

Reconceptualizing Food Regimes from a National (State-Capital Nexus) Perspective

Abstract: This paper undertakes a critique of the previously dominant globalist theorization of food regimes represented by the work of Friedmann and McMichael, especially in their 1989 paper *Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agricultures, 1870 to the Present*. Given what are considered to be serious theoretical and empirical shortcomings of this work arising from its failure to adequately theorize the nature of capitalism, its relation to the state, and consequently the substance and periodization of food regimes, this contribution presents a significantly revised theoretical foundation for thinking about the political economy dynamics underlying food regimes. The paper then deploys this revised foundation as the basis for proposing a new periodization featuring five international food regimes rather than Friedmann and McMichael's three 'global' regimes. Special attention is devoted to justifying the existence and exploring the character of the proposed first, second, and fifth international food regimes, since the first and fifth have not previously been mooted and the second is, as conceptualized here, substantively different from Friedmann and McMichael's first food regime, with which it broadly coincides chronologically.

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Beitrag unternimmt eine Kritik der bislang dominanten globalistischen Nahrungsregime-Theorie, wie sie im Werk von Friedmann und McMichael zum Ausdruck kommt – insbesondere in ihrem Aufsatz *Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agricultures, 1870 to the Present* von 1989. Angesichts der als gravierend zu erachtenden theoretischen und empirischen Schwächen des Ansatzes, die aus einer unzureichenden Theoretisierung der Natur des Kapitalismus, seines Verhältnisses zum Staat sowie der daraus folgenden Substanz und Periodisierung von Nahrungsregimen resultieren, präsentiert dieser Beitrag eine maßgeblich revidierte theoretische Grundlage aus der Perspektive der politischen Ökonomie für die Analyse der Dynamiken, die Nahrungsregimen zugrunde liegen. Auf dieser revidierten Grundlage wird sodann eine neue Periodisierung von fünf internationalen Nahrungsregimen an Stelle der drei ‚globalen‘ Regime von Friedmann und McMichael vorgeschlagen. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit gilt der Begründung und Charakterisierung des ersten, zweiten und fünften internationalen Nahrungsregimes: Das erste und das fünfte wurden in der bisherigen Forschung noch nicht diskutiert, während das zweite in der hier entwickelten Konzeption substanziell von Friedmann und McMichaels erstem Nahrungsregime abweicht, auch wenn es zeitlich mit diesem übereinstimmt.

Keywords: food regime, state-capital nexus, capitalism, state, class, imperium, periphery

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Introduction

In this paper, I undertake a critique of the previously dominant globalist theorization of food regimes, represented perhaps most famously by Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael's 1989 article in *Sociologia Ruralis* entitled *Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agricultures, 1870 to the Present*.¹ Over the years, their paper has become something of an article of faith for scholars researching food regimes, to the extent that its theoretical premises and periodization of food regimes have been accepted and replicated innumerable times without what might be considered due critical (re)appraisal. Being dissatisfied with this situation for well-founded theoretical and empirical reasons, I have previously undertaken such a critical and overdue reappraisal in two peer-reviewed publications: the first in 2018 (*Political Ecology, Food Regimes, and Food Sovereignty*),² and the second in 2019 in *Sociologia Ruralis* (*Food Regimes, Capital, State, and Class: Friedmann and McMichael Revisited*),³ marking the thirtieth anniversary of the 1989 article in the same journal. Since neither of these works has elicited a substantive response from Friedmann or McMichael, it seems opportune to reiterate in this paper the key messages of my 2019 *Sociologia Ruralis* article in particular, especially since they align very well with the underlying theme of the present special issue. Accordingly, the following pages present once again a significantly revised theoretical foundation for thinking about the political economy dynamics underlying food regimes, which is then employed as the basis for proposing a new periodization of food regimes. With respect to the latter, I propose the existence of five *international* capitalist food regimes rather than the three 'global' regimes of Friedmann and McMichael, devoting special attention to delineating the justification for and character of the first ('Liberal'), second ('Imperial'), and fifth ('Neo-Imperial') of these regimes, since none of them has hitherto been hypothesized by Friedmann and McMichael or any other food regime scholars.

As a point of departure, it is perhaps useful to recall what we mean by 'food regimes.' Food Regime Theory (FRT)⁴ proposes to found the theoretical conceptualization of food production, distribution, and consumption on a world scale in political economy – in other words, to understand how (and hopefully why) capitalism and the modern state constitute and structure this system. It is important in this context, however, to scrutinize the value of the descriptor 'world' – and, indeed, the term 'political economy.' As we shall see below, there are competing schools of political economy at play in food regime research, with the dominant trend derived from World Systems Theory (WST) using, as I assert, a very imprecise and inadequate definition of capitalism without reference to what we might mean by the 'modern capitalist state.' But if this dominant trend, which numbers Friedmann and McMichael amongst its adherents, has no precise definition of capitalism or the modern capitalist state, then it becomes logically impossible to define on that basis what might be

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- 1 Harriet Friedmann/Philip McMichael, *Agriculture and the State System: The Rise and Decline of National Agricultures 1870 to the Present*, in: *Sociologia Ruralis* 29 (1989), 93–117.
 - 2 Mark Tilzey, *Political Ecology, Food Regimes, and Food Sovereignty: Crisis, Resistance, and Resilience*, London 2018.
 - 3 Mark Tilzey, *Food Regimes, Capital, State, and Class: Friedmann and McMichael Revisited*, in: *Sociologia Ruralis* 59 (2019), 230–254.
 - 4 Philip McMichael prefers the term "Food Regime Analysis." See Philip McMichael, *Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions*, Halifax/Winnipeg 2013, 3.

meant by 'global' or 'world' scale capitalism – the supposed temporal baseline for Friedmann and McMichael's food regimes.

In this paper, I propose a much more precise definition and understanding of capitalism and the modern state, as well as the relation between these two entities, than that offered by Friedmann and McMichael. It comprehends food regimes as arising from the dominance of agrarian capitalist social property relations in one social formation (state-capital nexus), their diffusion to other social formations, and the development of productive and distributive interdependencies between these social formations on a capitalist basis. In other words, the emphasis in this paper is on understanding the agrarian class or social property relations which generate a *national* food regime on a capitalist basis in the first instance, as well as their subsequent diffusion to constitute other national capitalist food regimes, along with the development of symbioses or antagonisms between these national social formations (state-capital nexus) in the form of *international* capitalist food regimes. If we can comprehend the political economy dynamics underpinning this process of national and international food regime formation, it becomes effectively irrelevant whether the scale being addressed is global or less than global – the decisive point is whether the food regime under analysis can be understood as capitalist or not. This is all the more important because I also propose a dialectical and *enduring* relation between capitalism and the modern state as the state-capital nexus, a relation that persists and remains essential to the present day. It is thus the notion of an international rather than a global or world-scale food regime that is of key theoretical significance in the definition and periodization of food regimes. This stands in marked contrast to the globalist conceptualization of this phenomenon on the part of Friedmann and McMichael, for whom the state appears as an essentially ephemeral entity, initially facilitating but then rendered redundant by the rise of a global and putatively post-national capitalism. This is why they place such strong emphasis upon the perceived significance of global food regimes despite offering no adequate definition of what we might mean by 'global' – let alone of capitalism and the nation-state.

We may recall that, according to its co-originators Friedmann and McMichael,⁵ FRT proposes three 'global' food regimes: the First (1870s–1930s), Second (1950s–1970s), and Third Regime (1980s–present), with the latter betokened the "corporate-environmental" food regime by Friedmann⁶ and the "corporate" food regime by McMichael.⁷ Again, however, we are provided with precious little idea of what the authors mean by this 'global' nature. If we interpret the term, using a reasonable definition, to mean the dominance of capitalist social property relations amongst all social formations engaged in interdependent production and consumption (trade) relations at a world scale, then Friedmann and McMichael's definition certainly fails this test with regard to their first and arguably in relation to their second regime as well, and passes it plausibly only with respect to their third regime. This, again, reinforces my argument for defining capitalist food regimes on the basis of national and then international (rather than global) interdependencies, since it is these interdependencies between social formations (the state-capital nexus) subject to capitalist social property

5 Friedmann/McMichael, Agriculture.

6 Harriet Friedmann, From Colonialism to Green Capitalism: Social Movements and the Emergence of Food Regimes, in: *Research in Rural Sociology and Development* 11 (2005), 227–264, 229.

