Of the minds produced by the international left in the second half of the twentieth century, few have been the equal, in historical imagination, architectonic scope and conceptual clarity, to Giovanni Arrighi, whose work will be read and reflected on for the rest of this century. We publish below a tribute to him from a pupil, Tom Reifer, which gives a measure of his achievement. A thinker of exceptional warmth, integrity and largeness of spirit, Arrighi drew on personal experience of struggles in both the Third and First Worlds—the movements for national liberation in Africa, and the great labour insurgencies of Italy—in the sixties, and subsequent deep engagement with the trajectory of the two leading powers of the present global order, America and China. His texts in NLR are so many landmarks in the history of the journal. Scanning one decade after another came ‘The Political Economy of Rhodesia’ in the mid sixties (NLR 1/39); ‘Towards a Theory of Capitalist Crisis’ in the seventies (NLR 1/111); the arresting paradoxes of ‘Marxist Century, American Century’ at the close of the eighties (NLR 1/179); his famous analysis of ‘World Income Inequalities and the Future of Socialism’ in the nineties (NLR 1/189); and his return to the fate of Africa in this decade (‘The African Crisis’, NLR 15), when ‘Political Economy of Global Turbulence’ (NLR 20) and ‘Hegemony Unravelling’ (NLR 32 and 33) became central parts of his last book, Adam Smith in Beijing. Personal friendship and political loyalty were unshakeable values for him. The journal knew both. In the autumn of last year, he learnt that, in all probability, he was mortally ill. He faced that prospect with an unsurpassed calm, energy and courage. In the final months of his life, he composed a striking Afterword to the new edition of The Long Twentieth Century, out in early 2010, and offered a panoramic view of his ideas, and his life, in the magisterial interview we published in the January–February issue of this year. Conducted by David Harvey, it was made possible with the help of his companion Beverly Silver, co-author of Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System, the second volume of his trilogy on the origin of our times, and can be read as his testament. Moving and challenging, it makes clear why he is mourned by friends, colleagues, pupils and admirers from all over the world—East Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America. Future generations will look back on him as one of the finest lights of the period through which he lived.
One of the more telling features of the present conjuncture is the scarcity of analyses able squarely to place today’s global turbulence in geohistorical perspective. In his sustained examinations of the longue durée of capitalism, from its late medieval and early modern origins right up to the present, arguably no intellectual has developed a more formidable analysis of the current crisis than Giovanni Arrighi. Along with Immanuel Wallerstein and the late Terence Hopkins, Arrighi was one of the originators and foremost proponents of the world-systems analysis of European domination, global capitalism, world income inequalities and ‘development’. The world-systems perspective itself—challenging the dominance of post-war modernization theory—came out of the movements of the 1960s and brought together a fruitful synthesis of Marxism, Third World radicalism and critical currents in social science, from the work of the French Annales geohistorians to that of the German historical school. Wallerstein and Hopkins, sympathetic to the students who took over Columbia University in 1968 (both served on the ad hoc faculty committee), later migrated in the 1970s to Binghamton University in New York, which became for a time the centre of world-systems studies. Arrighi joined the faculty in the late 1970s and played an instrumental role in both the graduate programme and the related Fernand Braudel Center, as well as running various collective research groups.

The range and scope of Arrighi’s work—from his analysis of settler capitalism in Southern Africa to Adam Smith in Beijing, which traces the rise of Chinese-led East Asia as the new workshop of the world—is an astonishing achievement. Moreover, this analysis was accompanied
by a generosity of spirit towards his intellectual interlocutors that had few equals: Giovanni thrived on spirited discussion and debate, within a framework of mutual solidarity. An inspiration to many, it was thus with great sadness that the news of his passing on June 18, 2009, after a year-long battle with cancer, was received by scholars, activists, friends, former students and associates around the world.

*Formation of a worldview*

Born in Milan in 1937, Giovanni’s political trajectory was decisively shaped by the anti-fascist attitudes of his family, in a period that included the Nazi occupation of northern Italy, the emergence of the partisan resistance and the arrival of the Allies. Originally trained in neo-classical economics in Italy and then employed in a series of different business enterprises, he set out for what was then Rhodesia in the early 1960s. As William Martin noted in an essay underscoring the importance of scholars from C. L. R. James to W. E. B. Du Bois in adumbrating the perspective, ‘world-systems analysis, like the capitalist world-economy, has deep African roots’. Arrighi’s migration to Africa was, in his own words, ‘a true intellectual rebirth’; it was where he began his ‘long march from neo-classical economics to comparative-historical sociology’.

