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GIOVANNI ARRIGHI: A Global Perspective

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FORTUNATA PISELLI

**Reflections on Calabria: A Critique of the Concept of
'Primitive Accumulation'**

One of the most significant theoretical contributions of Giovanni Arrighi's work has been the critical reassessment of some assumptions concerning the concept of 'primitive accumulation'; in particular, the widespread assumption in the scholarly literature that the dispossession of agricultural producers from the land is a necessary condition of successful capitalist development. Arrighi criticized those scholars who mechanically and dogmatically applied Marx's concept of 'primitive accumulation', thus partially misinterpreting it.

Arrighi borrowed from David Harvey (2003: 142-144ff) the concept of *accumulation by dispossession*, more suitable than the concept of 'primitive accumulation' to describe the continuous role and persistence, in different forms, of predatory practices within the long historical geography of capital accumulation (Arrighi 2007: 224). Using this concept, Arrighi convincingly showed that the dispossession of agricultural producers from the land, far from leading to successful capitalist development, has in fact become the source of major developmental handicaps for many countries of the global South (Arrighi et al. 2010)¹. Conversely, he also showed that the developmental success of China and its competitiveness on the global market was built on a tradition of accumulation without dispossession and of decentralized industrialization (Arrighi 2007; Arrighi et al. 2010)².

This essay aims at reflecting upon the historical experience of Calabria in order to carry out, in a different context and from a different perspective, a similar revision of the assumptions about the 'primitive accumulation' through which the dispossession of the peasantry from the land is seen as a natural condition of capitalist development³.

This essay will be structured as follows. Firstly, and for a better understanding of my argument, I will briefly illustrate the three different social formations which emerged in Calabria in the mid-nineteenth century, following the disappearance of the *latifondo contadino* (peasant latifundium). Secondly, I will focus on the relationship between proletarianization and capitalist development in order to critically reassess the assumption of full proletarianization as a feature of a core position. Thirdly, I will focus on one of the three social formations (the Crotonese), where the eviction of the peasantry (i.e., the so-called ‘primitive accumulation’) took its classical form, in order to point out the contradictions and the limits of capitalist development based on full proletarianization. Fourthly, I will examine migration processes in order to critically reassess the close relationship, still widespread in the scholarly Marxist literature, between migration and proletarianization. Finally, a brief concluding section will sum up the main results of the analysis and point out its theoretical implications.

1. Three paths of agrarian transformation

Calabria is one of the poorest regions of Southern Italy. In the first half of the nineteenth century, a system of land tenure known as the *latifondo contadino* (peasant latifundium) had come to predominate throughout the region. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the *latifondo contadino* began to disappear, giving rise not to one but to three distinct social formations. This differentiation became evident in the particular conjuncture of the 1860s, which was characterized by a boom of agricultural prices on the world-market and by the incorporation of Calabria into the newly formed Italian state.

In the first micro-region, the Crotonese, the peasant latifundium was transformed in a way that resembled Lenin’s (1936) ‘Junker or Prussian road’: the landed estates were transformed into large capitalist enterprises (known in the literature on Calabria as *latifondi capitalistici*) run by the landlords (directly or through one of their employees), who employed wage labour, produced for the market, and aimed at a maximum profit. The tenants were evicted and either left the estates for good or continued to reside on them as wage workers.

In contrast, in the contiguous micro-region, the Plain of Gioia Tauro, the peasant latifundium evolved in a way that resembled Lenin's 'farmer or American road': the peasants became farmers producing for the market, some becoming small capitalists who employed wage labour to supplement family labour, and others turning into semiproletarians who hired out part of the family's labour to supplement the incomes derived from the sale of produce. In this instance, the landlords generally sold part of their land to the more well-to-do peasant farmers, continued to collect rent on another part, and became medium-sized capitalist entrepreneurs on yet another part.