7 McMichael, Food Regimes, 41.

relations, rather than any arbitrary notion of the 'global', that defines the *modus operandi* of food regimes within the capitalist mode of production. Friedmann and McMichael go on to suggest that food regimes comprise a series of key relationships enshrined in rulemaking and enforcing institutions, which coalesce to form relatively stable patterns of accumulation over delimited periods before eventually destabilizing and moving into crisis.⁸ In addition to WST, Friedmann and McMichael utilize a Regulation Theory (RT) interpretation of capitalist history; they invoke only part of RT, however, much to the detriment of their conceptualization of food regimes (see below).

In this paper, I wish to uphold both the tradition of radical political economy that motivated Friedmann and McMichael's 1989 paper and the value of the food regime concept itself. As suggested above, however, I am critical of the WST school within this tradition, which constituted a major influence on Friedmann and McMichael's development of FRT. While I am supportive of the other main intellectual influence on their formulation of FRT, namely RT, Friedmann and McMichael fail to employ this theory to its full extent, thereby seriously compromising their grasp of the importance of the state in upholding legitimacy functions to embed capitalism *in addition* to its function in supporting capital accumulation. I undertake my theoretical critique of Friedmann and McMichael by drawing on other schools of thinking within radical political economy: so-called Political Marxism, Neo-Gramscian International Political Economy, Poulantzian/Jessopian state theory, and the work of political anthropologist Eric R. Wolf. I also employ RT, but in a way that acknowledges the equal importance of the regime of accumulation *and* the mode of regulation (that is, the legitimation function of the state). I use these theoretical influences to propose a revised ontological basis for food regimes centred around the state-capital nexus, founding them on a more precise definition and understanding of capitalism, its co-evolutionary relation to the modern state, and its tendency towards imperialist relations between an 'articulated' capitalist core and a 'disarticulated' periphery. I then deploy this revised ontological basis to propose a sequence of five international food regimes rather than the three global food regimes suggested by Friedmann and McMichael. In my treatment, food regimes are defined not by whether they function on a putative 'world scale' but rather by whether the co-integration of states via (agri-food) trade relations occurs on the basis of capitalist social relations of production. It is thus the appearance of distinctively capitalist class relations and their co-dependency on the modern state that is crucial in enabling us to identify the first emergence and subsequent expansionary dynamic of capitalist food regimes, and thus to specify the first international capitalist food regime as dating from the 1840s.

Critique of Friedmann and McMichael: Proposing a revised ontological basis for food regimes

In their 1989 paper, Friedmann and McMichael set themselves the principal objective of explaining "the role of agriculture in the development of the capitalist world economy, and

8 Hugh Campbell/Jane Dixon, Introduction to the Special Symposium: Reflecting on Twenty Years of the Food Regimes Approach in Agri-food Studies, in: *Agriculture and Human Values* 26 (2009), 261–265, 263.

in the trajectory of the state system”.⁹ Given this objective, any critique of their paper might be anticipated to ask quite reasonably how Friedmann and McMichael define and understand capitalism, the state, the relation between them, and the relations between states as well as between classes – with the latter an issue largely neglected by the two authors. As suggested above, there are also potential questions to be asked about how a capitalist ‘world’ economy should be defined.¹⁰ We will address each of these key issues below.

With respect to the first issue, Friedmann and McMichael unfortunately offer no explicit definition of the capitalist mode of production. This deficiency is compounded by their reliance on WST, which notoriously conflates capitalism proper with merchant or commercial capitalism, enabling WST proponents such as Wallerstein to speak of “world capitalism” as a phenomenon dating from the sixteenth century.¹¹ Sadly, Friedmann and McMichael never broach – let alone explain – the discrepancy between Wallerstein’s earlier temporal baseline for the emergence of a putative capitalist world system and their own baseline set in the late nineteenth century. However, in order to define capitalism and bring clarity to this issue, we need to differentiate it from merchant or commercial capitalism.

Merchant capitalism is considerably older than capitalism proper and appeared as soon as producers had surpluses available and the social division of labour (social hierarchization) made possible an exchange of products in which this surplus was incorporated. As soon as a substantial part of the surplus produced by pre-capitalist workforces had become centralized in the hands of the members of powerful, privileged classes such as feudal lords and absolutist monarchs, it could then be bartered in long-distance trade, typically in exchange for luxury products originating from other societies. Merchant capitalists then exploited monopoly positions in bringing different societies into trade contact with one another. However, the profit thus derived by merchant capitalists was based on differences in subjective values (social utilities) between the two trading societies, which were essentially ignorant of each other. In other words, societies exchanged scarce products without knowing their respective social costs of production, and merchant capitalists were able to generate profit by buying cheap and selling dear. Contra Wallerstein, this merchant capitalism – not capitalism proper – constituted the basis for the great bulk of profit accumulation until the nineteenth century, with the absolutist, *pre-capitalist* states of Europe (with the exception of Britain) centrally reliant on it in their

9 Friedmann/McMichael, *Agriculture*, 93.

10 Although Friedmann and McMichael do not use the term ‘global food regime’ per se, expressions like ‘world-scale’, ‘world price’, ‘world economy’ and cognate terms are clearly key conceptual issues for them. It seems obvious that the key issue for the two authors is one of scale – in other words, that once an ill-defined capitalism achieves a certain critical mass, it may be defined as a ‘world-scale’ regime. This accords with the quantitative Wallersteinian approach, where modern or ‘world-scale’ capitalism is simply the result of the progressive accretion of capitalisms that have existed since time immemorial. This contrasts with our own view in which capitalism proper represents a distinct rupture from previous modes, and from mercantile capitalism in particular. The crucial issue is: At what point did these new capitalist social property relations become implanted in a social formation and then proceed to integrate other social formations (states) into this distinctive capitalist dynamic? The primary issue is therefore that of the implantation of this distinctive capitalist dynamic as co-integration of states rather than the scale of an ill-defined entity (“capitalist world economy”) whose dynamic remains unspecified.

11 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 1, New York 1974; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, vol. 2, New York 1976.

trading relations with other social formations – and indeed their own colonies. There was thus no equalization of the social labour time embodied in commodities through trade, such as would arise through market competition and the free movement of labour under capitalism proper. Rather, profit under merchant capitalism was predicated on very different principles founded on unfree labour and protected markets closely demarcated and patrolled by the pre-modern state in support of revenues and conspicuous consumption by political elites, with the absolutist monarchies of France and Spain perhaps the exemplars here.¹²

By contrast, the capitalist mode of production is identified by three essential features: 1) the entirety of social production takes the form of commodities; 2) labour power itself becomes a commodity, meaning that the producer – now separated from the means of production – becomes a proletarian; 3) the means of production themselves become commodities in which a social relationship is materially embodied, namely that of their exclusive appropriation by a class of capitalists. Following Marx, there is thus a need to specify capitalism proper in terms of class relations comprising owners of the means of production (capitalists) counterposed to an expropriated class (proletarians) now ‘free’ (from feudal bonds) to sell its labour power to the capitalists.¹³ In this way, the separation of producers from their means of production, together with the need for the new capitalists to sell their commodities on the basis of market competitiveness rather than political prerogative, gave rise to Marx’s “dull compulsion of the economic” as the essence of capitalism proper. Thus, for the first time in history, power over production in capitalism proper came to be exerted economically (rendered ideologically as the ‘self-regulating’ market) rather than politically as in feudalism, absolutism, etc. So long as the means of production are owned by capitalists (with absolute or exclusive property rights representing another particularly characteristic feature of capitalism proper) and withheld from producers (proletarians), this “dull compulsion of the economic” obliges the latter to sell their labour power to the former in order to secure the means of survival. Modern capitalism is thus a “*qualitatively* new phenomenon, a new mode of mobilizing social labour in the transformation of nature”.¹⁴ This stands in marked contrast to WST, for which – following in the tradition of Weber and Braudel – capitalism is simply a quantitative amplification of relations (‘production and trade for profit’) already present in pre-capitalist hierarchical modes of production.