Here, along with John Saul, Martin Legassick and others, he developed a pioneering politico-economic analysis focusing on the contradictions engendered by the proletarianization and dispossession of the Southern African peasantry.

Rhodesia was also where Giovanni also met his student—subsequently a friend and colleague—Bhasker Vashee, an African of Indian descent who later became a long-time director of the Transnational Institute. Indeed,

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1 I would like to thank all the participants in the international conference on Giovanni Arrighi’s work and the current crisis held on 25–29 May 2009 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, for the stimulating debate and discussion, which has very much influenced my own thinking. I alone, of course, am responsible for any errors.
Giovanni and Bhasker were cellmates, jailed for their anti-colonial activities; the former was deported about a week after his arrest, the latter only freed from solitary confinement after a year-long campaign to secure his release. By 1966 Giovanni had moved to Dar es Salaam, at a time when Tanzania was hosting national liberation movements from all over Africa. Here, Arrighi’s colleagues included a wide range of radical scholar activists, including Walter Rodney, Saul and Wallerstein.

Giovanni subsequently returned to Italy to teach and was involved in autonomista movements, helping to found Gruppo Gramsci. By the late 1970s he had turned his sights towards the analysis of imperialism, completing The Geometry of Imperialism in 1978; it was republished with a new postscript in 1983. It was around this time that Giovanni began to reconceptualize this work as a bridge towards what would become arguably his most significant book, The Long Twentieth Century (1994)—widely considered the most important contemporary work devoted to the longue durée of world capitalism. Here, drawing on the work of Smith, Marx, Gramsci, Polanyi and Braudel—including the latter’s notion of capitalism as the anti-market—Arrighi argues that capitalism evolved over a series of ‘long’ centuries, within which recurrent combinations of governmental and business organizations have led successive systemic cycles of accumulation. These cycles are characterized by material expansions of the capitalist world-system; when these reach their limits, capital moves into the realm of high finance, where interstate competition for mobile capital provides some of the greatest opportunities for financial expansions.

The obverse side of such expansions has been the reciprocal stimulus of military industrialization and haute finance in the restructuring of the world-system that accompanies the ‘autumns’ of cycles and the hegemonic structures of which they are a part. Financial expansions initially lead to a temporary efflorescence of the declining hegemonic power. Eventually, however, they give way simultaneously to increasing systemic chaos and to organizational revolutions in a newly emerging hegemonic bloc of business and governmental institutions. These are ‘endowed with ever-more extensive and complex organizational capabilities to control the social and political environment of capital accumulation on a global scale’; a process which, as Arrighi noted, has clear ‘built-in limits’.6

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Of particular significance here is the fact that, unlike Wallerstein but like Braudel, Arrighi located the origins of world capitalism not in the territorial states of Europe during the long sixteenth century, but in the Italian city-states of the thirteenth and fourteenth, in what was a regional forerunner of the modern world-system. He then traced the alliance of Genoese capital and Spanish power that produced the great voyages of discovery, before going on to analyse the changing fortunes of Dutch, British and US hegemonies, their respective systemic cycles of accumulation and, finally, the challenges posed to US power by the East Asian economic renaissance, today joined by China. In a series of subsequent works that completed what Arrighi called an unplanned trilogy—*Chaos and Governance in the Modern World System*, co-written with Beverly Silver, and *Adam Smith in Beijing*, as well as in a series of articles and an updated version of *Long Twentieth Century*, Arrighi carried this powerful analysis forward to the present.  

**Historical forecasts**

Arrighi’s unique perspective on large-scale, long-term social change, in part the product of nearly a decade of collective research, seems eerily prescient in light of recent events. Take, for example, his and Silver’s now decade-old proposition:

> The global financial expansion of the last twenty years or so is neither a new stage of world capitalism nor the harbinger of a ‘coming hegemony of global markets’. Rather, it is the clearest sign that we are in the midst of a hegemonic crisis. As such, the expansion can be expected to be a temporary phenomenon that will end more or less catastrophically.

The resultant backlash

announces that the massive redistribution of income and wealth on which the expansion rests has reached, or is about to reach, its limits . . . Once the redistribution can no longer be sustained economically, socially, and politically, the financial expansion is bound to end. The only question that remains open . . . is not whether, but how soon and how catastrophically the present global dominance of unregulated financial markets will collapse.