In another contiguous micro-region, the Cosentino, the peasant latifundium evolved in neither of the above two directions. Here, it evolved into a system of peasant holdings that employed family labour, produced predominantly for direct consumption, and sold in the market both their surplus produce and, above all, their surplus labour (labour power that could not be effectively used within the technical and institutional arrangements of subsistence production). The key characteristic of this transformation was that a good part of the income, derived from the sale of labour power in distant labour markets, was saved and eventually invested in the purchase of land and other means of production. As a result of this tendency, the landlords were progressively eliminated from the social and economic scene, and the viability of subsistence production was reproduced or even enhanced. This transformation was labelled the 'migrant-peasant or Swiss road'⁴.

All three transformations were associated with the further development of a wage-labour force. In the Crotonese, the sale of labour power was the expression of the *full proletarianization* of the formerly peasant households. In the Plain of Gioia, the sale of labour power for a wage was the expression of *semiproletarianization*; this designated the condition of petty producers, who could eke out a subsistence only by supplementing the sale of produce with the sale of labour power. Finally, in the Cosentino, the sale of household labour power was the expression of a process of *petty accumulation*, in the form of an initial fund with which to establish a new household and, occasionally, in the form of an increase in the productive and unproductive wealth of established households.

2. Proletarianization and capitalist development

The idea that capitalist development necessarily relies on full proletarianization is widespread in the scholarly literature. According to this assumption, there exists one particular relationship between a position in the core-periphery structure and the relations of production. One can arrive at this conclusion from two different theoretical perspectives. According to Wallerstein (1983), whose explanation of divergent paths of development is based on geography and ecology, the relations of production are determined by their position in a core-periphery structure. According to Brenner (1977), whose explanation is based on history and sociology, the relations of production determine the position in the core-periphery structure. For both of them, full proletarianization defines the core position.

The research on Calabria showed that is not the case. Firstly, there, within the same peripheral location, we found three different paths developing simultaneously and mutually reinforcing each other, mainly because of the important economic role performed by seasonal migrations from the Cosentino and the Plain of Gioia to the Crotonese.

Secondly, all three paths of agrarian transformation, which elsewhere were associated with a position in the core, were found in Calabria in the periphery. In fact, in all three microregions the outcome was the absence of that kind of diffuse development which had been achieved in the core through the Prussian, the American, or the Swiss roads.

The forms of peripheralization were different in the three cases. In the Crotonese, taxation and investments in financial markets were the main instruments through which the surplus accumulated in the hands of landowners was transferred to the national government and to industrial capitalists and banks in northern Italy, with little positive feedback for the local economy. In the Plain of Gioia, the surplus extracted was not sufficient to diversify investments so as to compete with industries closer to the main centres of capitalist accumulation. In the Cosentino, higher wages in core countries allowed migrants to save what they needed in order to buy land and become independent producers, but most of the surplus produced was directly appropriated by entrepreneurs in the locales of immigration (mainly the United States). In other words, the transfer of surplus (through the mobility of capital) was the specific form taken by peripheralization

in the Crotonese, unequal exchange (through the mobility of goods) the specific form in the Plain of Gioia, while direct surplus extraction (through the mobility of labour) was the specific form in the Cosentino (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 687ff).

Obviously, the inner dynamics of the three roads, and the differences in the social structures of the three microregions (which affected the different mechanisms of peripheralization), had important implications for the welfare of the people involved.

In the Crotonese, the extreme polarization of the social structure was associated with an equally extreme impoverishment of the majority of the population and with an endemic state of class struggle over cultivation and property rights between the landed bourgeoisie and the landless proletariat. In the Plain of Gioia, a stratified but less polarized social structure was associated with less widespread poverty and more diffuse wealth than in the Crotonese, but also with endemic struggles among rival patronage groups, which were absent in the Crotonese. Finally, in the Cosentino, long-distance/long-term migration contributed to the formation and consolidation of relatively prosperous rural communities, in which social conflict tended to decline both horizontally (i.e., among kinship groups) and vertically (i.e., between landlords and peasants).