Moving to the second issue, if WST – and by extension, Friedmann and McMichael – have no definitive definition of capitalism, then they likewise have no precise conceptualization of the modern state. This is because the newly constituted and institutionally separated spheres of the political and the economic under capitalism proper are *dialectically* cognate and implied, with their ‘separation in unity’ a consequence of the commodification of labour power and the establishment of absolute property rights in the means of production. The modern state also acquires a strategic political role that the individual capitalist or enterprise cannot attain. The state was initially instrumental in fulfilling the political task of expropriating the peasantry from its means of production, rendering the resulting ‘free’ labour power

12 Mark Tilzey/Fraser Sugden/David Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work of Eric R. Wolf: Reviving Critical Agrarian Studies*, London 2023.

13 Karl Marx, *Capital*, London 1981.

14 Eric Robert Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley 1982, 85, emphasis in original.

available to agrarian and industrial capitalists.¹⁵ Once capitalism was firmly installed by these means, the state (representing the condensation of dominant class interests in the social formation) further deployed its power to maintain and guarantee the absolute property rights of the capitalist class and to institute and support regimes of work discipline required by this new mode.¹⁶ The modern state also assumed the essential role of arbitrating and managing contestation and collaboration between different fractions of capital, and subsequently between capitalists and their labour forces, as well as the role of representing the interests of capital in the international arena – including by military force if necessary.

One might expect Friedmann and McMichael's acknowledged debt to RT to manifest in some substantive analysis of the modern state. Sadly, this is not the case, and their partial employment of RT only serves to reinforce the deficiencies of their reliance on WST. This relates in particular to their neglect of the two aspects of the relation between capitalism and the modern state that enable us to make sense of both entities in their dialectical co-constitution: the 'separation in unity' of the institutional spheres of the economy and polity referenced above and, relatedly, the complementary accumulation and legitimation functions of the state with regard to capital (and its labour forces) as defined by RT.¹⁷ Apart from almost completely disregarding the legitimation dimension (mode of regulation) of RT, Friedmann and McMichael apply a dichotomous rather than dialectical understanding of the relation between state and capital, with both entities being de-historicized and reified in their treatment.¹⁸ As noted earlier, their modern state consequently appears as nothing more than the contingent and temporally delimited outcome of a sectoral articulation between agriculture and industry. I suggest that a proper understanding of the state-capital relation needs to subvert this dichotomous conceptualization of the two entities.

In addition to a full employment of RT, the work of Poulantzas can help us to achieve this objective.¹⁹ Given the lack of extra-economic influence that individual capitals can exert, the state affords the essential institutional space for the various capitalist class fractions – and under social democracy (Keynesianism), for other non-capitalist class fractions as well – to collaborate and stimulate alliances and strategies while simultaneously co-opting or subverting those non-capitalist classes inclined to follow paths outside capitalism. Not least for legitimation purposes, the state also needs to be relatively autonomous from the interests and influence of particular fractions of capital and, where non-capitalist classes are to be effectively co-opted, even from capital in general. However, when non-capitalist classes become restive and potentially threaten the legitimacy of capitalism, as in the present-day conjuncture, states may become increasingly authoritarian and seek to limit the democratic rights

15 Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation*, Durham 2000.

16 Wolf, *Europe*, 100.

17 Robert Boyer/Yves Saillard, *Regulation Theory: The State of the Art*, London 2002.

18 Thus, while they do suggest that "it is possible to see a mutual conditioning of the state system and capital" (Friedmann/McMichael, *Agriculture*, 112), this is clearly conceptualized as an external relation, as indicated by the following: "In both movements agriculture became incorporated within accumulation itself, and states and national economies became increasingly subordinated to capital. We conclude that the growing power of capital to organize and re-organize agriculture undercuts state policies directing agriculture to national ends, such as food security, articulated development, and the preservation of rural/peasant communities" (*ibid.*, 95).

19 Nicos Poulantzas, *State, Power, Socialism*, London 1978.

and political influence of such classes while simultaneously attempting to ideologically co-opt selected groups into more restrictive notions concerning who should be the beneficiaries of capitalism and/or state welfare (for example, on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, religion, politico-economic allegiance, etc.). As Poulantzas and later Jessop suggest, the state is therefore a social relation constituting the condensation of the balance of class forces or interests in the social formation.²⁰

For Friedmann and McMichael, by contrast, capital appears to be a unitary entity lacking any class-fractional differentiation or national affiliation, and featuring a universally kindly disposition towards *laissez faire* and a 'minimal state.' In their interpretation, it is thus counterposed to an equally essentialized and de-historicized state with a general predisposition towards capital constraint and public control of the means of production. This view is directly opposed to our conceptualization of the state (or better, the state-capital nexus) as a social relation, an arena within which class contestation and compromise are played out – principally to facilitate the accumulation strategies of certain fractions of capital,²¹ but also to ideologically embed such strategies amongst the wider citizenry.

Addressing the remaining issues identified earlier, if Friedmann and McMichael have little notion of the specific class configuration of capitalism or of the state as a social relation, it is unsurprising that they apply a deficient class analysis or neglect it entirely, especially in relation to inter-class struggle. From this neglect arise serious shortcomings in their analysis of state-capital dynamics involving class contestation and compromise and, derivatively, inter-state relations. To remedy these shortcomings, I suggest here – building on the schools of Political Marxism and Neo-Gramscian International Political Economy (IPE) in particular – that the prime mover in the formation and reproduction of food regimes derives from the character of capitalist social property relations in the hegemonic state within an international trade regime comprising the articulation of these social property relations with receptive and complementary capitalist class interests in other states.²² This indicates the pivotal importance of class struggle in the emergence of capitalist social property relations within a given social formation or state, with a social formation being a concrete, organized structure (usually coterminous with the nation or state) marked by a dominant mode of production and the articulation around it of a complex group of other modes which become progressively subordinate to it – and in the case of capitalism, tend to disappear. Capitalist social property relations are defined by the key features identified earlier in this paper, and once these relations become dominant within a social formation, that social formation or state may then reasonably be described as capitalist. The capitalist mode of production, as the outcome

20 Ibid.; Bob Jessop, *The State: Past, Present, Future*, Cambridge 2016.

21 Peter Taylor, *The State as Container: Territoriality in the Modern World-System*, in: *Progress in Human Geography* 18 (1994), 151–162; Bastiaan van Apeldoorn/Nina de Graaff/Henk Overbeek, *The Reconfiguration of the Global State-Capital Nexus*, *Globalizations* 9 (2012), 471–486.

22 On Political Marxism, see Robert Brenner, *The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism*, in: Trevor Henry Aston/Charles Harding Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge 1985, 213–328; Colin Mooers, *The Making of Bourgeois Europe: Absolutism, Revolution, and the Rise of Capitalism in England, France, and Germany*, London 1991; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Question of Market Dependence*, in: *Journal of Agrarian Change* 2 (2002), 50–87; on Neo-Gramscian International Political Economy, see Andreas Bieler/Adam David Morton, *A Critical Theory Route to Hegemony, World Order and Historical Change: Neo-Gramscian Perspectives in International Relations in: Capital and Class* 82 (2004), 85–113.

of dominant class interests within the social formation, will then become national policy embodied in a particular regime of accumulation. Since capitalism entails, for the first time, the separation of the bulk of the population from its agrarian means of production, therefore implying trade in food staples to feed the newly formed proletariat, this new capitalist regime of accumulation necessarily includes a food regime.²³