Arrighi and Silver concluded that the West’s fall from the ‘commanding heights of the world capitalist system’ was ‘possible, even likely’; the

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question then being what the character of this phase of decline would be. They asserted that:

the United States has even greater capabilities than Britain did a century ago to convert its declining hegemony into an exploitative dominion. If the system eventually breaks down, it will be primarily because of US resistance to adjustment and accommodation. And conversely, US adjustment and accommodation to the rising economic power of the East Asian region is an essential condition for a non-catastrophic transition to a new world order.8

In *Adam Smith in Beijing*, Arrighi returned to many of these issues in light of the re-emergence of a Chinese-centred East Asia and America’s reckless gamble to continue its hegemonic reign with the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Rather than heralding a new age of US hegemony, as its advocates hoped, Arrighi emphasized how the ambitions of the Project for the New American Century, whose members staffed key positions in the Bush White House, ironically increased the long-term likelihood that the 21st century will be the age of Asia.

*Adam Smith in Beijing*, like its predecessors, is a difficult and ambitious book; not because it is poorly written—Giovanni’s prose was exemplary in its lucidity—but because of the density of its analysis and the scope of its ambitions. As Arrighi noted, the book’s purpose ‘is as much to offer an interpretation of the ongoing shift of the epicentre of the global political economy from North America to East Asia in light of Adam Smith’s theory of economic development, as it is to offer an interpretation of The Wealth of Nations in light of that shift’.9 At the same time, the book tackles a number of other issues, notably the reasons for what Kenneth Pomeranz has called the ‘Great Divergence’ between Western Europe, its settler offshoots and East Asia.10 In the latter part of the book Arrighi traces the growing bifurcation between US global military power and East Asia’s increasing economic clout, evidenced in the accumulation of colossal surpluses in Chinese-led East Asia and their investment in US Treasury securities and other dollar-denominated assets, including subprime mortgages. These developments are seen as anomalies which have no real precedent in previous systemic accumulation cycles.

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Arrighi also drew on a series of earlier essays published in New Left Review to put forward an appreciation and critique—in comparative world-historical perspective—of Robert Brenner’s analysis of the present long downturn. In many ways this was indicative of Arrighi’s method: he always instructed his students and colleagues to attack an argument on its strong points rather than its weak ones, challenging them to come up with better explanations than those they criticized.

Brenner’s critique of what he termed ‘Neo-Smithian Marxism’ and associated views on the origins of capitalist development, of course, contrasted sharply with the world-system perspective. In many ways, in terms of their analyses of capitalism’s origins, Arrighi and Brenner could not be further apart. Brenner’s argument against the world-system perspective largely focused on the centrality of property relations and the class struggle in agriculture, to the exclusion of virtually everything else, locating the origins of capitalist development in the English countryside as opposed to placing them in the context of an emerging world-system. Yet on the question of capitalist agriculture, Wallerstein and Brenner, following in the tradition of the Annales focus on rural history—and despite their great differences—have more in common with each other than with Arrighi in Long Twentieth Century, where agriculture plays little or no role in the origins of capitalist development on a world scale. In dramatic contrast, Braudel, following Oliver Cox’s Foundations of Capitalism (1959), located capitalism at the top level of world-trade and high finance, and to a lesser extent industry—the position to which Arrighi largely adhered.

With regard to the current crisis, however, Arrighi and Brenner have much more in common. Brenner’s explanation of the long downturn seems to match Arrighi’s account of the end of material expansions: for both, increasing competition brings down the rate of profit. Both consider the present global downturn not merely as a financial crisis but as the expression of a much deeper crisis of capitalism—exacerbated

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by government action—dating from the long downturn of the 1970s. Brenner, however, largely characterizes this as a crisis of over-production, whereas Arrighi saw it as primarily a crisis of over-accumulation. Another aspect of Arrighi’s emphasis, in contrast to Brenner, was to see the current long downturn and its accompanying financial expansion as related to the ongoing crisis of US hegemony, akin to British troubles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including to some degree the power of labour.14

Another difference is Brenner’s almost exclusive focus both on manufacturing and on Japan, Germany and the US, in contrast to Arrighi’s greater emphasis on finance and the financialization of capital—notably the development of offshore money markets—hegemony and global geopolitics. A decisive turning point here for Arrighi, connecting both these realms, was the US-led financial expansion of the late 1970s and early 1980s, in which the US competed for mobile capital on the global capital markets by borrowing via the most regressive means possible. This was a crucial shift, as Washington abandoned its earlier tolerance for forms of developmentalism in favour of a macroeconomic counter-revolution associated with the so-called Washington Consensus. Among the best analysts of these processes—notably the drive by the Wall Street–Treasury nexus to open up Pacific-rim markets that led to the Asian economic crisis of 1997, and subsequent attempts at increased regional financial integration—was Peter Gowan, in his The Global Gamble (1999) and a series of related articles.15