This proves that peripheralization took on very different forms, depending on the existing social and institutional context. Although *per capita* income in these three microregions was far below the national average, people in the lower strata in the Cosentino were more well-off than those in the Plain of Gioia and in the Crotonese.

In conclusion, none of the three systems of production (subsistence production, small-scale commodity production, and large-scale commodity production) can be construed as successive stages in the development of capitalism; neither can any of them be construed as a feature of core or peripheral positions.

Calabria therefore provides a good illustration of the fact that peripheralization may occur under the most diverse relations of production, and that the same kind of relations of production may be associated in one place with peripheralization and in another with ascent to core position. This conclusion should not surprise us, since peripheralization and its obverse are macroprocesses of the world-economy, which have only indirect and

largely indeterminate connections with the microstructures of production and reproduction. As a macroprocess, peripheralization is determined primarily by the relations in time and space among microstructures and only secondarily by the nature of the microstructures themselves. In other words, the chance that a given relation of production will experience peripheralization is not primarily determined by the nature of the relation itself but by the regional, national, and world-regional context in which it is located. Microstructures of production and reproduction do determine the *forms* of peripheralization. Nevertheless, peripheralization itself is the outcome of the interrelationships among microstructures that constitute the world-economy (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 694f).

3. Accumulation by dispossession and its limits in the Crotonese

I will focus on the Crotonese experience as a paradigmatic case of accumulation by dispossession. My aim is to show that such dispossession has in fact become the source of major contradictions and (has) led to the final demise of the capitalist latifundium, and the cause of its greater instability as compared to the other two social formations. For this purpose, the most important aspect of the strategy of *latifondisti*, as well as of large-scale commodity production, can be found in the sphere of labour relations.

The static nature of the production function and the strategy of keeping the use of land as flexible as possible to swiftly adapt to changing market conditions (switching back and forth between arable and pasturage according to the prices of grain versus those of wool and cheese) called forth, as a necessary complement, a strategy aimed at keeping wages low (because of the labour intensity of grain production) and, simultaneously, at preventing human settlement on the lands of the latifundium. In part, this double objective had been attained through the original eviction of tenants, the process that at the outset transformed the *latifondo contadino* into the *latifondo capitalistico*. The expropriation, through the unilateral elimination of long-term leases, cleared the land of most peasant settlements and transformed the inhabitants of those that remained into rural proletarians who could not piece together even the most meagre of subsistences without selling their labour power to the estates on an ongoing basis.

This full proletarianization, however, had broad negative effects as far as the development of the estates and capitalist enterprises was concerned. Firstly, the depeasantization of the latifundium induced a large wave of once-and-for-all *permanent* emigration, which depopulated the countryside and produced a structural deficiency of labour in the whole area. Secondly, it ‘flattened’ the local supply of labour, stripping it of the seasonal and skilled components necessary for cereal crops. Thirdly, the local supply of labour was also curtailed by the high death rates associated with the impoverishment which accompanied proletarianization. Finally, full proletarianization fostered an antagonism between labour force and landowners which was difficult to keep under control (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 66iff).

These contradictions of full proletarianization were never resolved. They were, however, kept in check, from the point of view of capital, by two related strategies. One was the transfer of seasonal labour – neither proletarianized and nor semi-proletarianized – from the neighbouring territories such as the Cosentino and the Plain of Gioia. The *latifondisti* of the Crotonese could therefore fill the local deficiency of seasonal and skilled labour by drawing from the labour surplus of the other areas. As a matter of fact, they developed the practice of recruiting more labour than was strictly necessary to fill the local deficiency so as to keep up the pressure of competition on the local proletariat. As a consequence of this intense competitive pressure, the local rural proletariat was forced to sell its labour power at wages below the level necessary for it to even afford the foodstuffs needed for subsistence⁶.