Should this national policy successfully augment the power of the dominant classes and hence the state through expanded capital accumulation, the state may then – through international projection and imposition of its regime of accumulation (subsuming a capitalist food regime) – aspire to the status of hegemon in the inter-state system. In order to compete with this new hegemon, or under duress from it, other states/social formations may then seek to instigate their own transformation to capitalist social property relations. Once the capitalist mode of production becomes dominant within them and they enter into trade with the hegemon, including substantial commerce in food staples, we may then speak of an international – and perforce capitalist – food regime. This process is exemplified by the emergence of the British ‘free trade’ food regime (1840s–1870s) as the first *international* capitalist regime, accordingly identified in my model as the ‘First’ or ‘Liberal’ Food Regime.²⁴ It is this understanding, I assert, that should form the basis for the definition and periodization of food regimes (see next section) rather than the vague notion of a ‘global’ food regime deployed by Friedmann and McMichael. To reiterate, according to our definition, the first two of Friedmann and McMichael’s regimes should not be defined as global in any case, since many social formations in the Global South in particular did not make the transition to dominant capitalist social property relations until the 1960s or later.²⁵

In this way, it is transnational class coalitions and international alliances of capitalists through the medium of the state which act as conduits for the dissemination of a food regime from the hegemon. Class-agential processes of this kind are characteristic even of relations

23 Tilzey, *Political Ecology*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

24 Tilzey, *Political Ecology*.

25 See Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*, and Mark Tilzey/Fraser Sugden, *Peasants, Capitalism, and Imperialism in an Age of Politico-Ecological Crisis*, London 2023, for details on capitalist transitions. Friedmann and McMichael place a great deal of emphasis on the formation of a putative “world price” as the basis for their definition of the first ‘global’ food regime. They do not, however, develop an understanding of capitalism that might explain why producers, and subsequently states, enter into competition with one another (the prerequisite for any “world price”) and how this differs fundamentally from mercantile capitalism. Again, the issue for Friedmann and McMichael seems to be simply one of scale rather than the emergence of capitalist social property relations predicated on market dependency – the need to reproduce capital and labour power in direct competition with other capitalists and labourers. Market dependency constitutes the fundamental dynamic of capitalism proper. What is key, then, is at what time these new social property relations and this distinctive dynamic first emerged in a social formation and subsequently began to enforce the integration of other social formations into this dynamic. This is why the concept of international capitalist food regimes is more meaningful than the quantitative, scalar concept of “world-price” underpinning food regime definition deployed by Friedmann and McMichael. We assert that the first integration of states on the basis of this new capitalistic dynamic occurred after the abolition of the British Corn Laws in 1846, drawing major grain suppliers in Europe – Germany, Russia, and to a lesser extent France – into its orbit. This same expansionary dynamic later drew in North America, Latin America, India, and elsewhere as cheap suppliers of grain to underwrite British industrialisation. Whether the scale of this process was first regional and subsequently ‘world-scale’ (with equivalent ‘regional prices’ and ‘world prices’) is less important than the specification of the capitalist logic of the dynamic itself.

between a hegemon and a subordinate state, such as between imperial states of the Global North and the so-called periphery of the Global South, in which case imperial transnational class fractions and extraverted peripheral capitalists may forge complementary strategies of accumulation. There may, however, not be a confluence of interest between dominant class fractions in different states, especially when these states are in competition with one another, in which case the aspiring hegemon will be resisted and divergent food regimes may exist concurrently, as was largely the case during the Imperial Food Regime as defined in my model (see below).²⁶ In this way, we can see that food regimes comprise specific forms of capital accumulation, and these forms reflect the preferred interests of a capitalist class fraction, or coalition of class fractions, within the hegemonic state. These interests are projected beyond the social formation by way of conscious class agency to mould a conformable international regime. Since the intention in this context is to enhance the power and wealth of dominant class fractions – and by extension, that of the hegemonic state itself – this international projection of national interests will tend to generate relations of ‘combined and uneven development’ (see below) with other social formations. These relations generally take the form of subordination to the hegemon, although they may also result in challenge, competition, and eventual displacement of the hegemonic power.

The above enables us, following van Apeldoorn/de Graaff/Overbeek,²⁷ to capture the essential internal relations between capital and state which the state-capital nexus deploys to ensure capital accumulation and political legitimization, simultaneously framing the form and function of food regimes. We can identify four key relations:

1. *Market creation*: to engender and ensure the effective functioning of markets, including the structural preconditions for the capitalist mode of production, such as the expropriation of agrarian producers with regard to their means of production (accumulation function);
2. *Market correction*: to mitigate the socially destructive and economically divisive impacts of capital accumulation, to manage the capital-labour relation, and to reproduce the subordination of the labour force to capital and its ideological adherence to capitalism (legitimation function);
3. *Market direction*: to direct and supervise capital accumulation when private capital fails or is unable to secure competitiveness for whatever reason; in other words, state intervention in the economy (accumulation function);
4. *External representation*: to represent the external interests of ‘domestic’ capital, extending from economic diplomacy to the military protection of business interests abroad (accumulation and legitimization function, the latter elevating the national interest above class interest in the name of nationalism and resulting in what we refer to as ‘combined and uneven development’).

These key relations constitute the foundation of food regimes as subsidiary elements of accumulation regimes within international political economy. With the first of these relations representing a basic prerequisite of the capitalist mode of production, the relative importance of the relations will vary across space and time according to:

26 Tilzey, Political Ecology.

27 Van Apeldoorn/de Graaff/Overbeek, Reconfiguration, 474.

1. The *class composition* of the respective state-capital nexus;
2. The *hierarchical* or *spatial* location of the state-capital nexus (social formation) within the international state system – core, semi-periphery, or periphery;
3. The *temporal* location of the state-capital nexus within the longer-term trajectory of the capitalist mode of production; for example, the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism, or the oscillation between ‘free trade’ liberalism and ‘protectionist’ mercantilism.

In conclusion of this section, I suggest that capitalism – intimately conjoined with the state – gives rise to food regimes as integral elements of its expansionary dynamic. This arises from a threefold logic connected to both the accumulation and legitimation functions of the state-capital nexus:

1. To supply food on a reasonably cheap and secure basis to its expropriated proletarian labour force, thereby aiming to ensure the relative quiescence of this proletariat (relations 1 and 2 above);
2. To supply this food as abundantly and cheaply as possible in order to exert downward pressure on the socially average wage²⁸ of labour forces, thereby maximizing surplus value in competitive commodity production and ensuring a transfer of surplus from agriculture to national industries (relations 3 and 4);
3. To create profit-making opportunities for the various class fractions of agrarian capital (relations 3 and 4).

The state-capital nexus employs all four relations identified above to secure this logic. These relations may be complementary, as in socially articulated economies where the labour force is important both as producers and consumers, or antagonistic, as in socially disarticulated economies where producers have no value as consumers and may therefore be subject to super-exploitation (payment of wages below the cost of subsistence).²⁹

28 As defined by Marx, the socially average wage is the amount of money required to sustain a worker at a specific society's average standard of living, reflecting a historically and socially determined level of subsistence, not merely a bare minimum of survival. See Marx, *Capital*.

29 Copley and Moraitis argue that while capitalist market relations are underpinned by states, they take on an autonomous, dominating logic that constrains states' agency. More concretely, by reproducing international monetary relations, states inadvertently contribute to the establishment of world labour productivity averages that force them to promote national competitiveness in order to keep pace with world market standards. In place of the notion of the mutual constitution of capital and the state, then, they offer Marx's concept of alienation as a theory of a form of social relations that have escaped the control of the institutions producing them. The challenge of state governance, they argue, is to reconcile the impersonal imperatives of market relations with the creation of a legitimate national political project. While correct as far as it goes, this argument fails to recognize that some (imperial) states are the differential authors of such market relations, imposing such relations on other, weaker states and, by the same token, possessing the capacity to mitigate these adverse impacts of the drive for global competitiveness. Moreover, it is important to remember that subordination to the capitalist market (market dependency) is the product of specific social-property relations generated by the separation of the mass of producers from their means of production. Depending on the configuration of social forces in power, states have the capacity to respond to such market dependency by transforming social property relations in such a way as to reunite producers with the means of production, effectively reversing primitive accumulation. See Jack Copley/Alexis Moraitis, *Beyond the Mutual Constitution of States and Markets: On the Governance of Alienation*, in: *New Political Economy* 26 (2021), 490–508.