Power and territory

Among the central aspects of Arrighi’s periodization of global capitalism is its fundamental convergence with Braudel’s and Schumpeter’s emphases on capitalism’s flexibility, non-specialization and capacity

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15 Gowan also passed away in June: see the obituary by Tariq Ali in NLR 59. For Gowan’s most sustained engagement with the world-systems perspective, see his important review of Arrighi’s and Silver’s Chaos and Governance in NLR 13, January–February 2002, and his ‘Contemporary Intracore Relations and World-Systems Theory’, in Christopher Chase-Dunn and Salvatore Babones, eds, Global Social Change: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, Baltimore 2006.
for change and adaptation. Here too, money capital and the system of national debts play a privileged role in restarting capitalism as it accumulates in declining centres and seeks to lay claim to future incomes by investing in rising hegemons, from Venice to the US.\textsuperscript{16} Equally important is Arrighi’s steadfast emphasis on geohistory, through which he demonstrates how recurrent combinations of geography and history have made and unmade capitalist fortunes. A further vital dimension of his analysis—often neglected, though it is central to understanding his deployment of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony in the context of capitalism as a global system—is the crucial importance of recurrent battles between capitalist and territorialist powers. These struggles might also be seen as synonymous with those between, on the one hand, maritime and later air powers (Venice, the United Provinces, England, the US), and on the other, territorialist Continental powers (successively Spain, France, Germany and the former Soviet Union).

As Arrighi emphasized, the financial expansions, intensified competition for mobile capital and growing systemic chaos that characterize hegemonic transitions generally result in the remaking of the global system on new and enlarged social foundations under a rising hegemonic power, or at least bring the collapse of the Continental challenger. The most recent episode produced the dramatic fall of the Soviet bloc, with much of the region returning to its original Third World role, in a battle won in the global capital markets as much as on any battlefield, as Arrighi many times underscored. This schema reveals not only capitalism’s flexibility, but also the evolution of this expanding system as it grew to global scope.

Another critical aspect of Arrighi’s work was his analysis of geo-economic regions and global income inequalities. Here he always aimed to take into account, first, the pre-colonial heritage; second, the impact of colonialism; and third, post-colonial developments—all within the framework of comparative world-historical analysis. The thrust of Arrighi’s most recent work in this area was to combine his long-term comparative analysis of sub-Saharan Africa with his later work on East

\textsuperscript{16} Arrighi, \textit{The Long Twentieth Century}, pp. 4–5; and ‘Winding Paths of Capital’, pp. 90–4. For an important article on the often neglected centrality of money and banking in the origins and development of capitalism, see Geoffrey Ingham, ‘Capitalism, Money and Banking: A Critique of Recent Historical Sociology’, \textit{British Journal of Sociology}, vol. 50, no. 1, March 1999, pp. 76–96.
Asia, as well as to chart developments in other regions, including what he called the organic core.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Accumulation and dispossession}

The present day crisis of capitalism would seem an especially fortuitous time to revisit discussions on the nature of capitalist development, its future trajectories and realistic world-historic alternatives. In an article aimed at ‘rethinking the non-debates of the 1970s’, Arrighi noted that, although such dialogues of the deaf may have helped to protect emerging research agendas against their premature demise, ‘eventually they become counterproductive for the full realization of their potentialities. I feel that world-systems analysis has long reached this stage and that it can only benefit from a vigorous discussion of issues that should have been debated long ago but never were’.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, he took up many of the most powerful critiques of Wallerstein’s world-systems perspective, including those developed by Theda Skocpol, Braudel and Brenner.

Perhaps equally significant in this context was Arrighi’s return to his own earlier work on the role of labour supplies. The contradictions of capital accumulation by dispossession via full proletarianization were most clearly revealed in what Samir Amin called the ‘Africa of the labour reserves’, encompassing much of Southern Africa, including the land of apartheid.\textsuperscript{19} Here, the combination of white settler colonialism, agriculture, mineral wealth and labour shortages led to the full dispossession of much of the African peasantry, so as to provide low-cost migrant labour for the mines and manufacturing industry; but over time this ended up raising labour costs. In marked contrast—as shown by Gillian Hart, on whose work Arrighi drew—was the accumulation without dispossession and associated ‘rural development and industrialization’ that took place throughout much of East Asia. The paradox here—underscored by both Hart and Arrighi and his co-authors—is that the full proletarianization of the original producers through accumulation with dispossession, although classically associated with the origins of capitalist development,


has become one of the biggest barriers to successful capitalist development in Southern Africa and perhaps many other regions of the global South. Differing trajectories of accumulation, with or without dispossession, and associated policies of racial exclusion thus underpin the radical divergence in development experiences in East Asia and Southern Africa. Arrighi and his co-authors also suggest specific policy changes in Southern Africa, including distribution of land to the landless and increases in education and social welfare, that would benefit the vast majority of Africans.

