the first step in academic careers in Italian universities. The dissertation probably helped me also in obtaining a paid job with the multinational Unilever as a manager trainee. Most important, two years later it helped me procure an interview at the University of London and a job offer as a lecturer in economics at one of its overseas

colleges, the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) in Salisbury (now Harare, Zimbabwe).

At UCRN, and under the influence of social anthropologists Clyde Mitchell and especially Jaap Van Velsen, I was reborn intellectually and began my long march from neoclassical economics to comparative-historical sociology. Van Velsen ruthlessly dispelled all residual illusions that the a priori theorizing typical of economics (and not just neoclassical economics) was any more relevant to an understanding of economic development than general equilibrium theory was to an understanding of the production and distribution of incomes. Far more gently, Mitchell led me to recognize that all economic life and action is embedded in social networks. Jointly, they led me in the direction of historically grounded theorizing which, implicitly or explicitly, always involves comparisons of social structures across time or space. The result were two long articles—"The Political Economy of Rhodesia" (also published as a short book) and "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia"—which jointly provided elements of a historically grounded theory of the development of settler capitalism in the Southern African context. After being deported from Rhodesia by the white-minority government, I moved to the University College of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in 1966. There I developed further this kind of analysis in collaboration with John S. Saul. Our joint and solo publications on issues of political and economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa were later published in the collection *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York, 1973).

In 1969 I returned to Italy—where social movements were in full bloom—and entered a new stage of my intellectual development. I taught economic development for two years at the Università di Trento, and then taught two more years as a fellow at the Scuola Superiore di Formazione in Sociologia in Milan while writing collective pieces on the labor process with workers in the factories. Then in 1973 I received a joint appointment in the Sociology and Economics Departments of the newly established Università degli Studi della Calabria in Cosenza where for several years I directed a research project that, by comparing three micro-regions of Calabria, demonstrated how a condition of peripherality neither determines, nor is determined by, the particular relations of production and exchange that exist locally. I later summed up the main findings of the research in "Capitalist Development in Hostile Environments: Feuds, Class Struggles, and Migrations in a Peripheral Region of Southern Italy" (*Review* 10, 1987) co-authored with Fortunata Piselli. At the same time, however, I was becoming increasingly involved in the kind of world-historical sociology that was being refurbished under the label of world-systems analysis. My initial contribution to the field consisted of a solo book—*The Geometry of Imperialism: The Limits of Hobson's Paradigm* (London, 1978)—and two books co-authored with Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein—*Dynamics of Global Crisis* (New York, 1982) and *Transforming the Revolution: Social Movements and the World System* (New York, 1990).

Even before the last two books were published, I had migrated again, this time to the United States, to join the Sociology Department and the Fernand Braudel Center at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Sustained by an exceptional community of

graduate students, prodded by Wallerstein to take Braudel's *longue dure* as the unit of analysis, and protected by Terence Hopkins' methodological astuteness, I found myself pushing the investigation of the dynamic of world capitalism farther back in time and out in space than I originally intended. The result has been an unplanned trilogy that has taken 25 years to complete. In *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London, 1994), I identified and compared four "systemic cycles of accumulation" as moments, not just of recurrence, but of fundamental reorganization and enlarged reproduction of world capitalism. In *Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System* (Minneapolis, MN, 1999), co-authored with Beverly J. Silver, we compared two successive hegemonic transitions—from Dutch to British and from British to US—in order to identify what is truly novel and anomalous in the present crisis of US hegemony. Finally, in *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London, 2007), conceived in Binghamton but researched and written after I had joined the Sociology Department at The Johns Hopkins University in 1998, I compared the Western and East Asian developmental paths in order to identify the process of mutual hybridization that may be bringing to an end two centuries of Western global dominance.