

## INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD-HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

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*The Long Twentieth Century* is one of those classics that one “reads at” rather more than one “reads through.” It is a book that one never really finishes reading. The present collection of essays is testament to this. Giovanni Arrighi always sought to answer the big questions of modernity – of civilizations, of world power, of class struggles, of capital – and he always sought to pose more questions than any single text, indeed any one scholar, could ever answer. Not for nothing did the subtitle of his greatest work immodestly read: *money, power, and the origins of our times*. “We cannot do everything at once,” he observes in the opening of the *Long Twentieth Century* (1994:25). Far from a banal statement, Arrighi’s powerful contention is that rigorous and sophisticated world-historical research involves constructing partial totalities that necessarily lop off important aspects of reality. Reviews of *The Long Twentieth Century* often zeroed in on these apparent omissions (Moore 1997), noting especially the book’s relative neglect of class struggles and core-periphery inequalities. Arrighi of course knew what he was doing. An earlier plan for *The Long Twentieth Century* was a three-part structure of world power, capital accumulation, and class struggles. And yet, it was impossible to move in all directions at once. If Arrighi was often criticized for important omissions, I slowly arrived at the opposite conclusion, won gradually over subsequent years of reading at *The Long Twentieth Century*. Far from obscuring class struggle, imperialism, and other dynamics, Arrighi’s model (itself a partial totality) in fact created new possibilities for a holistic analysis of capitalism’s dynamic contradictions.

Arrighi’s great contribution was to direct our attention to the inner dynamics of accumulation and world power in a way that opened new vistas, in at least two major directions. The first new vista allowed fresh analyses of the history of antisystemic movements, civilizational conflicts, culture change, commodity chains, and yes, even environmental transformation. These, and many others, could now be investigated in greater geographical breadth, and greater temporal depth, in relation to the cumulative, cyclical, and novel features of successive “long centuries” of capitalism. Arrighi is rightly known as an eclectic thinker, who never saw a great idea he didn’t appreciate. But his model of historical capitalism was a paragon of consistency, illuminating the decisive “stakes of the game” (Bourdieu 1990:110) in the great contests of states, capitals, and classes over the *longue durée*. All the more remarkable is that such consistency was achieved by *incorporating* contingency, the fruit of a world-historical method that understood historical capitalism as *structurally invariant* (Arrighi 2004; see also my contribution to this collection).

Early on in *The Long Twentieth Century*, Arrighi suggests a second research vista:

Certainly, as our construction proceeds, what initially may appear to be mere historical contingency will begin to appear to reflect a structural logic.

Nevertheless, the tension between the two kinds of appearances cannot be fully resolved within the limits of our research agenda. *A fully resolution of the tension – if that is possible – requires that we descend again to explore the lower layers of market economy and material life with the knowledge and questions brought back from the journey into the top layer which this book undertakes*” (1994:26, emphasis added).

It is a tribute to Arrighi’s world-historical imagination that, more than fifteen years after *The Long Twentieth Century*’s publication, the present collection of essays is devoted to engaging this tension between Braudel’s overlapping zones of capitalism (as world power and capital accumulation), market economy, and material life. As John Talbot powerfully observes, it is impossible to discern where one moment began, and the others left off, in the coffee houses of 18<sup>th</sup> century London, the pivot of the world coffee economy. Benjamin D. Brewer similarly questions the utility of any framework that views cultural change in late capitalism as somehow “immaterial,” perceptively linking financialization, global commodity chains, and the commercialization of culture as symbolically and materially interrelated. In both instances, Arrighi’s systemic cycles of accumulation approach, with its emphasis on alternating phases of material and financial expansion in modern world history, is viewed as an indispensable point of departure for connecting (and synthesizing) the structures of everyday life, commodity production and exchange, and world power and accumulation.

John Gulick approaches this problematic of linking Braudel’s three layers of socio-historical reality through a *tour de force* analysis of the rise of China in recent decades. Where Brewer and Talbot are principally concerned with global commodity production and exchange, Gulick brings into focus a tension within East Asian geopolitics and the “socio-ecological constraints to global capitalist reproduction.” Far from a critique that scores *The Long Twentieth Century* for neglecting socio-ecological factors, Gulick argues that Arrighi’s subsequent analyses of East Asia faltered by de-emphasizing “his earlier belief that unprecedented ruptures in hegemonic succession might imperil the reproduction of the modern world-system.” The focus on the rules of reproduction for the world-system are amongst *The Long Twentieth Century*’s “most stimulating” formulations. Gulick’s appreciative critique therefore suggests that Arrighi’s vision may be creatively extended in by demonstrating how the system’s conditions of reproduction are grounded in material life and commodity production and exchange.

Abbeloos and Vanhaute focus on Arrighi’s place in the debate over the “Great Divergence” (Pomeranz 2000) between “the West” and “the Rest.” At the core of their critique, Abbeloos and Vanhaute contend that Arrighi, in *Adam Smith in Beijing* (2007), “assumes but never accounts for the survival” of East Asian market networks that might allow for a “commonwealth of civilizations” to succeed capitalism. Like Gulick, they see an unproductive drift away from the model of historical capitalism presented in *The Long Twentieth Century*.

In my contribution, I trace my evolution from the first of the research vistas opened by *The Long Twentieth Century* to the second. Where I initially formulated a “dual cycle” approach in which environmental transformation was a world-historical movement *complementary* to systemic cycles of accumulation (Moore 2000), a deeper engagement with *The Long Twentieth Century*’s led me towards a new synthesis. This is the theory of capitalism as world-ecology, which seeks a unified theory of world development that joins the accumulation of capital and the production of nature in dialectical unity.

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Giovanni was a fearless intellectual who respected no orthodoxy, and never retreated from the challenges of the present conjuncture. His scholarship and teaching pulse through this collection of essays, which does not shy away from critique. What is so compelling, in my view, is the degree to which the contributors have engaged in precisely the kind of *reconstructive* critique that was Giovanni's hallmark. I think he that would be pleased with this collection's robust engagement with his work, that he would have agreed with some of it, and that he surely would have disagreed with much more. The enduring legacy of *The Long Twentieth Century*, and Arrighi's work as a whole, is its capacity to stimulate and to inspire new world-historical syntheses appropriate to the world realities they confront. We are all indebted to Giovanni for this (and so much more) and we miss him greatly.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my greatest appreciation to the contributors to this special issue, the anonymous referees, and to Andrew K. Jorgenson for his support in bringing this project to completion.

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