Though it has not been done to date, one can imagine teasing out a series of geohistorical linkages between Marx’s, Wallerstein’s, Braudel’s and Arrighi’s work on the ‘top level of world-trade’ with the work of Barrington Moore, Brenner and others on agricultural capitalism, relating these developments in an original synthesis. The idea here would be to demonstrate more fully—including through building on Wallerstein’s classic treatment of these issues in *The Modern World-System* and through a re-reading of both the ‘Brenner debate’ and the ‘non-debates’ of the 1970s—how capitalist agriculture, urbanization and what Arrighi calls a ‘capitalist system of statemaking and warmaking’ are all intimately entwined in the world-historical origins of capitalist development.

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20 See Arrighi, Nicole Aschoff and Benjamin Scully, ‘Accumulation by Dispossession and its Limits: The Southern African Paradigm Revisited’, 17 February 2009, unpublished paper, especially p. 39. The authors also cite Gillian Hart’s *Disabling Globalization: Places of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Berkeley 2002, in which Hart argues that these development trajectories suggest that we should ‘revisit classical political economy debates, and revise the teleological assumption about “primitive accumulation” through which dispossession is seen as a natural concomitant of capitalist development’: pp. 199–200.

21 It would be interesting to extend this comparative analysis to Latin America. For an example, contrasting the development models and industrialization of Japan-led East Asia and US-led Latin America, see the work of the late Fernando Fajnzylber, *Unavoidable Industrial Restructuring in Latin America*, Durham, NC 1990.

22 Something like this was intimated by Perry Anderson in an essay on Brenner, in which he observed that ‘The idea of capitalism in one country, taken literally, is only a bit more plausible than that of socialism . . . Historically, it makes better sense to view the emergence of capitalism like this: as a value-added process gaining in complexity as it moved along a chain of interrelated sites. In this story, the role of cities was always central. English landowners could have never started their conversion to commercial agriculture without the market for wool in Flemish towns.’ See Anderson, *Spectrum*, London and New York 2007, p. 251.
and Arrighi’s work on accumulation with and without dispossession in contemporary Southern Africa and East Asia might shed light on the origins of capitalist development trajectories in agriculture as analysed by Brenner and Wallerstein.

These debates about past and present are of course intertwined; excursions into the past quintessentially reflecting contemporary concerns. For, as the editorial introduction to Brenner’s critique of ‘Neo-Smithian Marxism’ noted in the late 1970s,

The implications of conflicting accounts of how capitalism emerged, and why it did so in some regions of the world rather than others, were clearly of far more than purely historical interest. They affect assessments of the coordinates of class struggle on a global scale today, interpretations of the bourgeois state and conceptions of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The debate further involved a series of key theoretical problems concerning the nature of historical determination, the relation of economics to politics and the validity of Marx’s basic analysis of capitalism.23

Much the same could be said for present day debates on these matters, to which we should arguably return, in light of new developments and research findings.

Arrighi had also hoped in recent years to put together a compilation of his most important work on the foundations of global inequality. Sadly, he will now be unable to complete this work, though one hopes that others will make these writings available to the wider audience they deserve. One can only wonder to what extent he might have drawn in this endeavour on the important work done on inequalities over the last few decades by the likes of Jean Drèze, Amartya Sen, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Charles Tilly, Branko Milanovic, and Roberto Korzeniewicz and Timothy Patrick Moran. There could be no better tribute to the memory of Giovanni Arrighi and his quest for a more humane global system than for scholars and activists to return to these central questions of our time, as an integral part of ongoing collective efforts to understand the world and transform it in more peaceful, socially just and egalitarian directions. Among the most significant losses in the maelstrom of 21st-century life has been the virtual disappearance of attempts to analyse

the present in the *longue durée*. Giovanni Arrighi’s work—and that of his collaborators—represents a pioneering effort to do exactly this. We can only hope that future generations will have the wisdom to build on his thinking, most especially the spirit of solidarity and scholarly acuity which informed all his work.