The other strategy was the development of an internal repressive apparatus, which made the latifundia assume the twofold character of capitalist enterprises and quasi-military organizations. Many of the wage workers employed on a stable basis (*salarinati fissi*) became armed guards who performed the double role of private police and supervisors of the labour process. They imposed the orders of their masters on the labourers who were employed on a daily, weekly, or, at most, monthly basis. They threatened (and when necessary executed) harsh sanctions against transgressors, and they assured the security of persons and property on the estates. The reproduction of the landowners’ monopoly over the use of land resources thus went hand in hand with the enforcement of a territorial monopoly on the use of violence.

This double monopoly could of course only be exercised with the connivance and ultimate backing of agencies of the state. Conscious of this dependence, the landowners pursued an active policy of monopolization of local administrative and judicial power either directly or through kin and clients. Normally, this repressive apparatus (complemented by the intense competitive pressures discussed above) managed to keep the antagonism of the rural proletariat under control. When state power was disorganized, however, or the organic links that connected agrarian capital to the state were disrupted, which was true at the end of the First World War and again at the end of the Second World War, the Crotonese was shaken by sudden explosions of class struggles that had no parallel in other parts of Calabria.

On these occasions, occupations of land were accompanied by street demonstrations, seizures of public buildings, and violent clashes with both the private police of the landowners and the state's military and police forces. These struggles, which after the First World War had been brutally repressed by the Fascist regime, resumed with greater intensity and wider spread during and after the Second World War, until the national government (the Christian Democratic party and its allies) was forced to yield to the pressures for land reform. The implementation of the reform began in 1950, and within a few years the redistribution of land broke up the latifundium, which disappeared very rapidly and left little trace of its once powerful organizational structures (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 697ff).

The other two systems of production disintegrated quite differently during the great post-war transformation. There was no immediate crisis of small-scale commodity production or of subsistence production to match the crisis and disappearance of the capitalist latifundium. On the contrary, in the immediate postwar years small-scale commodity production enjoyed a short period of prosperity as the acute shortages of agricultural supplies on the national markets greatly inflated the prices of some of the Plain's products. The crisis of small-scale commodity production came later when the reactivation of national and international transport, the liberalization of trade, the expansion of supply, and the emergence of new competitors with lower costs of production increased competitive pressures and squeezed many producers out of the market. The crisis of subsistence production in the Cosentino came even later. The intensification of competition in the markets for agricultural commodities did not affect producers, who sold

very little on those markets, and the reopening of the channels of long-distance migration, which had been closed or narrowly restricted during the war and the interwar years, injected new vitality into the structures of subsistence production, which were able to reproduce themselves, as a system, until the 1960s.

Two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the experience of the Crotonese highlighted the limits and contradictions of a capitalist development based on full proletarianization of the peasantry. On the one hand, it increased the latifondisti's dependence on external labour supplies; on the other, by keeping the rural proletariat below the level of physiological subsistence, not only did it tend to degrade and further deplete the latifundium's internal labour supplies, but it also sharpened class antagonisms, which at a favorable conjuncture would easily detonate. Thus, the class struggles, during and after the Second World War, in conjunction with a neoliberal turn of the national economic policy, were at the roots of the crisis and dissolution of the capitalist latifundium and thus eventually precipitated its demise.

Secondly, we can confirm, from a different angle, that the three different regional economic systems which emerged from the disappearance of the peasant latifundium cannot be construed as successive stages in the development of capitalism: in other words, they cannot be ordered on an evolutionary ladder in which the present of one system shows the other its own future. Large-scale commodity production in the Crotonese, with its full proletarianization of labour, did not reveal the future to the small-scale commodity production of the Plain of Gioia; the latter, in turn, with its full commodification of social production, did not show it to the subsistence production of the Cosentino. On the contrary, as is proved by the evolution of the three sub-regional systems during the great post-war transformation, large-scale commodity production was the most unstable system and subsistence production the most stable one.