Proposing a new periodization of international food regimes

The revised ontological basis for understanding food regimes set out above enables us to propose a new periodization of *international* rather than the less meaningful *global* or *world-scale* food regimes. These regimes are defined as follows:

- The First International, or *Liberal* Food Regime, 1846–1870s;
- The Second International, or *Imperial* Food Regime, 1870s–1930s;
- The Third International, or *Political Productivist* Food Regime, 1930s–1980s;
- The Fourth International, or *Neoliberal* Food Regime, 1980s–2010;
- The Fifth International, *Neo-Imperial* Food Regime, 2010–Present.

The justification for and detailed characterization of this periodization has been presented in Tilzey (2018), Tilzey (2019), Tilzey et al. (2023), and Tilzey and Sugden (2023).³⁰ The characterization of my proposed Third and Fourth International Regimes is not drastically different from Friedmann and McMichael's Second and Third Food Regimes – although in my model, the Neoliberal Regime (McMichael's Corporate Regime) retains a central focus on the state-capital nexus as the provider of the key regulatory environment (including through the World Trade Organization – an organization controlled by states) within which transnational fractions of capital are able to thrive. This being the case, the following sections will focus on further detailing and justifying the first, second, and fifth of our international food regimes – in other words, those regimes which Friedmann and McMichael (including in their later work) do not consider at all or which they characterize quite differently.

The First International, or Liberal Food Regime, 1846–1870s

Agrarian capitalism had been emergent in England since the fifteenth century,³¹ but it was not until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, following the process of widespread parliamentary enclosure and extirpation of peasant common rights (the expropriation of the means of production from the agrarian producers),³² that the capitalist mode came to dominate the production of food staples for the population as a whole and a national food regime appeared. The capitalist structure of agricultural production and competitive rental agreements with yeoman tenants enforced increasing yields and productivity to meet the new demand for food staples from a burgeoning proletariat and urban middle class. Agrar-

30 Tilzey, Political Ecology; Tilzey, Food Regimes; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work; Tilzey/Sugden, Peasants, Capitalism, and Imperialism.

31 Spencer Dimmock, *The Origin of Capitalism in England 1400–1600*, Chicago 2014; Spencer Dimmock, *England's Second Domesday and the Expulsion of the English Peasantry*, Leiden 2024.

32 The separation of people from their agrarian means of production as a precondition for capitalism is highlighted here because this is how capitalism first began in England – where the first national (capitalist) food regime, and subsequent international (Liberal) food regime, were initiated. This emphasis does by no means preclude other means of implanting capitalism, however, including by dispossessing indigenous people and granting their land to a class of petty commodity producing family farmers, as in the case of the settler states of Canada, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. Indeed, the author has detailed these various paths of agrarian transition to capitalism elsewhere (see Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work; Tilzey/Sugden, Peasants, Capitalism, and Imperialism).

ian landlords could see clear opportunities for rent increases, and the accompanying age of agricultural improvements was ushered in after 1750. Agricultural prices remained relatively buoyant with the continued movement of people from rural areas to the cities, but the war with France starting in 1793 saw wheat prices accelerate upwards; they would remain high until the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. Thereafter, the progressive introduction of an international 'free trade' regime, with the British hegemon at its centre, led to a gradual decline of arable farming in Britain.³³

What I choose to term the First or Liberal International Food Regime emerged following the repeal of the British Corn Laws in 1846 and was founded on free trade principles designed to allow the export of competitive British industrial goods to other newly capitalist social formations in return for cheap food staples with minimal hindrance in the form of tariff barriers. This may be identified as the first international food regime founded on the integration of imperial or 'core' states (notably France and what was to become Germany) together with certain 'peripheral' social formations like Argentina as (for the first time) predominantly capitalist economies. This international regime arose because the cost of cereals, the principal item in the proletarian diet, became too high in Britain due to the protectionism of the Corn Laws and the progressive inability of the 'organic' four-course rotation system of the 'first' (capitalist) agricultural revolution to sustain output increases over the course of the mid-nineteenth century.³⁴ This led to a squeeze on profits, and consequently to pressure by industrial capitalists to source cheaper supplies elsewhere. These pressures could be eased by spatio-temporal fixes in the form of bilateral trade agreements with complementary class fractional interests overseas, thereby exploiting an extractive frontier where labour power and/or the ecological conditions of production were cheaper. Britain thus began to invoke the free trade doctrine of comparative advantage in the first half of the nineteenth century, whereby wage foods should be sourced from wherever they could be produced at the least cost (initially mainland Europe, then North and South America), consequently affording a competitive boost to Britain's preminent industrial status.

During the mid-nineteenth century, Britain negotiated a series of bilateral trade agreements, among which the Anglo-French (Cobden-Chevalier) Treaty of 1860 was perhaps the most emblematic; its terms were effectively extended to all states in Europe in seven further treaties concluded during the 1860s.³⁵ Like its successors, the treaty of 1860 facilitated the entry of more competitive agricultural commodities from certain European states into Britain in return for the reciprocal free entry of British industrial goods. These bilateral treaties effectively represented international coalitions between class fractions whose interests happened to be complementary in the historical conjuncture of the mid-nineteenth century. As it was with French agricultural exporters, so it was with Prussian Junkers in relation to British industrialists. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Prussian agrarian reforms aimed at stimulating a transition to capitalism, and explicitly emulating Britain, liberalized

33 Tilzey, *Political Ecology*.

34 Mark Overton, *The Agricultural Revolution in England 1550–1850*, Cambridge 1996.

35 Nik Koning, *The Failure of Agrarian Capitalism: Agrarian Politics in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and the USA 1846–1919*, London 1994; Stephen David Krasner, *State Power and the Structure of International Trade*, in: *World Politics* 28 (1976), 317–347; Bill Winders, *The Vanishing Free Market: The Formation and Spread of the British and US Food Regimes*, in: *Journal of Agrarian Change* 9 (2009), 315–344; Tilzey, *Political Ecology*.

(de-feudalized) the land market and labour relations, leading to an expansion of estate farms and the conversion of Junkers from feudal lords to capitalist farmers. By subjecting the peasantry to heavy burdens of redemption which it could ill afford, these reforms ultimately led to the large-scale transfer of peasant land to the Junkers. From the 1840s, rising agricultural prices and growing demand for agricultural commodities, especially from new importers such as Britain, encouraged Junkers and large domain tenants to develop their farmland along British lines: They enclosed their fields, introduced rotational leys and new fodder crops, and increased livestock numbers, which in turn improved soil fertility, leading to improved arable yields. Such agricultural 'improvement' enhanced the competitiveness of the estate farms, enabling a further expansion of their area from 6.25 to 7.15 million hectares in Prussia between 1851 and 1861.³⁶

In this way, the newly capitalist Junkers and a smaller stratum of upper peasants became competitive grain suppliers in international trade over the course of the mid-nineteenth century. German industrial capitalists, however, had not yet attained parity with their British counterparts. The Junkers were therefore advocates of free trade in agricultural commodities along with the industries supplying agricultural machinery, railways, and other industrial infrastructure necessary for the cheap production and distribution of food. By contrast, German industrial class fractions sought protection against their more competitive counterparts in Britain. The political power of the Junkers – and therefore their interests – still prevailed at the level of the state, however, with the result that Prussia eliminated trade barriers for agriculture and retained only a few duties on imported industrial goods.³⁷

Despite Britain's status as economic hegemon, other states in the core of the emergent capitalist international system managed to avoid becoming peripheralized – that is, they evaded the fate of dependent or disarticulated development that would become characteristic of the periphery in the Global South. This was due both to their pre-existent strong military infrastructures as a legacy of absolutism, which could effectively resist any British resort to extra-economic measures to enforce market opening (in contrast to the experiences of China, India, Africa, and Latin America), and to the existence of strong nationally oriented bourgeoisies which were reluctant to see emergent national capitalist production subordinated to the economic requirements of an overseas power. For example, Britain had been militarily repulsed by the USA and was only able to defeat Napoleonic France with the assistance of Prussia.³⁸

Such was not the case in the emergent capitalist periphery, however. Marini's theory of unequal exchange is highly relevant to understanding the question of the dialectical relation between underdevelopment in the periphery and development in the imperial states of the core, and simultaneously the perpetuation of the peasantry in the former versus its demise and replacement by capitalist farms in the latter.³⁹ Marini posits the super-exploitation of

36 Koning, *Failure*.

37 *Ibid.*; Winders, *Vanishing*; Tilzey, *Political Ecology*.