4. Proletarianization and migration

The postulation of a tight relationship between migration and proletarianization is commonplace in the existing literature, especially that of a Marxist orientation. Proletarianization is viewed as the outcome of the

complete separation of the labourers from their means of production, and, in turn, is considered as a vehicle for the deepening of such separation. The historical experience of Calabria shows the limits of this assumption. As a matter of fact, if we look at long-distance migration, which prevailed since the 1880s until the 1950s, this correlation is questionable or even simply untrue.

First of all, as we have seen, long term/long-distant overseas emigration was the most important feature for the development of the migrant-peasant road: it was based in a micro-region (Cosentino) where no dispossession took place, but where migration was a powerful factor in the continuity and expansion of subsistence production. This was related to the customary norms that regulated inheritance and marriage. Various forms of primogeniture (whereby only the eldest son inherited the land) prevented the fragmentation of productive units, and, combined with norms that restricted the right to marry, these generated an abundant supply of subordinate domestic labour over and above the requirements of the household. This surplus of labour was traditionally unproductively absorbed by the Church or the state, but in the period under consideration it came to be productively mobilized through a process of long-distance migration (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 656ff).

Being long-term, this kind of migration involved long periods of absence from the community (10–20 years) and, being long distance, it involved costs and risks that made it a real ‘enterprise’. As a consequence, only those who belonged to cohesive and extended kin-groups, and accepted the rules and obligations that regulated such groups, could mobilize the material and moral resources necessary to undertake the enterprise; namely, to pay the expenses of the journey, to ensure the survival/adjustment of the migrant in the locales of immigration, and to ensure the survival of the migrant’s nuclear family which, as a rule, was left behind for a good part, or for the entire period, of absence.

This migration had two relevant consequences. Firstly, it strengthened social networks of kinship and neighborhood in the locales of emigration, and, secondly, it projected such networks into the locales of immigration, thereby facilitating further rounds of migration. In the longer run, if and when the migrants actually returned with enough savings to set themselves up as independent householders (as many did), the structures of inde-

pendent subsistence production were further consolidated and expanded through the purchase of land from absentee landowners and investment in land improvements and better means of production (Piselli/Arrighi 1985: 379ff).

In the Plain of Gioia as well, long-distance migration (which remained well below the levels attained in the Cosentino), was undertaken by individuals of the middle and upper-middle classes. In periods of crisis or unfavourable conditions for the activities in which they were involved, they sold land and other assets in order to finance emigration. If and when the migrants actually returned, they invested their savings in small-to-medium sized capitalist enterprises, so widening the base of small-scale commodity production.

The evolution of long-distance migration in the Crotonese was quite different. At the turn of the century, the Crotonese had almost as much experience in long-distance emigration as the Cosentino. Migratory flows largely originated in the interior, where the expanding capitalist latifundium clashed with the structures of subsistence peasant production.

Particularly significant were the differences in the immediate causes and temporal patterns of migration originating in the two areas. In the Crotonese, the push to emigrate did not come so much from the customary norms that restricted rights to inherit and marry as from the growing difficulties of preserving one's productive and reproductive capabilities in the face of the landlords' centralizing tendencies. As a consequence, the long-distance migration tended to be *permanent*, rather than long-term. As soon as the process of proletarianization was completed, long-distant migration fell sharply. The rural proletariat of the Crotonese did not command the individual and collective resources necessary to undertake the costs and risks of this type of migration. As a matter of fact, the moral and material impoverishment of the rural proletariat were such that even its ability to compete effectively in the regional labour markets was undermined. And, as the scope of 'exit' narrowed, 'voice' became the only option open to the rural proletariat to escape the exploitation and oppression of the landed bourgeoisie and its repressive apparatus (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 668f).

In short, as for the first stage, migration cannot be conceived as a messy form of escape for the poor and as a consequence of the process of proletarianization. Those who actually migrated could rely on a strong family

network and material resources, so that migration was an investment as part of a complex strategy.

It was only since the late 1950s, with the following migratory waves, that proletarianization, both past and present, started to fuel migration in a prevalent way. In all three territories migration took on the same intensity and, along with urbanization and schooling, contributed significantly to the convergence of the three paths toward a common pattern.

With the changes in labour force demand and in forms of capitalist integration in the national and European industrial centres, the spatial and temporal patterns of migration changed as well. Short-middle distance and short-medium term migration towards Northern Italy (especially the cities forming the so-called 'industrial triangle': Milan, Turin and Genoa) and Western European countries became predominant. Moreover, intrastate migration (that is, migration from Calabria to other Italian regions) came to account for a large and growing share of intra-European migration. Labour force migration towards Northern Italy, already significant since the early 1960s, intensified from the mid 1960s. With the economic upturn in 1966, the competitive position of the Southern labour force turned into a new migratory wave, meeting the growing demand for unskilled and semiskilled jobs in Northern Italy. Migration became permanent and, for the first time, extraregional migration became a mass phenomenon dominated by the lower social strata. Due to lower costs and risks if compared to the previous trans-oceanic phenomenon, migration was then open to everybody: proletarians as well as smallholders, sons as well as fathers. In fact, given the features of migrant labour force demand in the industrial centres, at that stage migration mostly attracted younger generations and more proletarianized members of the labour force.

Two qualifying statements are needed in order to account for the complex and contradictory nature of the migratory process and the ambiguities of the associated term 'proletarianization'. First of all, in the locales of emigration, migrants' revenues allowed for a large diffusion of consumer durables (cars, electrical household appliances, and so on) and a strong tendency towards the education of the younger generations. Thus, proletarianization did not imply that material (and moral) impoverishment usually associated with it.

Secondly, in the locales of immigration, the proletarian condition of migrants from Calabria and other peripheral regions assumed different meanings over time. Therefore, it cannot be said that the circumstances in the locales of immigration determine the conditions and wages the migrants are willing to work for.

During the first migratory wave from about the late 1950s to the early 1960s, migrants from Southern Italy perceived their jobs as temporary, and this attitude endowed them with a strong competitive advantage vis-à-vis indigenous workers, since they did not expect employment in core regions to provide them with lifelong work and subsistence. The reason was that their costs of reproduction were largely or partly covered by subsistence-oriented activities.

Once migrants perceived their condition as permanent, and cut the bonds with their communities of origin, this competitive advantage disappeared. When this happened, migrants perceived themselves as deriving the bulk of their subsistence from wage employment and were therefore ready to engage themselves in working-class struggles. This accounts for the transformation of Southern migrants, which occurred in the industrial centers in the 1960s, from 'scabs' into class-struggle vanguards (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 713ff).

Summing up, the historical experience of Calabria points at a theoretical model of migration which, on the one hand, contradicts, and, on the other, qualifies the prevailing models.

5. Conclusions

The Calabrian case provides compelling evidence in support of the need to critically rethink the assumptions about 'primitive accumulation' by means of which the dispossession of the peasantry is seen as a natural condition of successful capitalist development. In short: In the first place, systems of production that are often construed as successive stages in the development of capitalism (subsistence-production, small-scale commodity production, and large-scale commodity production) developed in Calabria next to each other and at about the same time.

In the second place, if none of the three roads to wage labour can be construed as representing successive stages of capitalist development, neither can any of them be construed as a feature of core positions or of peripheral positions. The very labels that were used to designate them (Prussian, American, Swiss) underscore the fact that elsewhere these paths have been associated with economic development/ascent to core position. Yet, in Calabria they were *all* associated with economic underdevelopment/peripheralization. As we have seen, the forms of peripheralization were different in the three instances, but in all instances social and economic actors were increasingly confined to the performance of subordinate roles in the competitive struggles of the world-economy.