38 It should be noted, however, that the threat of such peripheralization in Germany was not fully repulsed until the power of the export-oriented Junkers in the state was curbed with unification and the adoption of protectionist policies after 1871.

39 Ruy Mauro Marini, *Dialéctica de la Dependencia*, Mexico City 1974; Ruy Mauro Marini, *Plusvalía extraordinaria y acumulación de capital*, in: *Cuadernos Políticos* 20 (1979), 18–39; Ruy Mauro Marini, *The Dialectics of Dependency*, New York 2022.

labour as the essential factor in capitalist underdevelopment in the periphery, while at the same time viewing the full development of capitalism in Britain as being based on cheap food imports from Latin America (especially Argentina and Uruguay) together with other social formations in an emergent periphery, which allowed extensive specialization in industry, full proletarianization, and the shift from absolute to relative surplus value.⁴⁰ This relation established during the Liberal Food Regime, so Marini's argument goes, provided the unacknowledged foundation for the transition of capitalism in Britain to production dominated by large-scale industry during the middle and latter part of the nineteenth century. Marini's theory thus combines the genesis of export-oriented capitalism in the periphery with the development of industrial capitalism in the core of imperial states.

Marini argues that the international market prices of food commodities and other raw materials were below their value because capitalist producers suppressed the wage levels of their workers to below the value of their labour power. This relation was not a result of the deployment of pre-capitalist means of exploitation, he states, but rather a sign of the generation of a *different* type of capitalism *within* the developing capitalist mode of production as a whole. The unequal exchange that emerged within an apparently free trade relation between the periphery and the imperium was not owed to the export of capital, Marini claims, but rather to an emerging capitalist class in the former that was tied to exports as the principal type of commodity production. International trade in turn induced the capital-wage relation under particular conditions in the post-colonial periphery. This is essentially a relation that de Janvry would later term "socially disarticulated" accumulation, whereby workers can be paid below-subsistence wages since they do not represent consumers for the export-bound commodities they produce.⁴¹

Marini therefore points out that the periphery exhibits deformations when measured against the capitalism of the core states precisely *because of* the relation of dependency between the former and the latter. In his view, the challenge is to explain the particular form of deformed capitalism that came to characterize Latin America and the wider periphery –

40 It should be noted here that Marini's emphasis on Latin America's cheap exports as undergirding industrialization in Britain appears to be considerably over-stated. During the Liberal Food Regime, imports of food, especially grains, from Germany, Russia, France, Canada, and Ireland were far more important than those from Latin America. Thus, wheat exports from Argentina, the most important Latin American exporter to Britain, did not assume an important role in British imports until later in the century, during the Imperial Food Regime. Nonetheless, Marini's comments concerning the deformation of export-oriented social formations dominated by large landowners and sustaining dependent, disarticulated development as an augmenting factor in the central shift from absolute to relative surplus value appear relevant in relation to Russia, pre-unification Germany (Prussia), and Ireland especially, major exporters of food to Britain. It is also important to note, in arguing the case for the First for Liberal Food Regime, that imports of wheat (the fundamental staple of working-class diet) to Britain rose steadily after the abolition of the Corn Laws – from less than 10% before abolition to nearly 17% by 1850, to 35% by 1870. (Mette Ejrnaes/Karl Gunner Persson/Soren Rich, *Feeding the British: Convergence and Market Efficiency in the Nineteenth-Century Grain Trade*, in: *The Economic History Review* 61 (2008), 140–171.) They then continued on this trajectory, established during the Liberal Food Regime, to reach nearly 80% import dependency by 1914. As Bairoch suggested, starting in 1840–1850, Britain began to depend more and more on foreign countries for its subsistence. (Paul Bairoch, *Revolución Industrial y Subdesarrollo*, Mexico City 1967.) Again, it should be emphasized that it is the cause of this expansionary trajectory of food imports that is important – that is, the new capitalism – not whether it became a notionally 'world-scale' phenomenon by the 1870s.

41 Alain de Janvry, *The Agrarian Question and Reformism in Latin America*, Baltimore 1981, 27.

and he considers the key to be the super-exploitation of labour, which he characterizes as follows:

“The intensification of work, the extension of the working day, and the expropriation of part of the necessary labour for the labourer to replace his labour power configure a way of production founded exclusively in the greater exploitation of the worker, and not in the development of his productive capacity.”⁴²

Marini argues that these mechanisms signify that labour power is paid under its value through depressed wages, and that they thus correspond to the super-exploitation of labour. Significantly for our understanding of the Liberal Food Regime, Marini places the necessity for the super-exploitation of peripheral labour power in the mid-nineteenth century – *before* the appearance of imperialism as portrayed by Lenin as well as what I term the Imperial Food Regime (see below).⁴³ The transition in Britain from production dominated by methods of absolute surplus to relative surplus value depended on cheap imports of food and raw materials *in addition* to greater productivity. Marini emphasizes this point as follows:

“Beyond facilitating quantitative growth, the participation of Latin America in the world market would contribute to the axis of accumulation of the industrial economy displacing from the production of absolute surplus value to relative surplus value, that is to say that the accumulation depended more on the increase in productivity of the worker rather than simply on their exploitation. Nevertheless, the development of Latin American production that allowed the region to aid this qualitative change in the central countries was due fundamentally to greater exploitation of the Latin American worker. It is this contradictory character of Latin American dependency that determines the relations of production in the overall capitalist system [...]”⁴⁴

While Marini may have seriously overstated the contribution of Latin America to the development of industrialization in Britain, his model nonetheless appears applicable to other peripheral social formations in the mid-nineteenth century as well – notably Russia, Ireland, and pre-unification Germany (Prussia), all of which were major exporters of food staples to Britain and characterized at the time by highly inegalitarian agrarian landlordism. Germany was subsequently able to escape from peripherality and agrarian landlordism through protectionist policies, unification, and increased militarization, while Ireland did the same by embarking on a programme of comprehensive land reform after a period of sustained social unrest which threatened the stability of the British state.

I have demonstrated above the fundamental importance of the Liberal Food Regime of the mid-nineteenth century, firstly in that it embodies the pristine emergence of capitalism proper on the international stage, and secondly in that it signifies the development of capitalism in the core – especially the appearance of ‘socially articulated’ capitalism there, accompanied by the

42 Marini, *Dialéctica*, 48.

43 Vladimir Illich Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline*, Collected Works, London 1964.

44 Marini, *Dialéctica*, 23.

development of dependent, deformed, and 'socially disarticulated' capitalism in the periphery. It is therefore all the more remarkable that this period – one that set in motion capitalist, inter-continental trade in food commodities – receives no attention at all in the work of Friedmann and McMichael, for whom international trade in food staples began only in the 1870s.

The historical conjuncture of complementarity between class fractions of the core states during the Liberal Food Regime could be sustained only as long as increased consumption of food commodities could support profitable production. This conjuncture began to unravel in the 1870s as continuing and expanding cheap agricultural production in the periphery and in North America combined with increases in farm productivity to generate an over-production crisis with resulting sharp declines in food commodity prices. This sounded the death knell for larger-scale arable farming in Britain, where the government continued to insist on free trade policies and agriculture increasingly concentrated on livestock and dairy production. Agricultural decline and depression in Britain were not considered by British governments to present overriding problems, however: Given that the majority of the population was now engaged in urban industry, agrarian unrest was largely a thing of the past, the agrarian landlord class had diversified its investment portfolios to include non-agrarian interests, and cheap food for the working classes could be readily imported.

This was not the case, however, in the core states of France and Germany. Here, the agrarian question of the peasantry, and the potential for rural unrest, was still very real. Moreover, agrarian capitalists such as the Prussian Junkers, less able than their British counterparts to diversify investment portfolios into what were still nascent industrial sectors, were unhappy to see their domestic and export markets compromised by cheap imports. Additionally, if capitalist agriculture went into decline in these countries, a refocus on industrial development according to free trade principles was perilous given Britain's competitive pre-eminence as 'workshop of the world.' In response to these threats, agricultural and industrial class fractions now demanded protection from the free market, and tariff rates on food imports began to increase in France and Germany. The ruling classes – increasingly comprising domestic alliances between agricultural and industrial class fractions – now sought to develop more nationally based development strategies that were to establish an articulation between agriculture and industry within the national territory. In the cases of France and Germany, this was to be combined with a formal imperialism in the shape of carving out colonies in the periphery, whose function – apart from demonstrating the prowess of the colonizer in this new era of national competition rather than complementarity – was to supply super-cheap raw materials produced by super-exploited labour in order to subsidize industrial development and the shift to the predominance of relative surplus value production amongst a national 'labour aristocracy.'

The Second International, or Imperial Food Regime, 1870s–1930s

The Imperial Food Regime thus saw the widespread adoption of protectionist rather than free trade policies in core states, and a significant political development was the unification of the German state in 1871. These developments coincided with a commodity over-accumulation

crisis, a cyclical tendency that capital could overcome in two possible ways: first, by moving away from an extensive and quantitative regime of accumulation based on absolute surplus value extraction towards an intensive or qualitative one founded on relative surplus value extraction, implying that the working classes needed to be integrated increasingly into a virtuous circle of enlarged, machine-based production and expanded consumption. This aligned well with sectoral articulation and new nationhood (social articulation), so that both accumulation and legitimation needs could be fulfilled in the states of the core. The second means of mitigating over-accumulation lay in supplementing and underwriting qualitative growth by importing super-cheap primary commodities from the periphery (primary means) as well as securing captive markets, in part by destroying local production in those regions (secondary means). Under conditions of rival rather than complementary capitalisms, these means were secured through imperialism. Competitive, protectionist, and nationalist economies, bolstered by racialized ideologies of 'social imperialism', generated an underlying dynamic of mutual aggression that would eventually erupt in the First World War.

Thus, the Imperial Food Regime is defined by the paradoxical reversal in the relation between trade and national development in the core states, away from free trade and towards protectionism – a trend most noticeable in states such as France and Germany, as well as the newly capitalist state of Japan, that could be described as 'late developers.' They now viewed the competitive advantage of Britain in industry and the USA in agriculture as inimical to their own capitalist development and political stability. As we have seen, the preceding Liberal Food Regime had been characterized by a *de facto* British industrial monopoly in the international arena, with the norm within it being one of assured profits through competition between small and medium-sized enterprises. In stark contrast, the post-liberal or imperial era was characterized by international competition between Britain and the now rival capitalist industrial economies of Germany and the USA in particular.⁴⁵ This competition was heightened by the difficulties in realizing sufficient profits for reproduction now faced by capitalist enterprises under conditions of relative depression. In this way, capitalism – embodied in the geopolitical strategies of the core states – entered a period of formal imperialism as understood in the way described by Lenin:⁴⁶ that is, in the broad sense of capitalism as now characterized by 'monopoly capitalism', along with the narrower sense of the new and formal integration (colonization) of the periphery as dependencies of the core states – and, as a corollary of this, as competition between these core states.⁴⁷

I suggest, following Lenin, that the major rationale for the adoption of imperialism by the core states after the 1870s was monopolistic control of the sources, and the production through super-exploited labour, of raw materials for subsequent manufacture in the respective imperium.⁴⁸ This goal could be met most effectively by means of territorial conquest. The same rationale continues in the neo-imperialism of today (see below) but is complemented, crucially, by the unprecedented relocation of manufacturing itself from the core to selected regions of the periphery, representing an essential investment outlet for imperial capital in

45 Koning, *Failure*.

46 Lenin, *Imperialism*.

47 Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

48 Lenin, *Imperialism*.

accordance with Lenin's theory.⁴⁹ Since it was a necessary factor in counteracting the over-accumulation crisis of the core, Lenin saw the export of capital as generating severe rivalry amongst the imperial states as they strove for access to, and control over, the periphery. He thus perceived a diffusion of capitalism to the periphery and, relatedly, a homogenization of this mode of production between the core and the periphery. In the latter respect, however, Lenin seems to have been incorrect, since he failed to appreciate the dependent and deformed nature of 'development' based on systems of super-exploitation of people and nature that was, and continues to be, characteristic of peripheral subordination to the imperium.

Unlike Lenin, Wolf points to the role of social imperialism in propelling imperialism/colonialism, in effect by fulfilling a legitimacy function of the imperial state.⁵⁰ This is a motivation that strives to unify people at home by displacing internal conflicts onto an external enemy, with tangible gains accruing to members of supposed 'master races' from the domination of multitudes of purportedly 'inferior races'.⁵¹ "The spread of imperialism and the extension of outright colonial rule thus appear to be the result of a more complex interplay of social constellations than was allowed for in Lenin's explanation."⁵² Aligning with the thinking developed in this paper, Wolf also points to the advantages of conjoining the theories of Lenin and Trotsky:

"When Lenin characterized Russia as the 'weakest link' in the chain of capitalist domination, he implicitly raised the question of what made some links stronger and others weaker. Trotsky, who attempted an answer, argued that this variability was produced by 'uneven and combined development' – 'uneven' because capitalism encountered extremely diverse conditions produced by uneven development in the past, and 'combined' because capitalism had to combine with these uneven conditions in the very act of permeating them. This answer granted a measure of influence to pre-existing capitalist modes, and recognized that the way capitalism worked depended on this influence. Yet Trotsky still defined capitalism as uniform in its 'law of motion', and therefore uniform in its effects. What, however, if the capitalist mode generated variability and differentiation not only through its combination with other modes but also in the very course of its own operations?"⁵³

This quote strongly anticipates our own proposal to reverse Trotsky's terms to produce 'combined and uneven development', meaning that the operation of the capitalist mode in combining actually generates 'uneven' development⁵⁴ – for example, through the attempt to perpetuate forms of non-capitalist production underpinning the super-exploitation of peripheral labour forces, even as it takes place *within* the capitalist mode of production.

49 Tilzey, Political Ecology.

50 Wolf, Europe.

51 If this sounds familiar, it is because we are currently experiencing something very similar in the neo-imperial and ultra-nationalist conjuncture, and for very much the same reasons. Despite inter-imperialist and anti-fascist wars and the loss of untold millions of lives over the last century or more, current trends suggest that we have learnt nothing from history.

52 Wolf, Europe, 302.

53 Ibid., 303.

54 Tilzey, Political Ecology; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work.

The appearance of this combined and uneven development during the Imperial Food Regime had the effect of further entrenching highly inequalitarian and racialized systems of disarticulated accumulation and primary resource extraction, whereby the function of formal colonies and informal dependencies (such as the ostensibly independent Latin American states) alike “was to complement the metropolitan economies and not to compete with them.”⁵⁵ It must be emphasized again that the capitalism and inter-state relations underlying the Imperial Food Regime were very different from those which had been dominant until the 1870s. Contra the assertions of Friedmann and McMichael, these relations now comprised a plurality of rival national economies ‘protecting’ themselves against each other.⁵⁶ With the breakdown of trade between complementary international class fractions that had typified the liberal era in conformity with the Ricardian ideology of comparative advantage, the need to secure access to key resources under the new conditions of relative depression and the new protectionism seems to have become the key factor driving imperial ambition.⁵⁷

Rather than viewing imperialism simply as an expression of the contradictions of capital accumulation in its new monopoly phase, however, in accordance with our conception of the state-capital nexus, we likewise need to direct our attention to the geopolitical and legitimation dimensions of the capitalist state. As we have seen in reference to Wolf’s work, imperialism was also an important means of defusing social tensions within the states of the core. The rise of labour movements that characterized the newly proletarianized and increasingly enfranchised working classes in Europe and North America generated political contradictions for the state-capital nexus which could be ameliorated only partially by means of productivity-related wage increases, important though they were.⁵⁸ Ideological incorporation into the nation-state as citizens was equally important – and here imperialism, as social imperialism, could act as a crucial augmenting factor. With the rise of large labour movements and democratic politics, social imperialism – understood as the attempt to use imperial expansion to diminish domestic discontent by economic improvements, social reform, or denigration of other nationalities, races, or ethnic groups to justify their super-exploitation or underpin their casting as scapegoats for capitalism’s own ills – became essential for sustaining concord at home. As Hobsbawm has suggested:

“More generally, imperialism encouraged the masses, and especially the discontented, to identify themselves with the imperial state and nation, and thus unconsciously to endow the social and political system represented by that state with justification and legitimacy.”⁵⁹

It is therefore incorrect to suggest, as do Friedmann and McMichael, that mainland Europe was subordinated to a continuing free trade regime from the 1870s onwards.⁶⁰ Rather, it was

55 Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914*, London 1987, 65.