In the third place, the experience of the Crotonese shows the contradictions of a capitalist development based on the extreme dispossession of the peasantry. These contradictions sharpened under the impact of the Second World War, when the organic links between the state and agrarian capital weakened. The explosion of social conflict in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, along with the neoliberal turn in the national economic policy, finally broke the equilibrium on which the economic system of the capitalist latifundium was based. The subsequent land reform caused its eventual dissolution. The neoliberal turn also fostered the crisis of small-scale commodity production, whose pace, however, was much slower. More stable was the subsistence production system, which remained untouched by external influences and, thanks to the reopening of long-distance migration flows, was able to reproduce itself until the mid-1960s. In conclusion, in the world political and economic context determined by the outcome of the Second World War, when our three roads to wage labour began to converge towards a common pattern, the path of development that proved to be the least stable in the new situation was the Junker road followed by the Crotonese.

In the fourth place, the analysis of migratory flows shows, from a different perspective, that capitalist development does not necessarily rely on full proletarianization. Long-distance labour migration was prevalent in the Cosentino, where no dispossession took place, and where return migrants invested their savings in the purchase of land from absentee landowners to form new viable units of subsistence production. Long-term migration was in fact a process of *petty accumulation* through which small

independent property strengthened and expanded. Conversely, in the Crotonese, where labour was fully proletarianized, labourers had neither the means nor the incentives to cope with and organize long-distance migration. At this stage, then, the correlation between migration and proletarianization is negative: only those with resources and connections were able to migrate, and not the very poor people.

It is only with the second wave of migration, beginning in the late 1950s, that, as most of the literature maintains, migration actually fostered widespread proletarianization, which, in turn, generated new impulses to migrate. Migration thus became a mass phenomenon open to all social strata. However, the wages and conditions Southern migrants were willing to work for changed over time. As long as they perceived their jobs as temporary and kept the bonds with their communities of origin alive, they had a strong competitive advantage vis-à-vis indigenous workers. Nevertheless, when they perceived their condition as permanent and cut off the bonds with their communities of origin, this competitive advantage disappeared. They became conscious of being fully proletarianized and struggled for higher wages and better working conditions.

We can draw two general conclusions from the historical experience of Calabria. Firstly, it shows that, in a peripheral context, subsistence-oriented production has better chances of survival than small-scale commodity production, and far better chances than large-scale commodity production. This is hardly surprising, since within peripheralized activities there is little room for surplus appropriation, particularly in the form of profit. If by any chance micro-level capitalist relations of production actually develop in a peripheral context – as they did in Calabria and as they do all the time in other peripheral locales – they are subject to extreme competitive and/or subversive pressures that undermine their viability. It is not the absence of micro-level capitalist relations of production that produces peripherality; it is peripherality that problematises the development of such capitalist relations of production. To retain their viability, capitalist relations of production in a peripheral context must either develop a symbiotic relation with subsistence activities, or supplement the invisible hand of the market with the visible hands of the repressive apparatus – or both (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 702f).

Secondly, different ways of organizing economic life (such as subsistence-production, small-scale commodity production, and large-scale commodity production) have no necessary relation to economic progress (through which the absolute and relative command of the residents of that territory over economic resources, that is, their ‘wealth’, is increased). They are neither stages leading to greater economic command nor attributes of lesser/greater command. Rather, they are alternative forms of social life and social change within an evolving world-economy. Even though elsewhere these forms, or paths, have all been associated with economic progress, in Calabria they have all been associated with economic regress, comparatively at least. The path of social change followed by a territory does not therefore determine the command of that territory over economic resources. It does, however, determine the distribution of such command *within* the territory, and therefore the welfare of its population. Thus, in Calabria, economic regress for the bulk of the population was least along the path of subsistence production entered by the Cosentino, and greatest along the path of large-scale commodity production entered by the Crotonese (Arrighi/Piselli 1987: 735ff).

In conclusion, the historical experience of Calabria contradicts, in many respects, the notion that the dispossession of the peasantry is a necessary condition of successful capitalist development. The extreme dispossession of the Junker road (Crotonese) underlay the abrupt and complete end of the capitalist latifundium. On the contrary, the *petty accumulation* without dispossession of the peasant-migrant road (Cosentino) proved to be more stable and capable of ensuring better living conditions for its population.

- 1 Arrighi combined the complementary insights of three different analyses (Arrighi 1970; Legassick 1975; Wolpe 1972) which, since the 1970s, had emphasized the contradictions generated for influencing accumulation in Southern African countries by extreme peasant dispossession and thus proletarianization. He outlined a single model of accumulation by dispossession that highlights not just the reasons for the initial successes of settler capitalism in Southern Africa but also its contradictions and eventual demise. He then revised this model through the analysis of the historical experience of South Africa, which represents an extreme case of ‘forcible’ dispossession of the peasantry from the land and control of the proletarianized labor force through the apartheid regime (Arrighi et al. 2010).
- 2 Arrighi mentioned on several occasions (2007: 365, Arrighi et al. 2010: 417) Hart’s call “to revisit classical political economy debates, and revise the teleological assumptions

about ‘primitive accumulation’ through which dispossession is seen as a natural concomitant of capitalist development” (Hart 2002: 201).

- 3 The analysis relies primarily on Arrighi/Piselli 1987, but also on Arrighi 2009; Piselli 1981; Piselli/Arrighi 1985.
- 4 The idea of designating this path as the ‘Swiss road’ arose from a reading of Casparis (1982).
- 5 On the process of formation of the capitalist latifundium in the Crotonese, see the important case study analyzed by Petruszewicz (1996).
- 6 The miserable living conditions of the labouring population of the Crotonese had a devastating effect on their physical health. This was evident above all in comparison with the more robust and healthy population of the Cosentino, who had at least the means to produce their physical subsistence (see Arlacchi 1983: 177ff).

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Abstracts

This essay, through the historical experience of Calabria, argues for a critical revision of the concept of primitive accumulation, through which dispossession of peasantry from the land is seen as a necessary condition of capitalist development. It focuses on the relationship between proletarianization and capitalist development and it shows that systems of production that are often construed as successive stages in the development of capitalism (subsistence-oriented production, small-scale commodity production, large-scale commodity production) developed in Calabria next to each other and at about the same time. Moreover, it shows that in a peripheral context subsistence-oriented production based on accumulation without dispossession has better chances of survival than small-scale commodity production, and far better chances than large-scale commodity production based on full proletarianization.

In diesem Artikel wird anhand der historischen Erfahrungen Kalabriens eine kritische Revision des Konzepts der ursprünglichen Akkumulation gefordert, das die Enteignung der Bauernschaft als notwendige Voraussetzung für kapitalistische Entwicklung betrachtet. Dabei wird die Beziehung zwischen Proletarisierung und kapitalistischer Entwicklung in den Mittelpunkt gestellt und gezeigt, dass Produktionssysteme, die oft als einzelne Phasen in der Entwicklung des Kapitalismus (Subsistenz-

wirtschaft, Warenherstellung durch Kleinproduzenten, Warenherstellung durch Großproduzenten) angesehen werden, sich in Kalabrien nebeneinander und zur gleichen Zeit entwickelten. Darüber hinaus zeigt sich, dass subsistenz-orientierte Produktion, die auf Akkumulation ohne Enteignung aufbaut, in einem peripheren Kontext mittelfristig bessere Überlebenschancen hat als Warenherstellung durch Kleinproduzenten und weitaus bessere Aussichten als Warenproduktion durch Großproduzenten, die auf einer vollständigen Proletarisierung aufbaut.

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