56 Friedmann/McMichael, *Agriculture*.

57 Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

58 Tilzey, *Political Ecology*.

59 Hobsbawm, *Age*, 70.

60 Friedmann/McMichael, *Agriculture*. Friedmann and McMichael place great emphasis upon the supposed role of ‘settler states’ – USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand – in facilitating the development of capitalism in Europe through the export of cheap staples within the context of free trade. While this is true of Britain, it was

only Britain, for reasons unique to its early industrializing experience, that continued with a relatively free trade regime during the imperial era (what I refer to as the Imperial Food Regime) – and this primarily in relation to its colonies and economic dependencies such as Argentina and Uruguay. The principal states of Europe, notably France and Germany, pursued very different agricultural policies best characterized as protectionism rather than free trade.⁶¹ As suggested above, the key dynamics in this process arose from shifting relations between class and class fractional interests within and between the core capitalist states. Where the interests of the major class fractions in each state had been complementary during the Liberal Food Regime, they now became progressively more antagonistic in the Imperial Food Regime. Thus, in the case of Germany – which, as indicated, was a major supplier of wheat to Britain during the mid-nineteenth century – the turn of the latter towards the USA and elsewhere as the cheapest producers of grain had progressively deeper adverse impacts on the incomes of the Prussian Junker capitalists. With foreign sources of income increasingly blocked by cheaper competition, the Junkers began to see a confluence of interest with the nascent industrial bourgeoisies through policies of sectorally and socially articulated and protected national development. The German industrial-capitalist class fraction likewise saw its national, let alone international, expansion thwarted by Britain's predominant industrial prowess, which was now further buoyed by cheap food imports from North and South America and elsewhere.

Meanwhile in Germany, agricultural crisis arising from the capitalization of agriculture and the growing imports of cheaper food staples was generating an ever larger 'surplus' rural population, with the prospect of serious social unrest becoming a progressively more urgent danger to the ruling classes despite the safety valve of emigration. The solution to these concomitant accumulation and legitimization crises was increasingly seen in protectionism, with articulated development affording the means to both absorb labour and augment the power of the nation-state. The state, aided by the process of national unification, assisted the establishment of industrial monopolies, while social unrest could now be dampened through

not at all true of states such as Germany and France. The reason why we pay relatively less attention to these semi-peripheral settler states compared to states such as Germany during the Imperial Food Regime is therefore to point out Friedmann and McMichael's errors in asserting that: a) this period was a 'free trade' era (it was free trade in food only for Britain); and b) that the settler states were pivotal to the development of capitalism in mainland Europe. This period represented a reaction to free trade in the major states of mainland Europe, with protectionist policies being pivotal in enabling national capitalist development. States like Germany and France sought to stimulate their own national agricultures in articulation with nascent industry against cheap food imports from settler states. This is completely ignored by Friedmann and McMichael and shows, in contrast to their position, the importance of states and nationalism in the dynamics of capitalism. This is by no means to deny the importance of settler states for the British food system during the Imperial Food Regime – Britain continued to pursue a more or less free trade regime in food during this period, and much of this food came from the settler states. Lands expropriated from indigenous people in these settler states could usefully absorb small family farmers surplus to requirements in the UK and Europe, but on the condition that these new petty commodity producers were market-dependent while the industries of the settler states remained largely subordinate to British capital (less so in the case of the USA). The model of 'articulated' national development for these states did not really come to fruition until the Keynesian era (Third International Food Regime). See Koning, *Failure*; Tilzey, *Political Ecology*; Tilzey, *Food Regimes*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

61 Koning, *Failure*; Marcel Mazoyer/Laurence Roudart, *A History of World Agriculture from the Neolithic to the Current Crisis*, London 2006.

wage increases in line with productivity enhancements – and social divisions ideologically papered over by means of social imperialism. In Germany as well as in France, which pursued similar policies, significant measures were thus introduced to protect national cereal, meat, and dairy production.⁶² This trend was accompanied by a new support for the creation and perpetuation of a class of small commercial farmers over larger capitalist producers, stimulating a ‘farmer path’ to national developmentalism rather than the ‘Junker path’ associated with an emphasis on export orientation.⁶³

The Imperial Food Regime consequently saw states such as Germany and France renewing efforts to increase productivity of the nation’s land, often inspired by anxiety regarding food security. Now that large farms, under conditions of depressed food prices, were in many cases failing to intensify production, intensive land use by small farms assumed a new importance. Of even greater significance were fears that a rural exodus would exacerbate the social disruption engendered by the overall crisis of factory capitalism during this period.⁶⁴ These fears triggered a search for means to stem the flight from the land. Since falling output prices made large farms save on labour, small farms and allotments were embraced as a way of keeping people bound to the soil. In this way, land reform measures were advocated by urban liberals and even wealthy rural classes to counter the exodus of farm labour and sustain farm rents as well as the intensification of land use. This contributed to the political desire to create a class of small proprietors as a line of defence against radical socialism, and with it the spectre of the expropriation of private property.⁶⁵

Therefore, agricultural protection was introduced in Germany in the 1880s under Bismarck, moderated in the 1890s, and returned to its former level after the turn of the century. Protectionist farm policy was demanded by a united front of landlords and peasants (now small commercial enterprises) and endorsed by powerful circles in industry and government. These interest groups hoped that farm prosperity would sustain the domestic market, curb a potentially disruptive process of urbanization, secure food security, and make the peasantry a loyal bulwark of the state. Despite increasing industrial exports, the home market remained vitally important for German manufacturers. Furthermore, several enterprises reliant on sales of farm inputs or the processing of agricultural products were prominent in the Central Union of German Manufacturers; they advocated strongly for a rise in agricultural tariffs. These arguments were supported by renowned economists in the Economic Commission established by Chancellor Bülow in 1900 to examine the case for tariff increases. Supported by agri-industrial interests, these economists emphasized the importance of agriculture for the home market as well as for social harmony and food security while stressing the risks of an exclusive focus on industrialization. Consequently, and capturing the essence of the Imperial Food Regime, Bülow’s tariff act was passed in 1902.⁶⁶

Thus the Imperial Food Regime, in marked contrast to the *laissez-faire* of the preceding Liberal Food Regime, saw the introduction of protectionism – especially in France and Germany – tied to calls for land reform to counter the exodus of farm labour and the creation of

62 Mazoyer/Roudart, *History*.

63 Koning, *Failure*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

64 Koning, *Failure*.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

a class of owner-occupying small proprietors as a bastion against any drift towards socialism. In most European countries that had undergone full capitalist transition, located primarily in the west and north of the continent, farm income support had “become necessary to keep investments in agriculture paying”.⁶⁷ Britain, however, continued to refrain from such support, retaining its free trade orientation. The proposed introduction of tariffs on agricultural imports by certain agrarian interests during the first decade of the twentieth century was opposed by finance capital, a large segment of industry, and by Britain’s large proletariat, all of whom were concerned with keeping food as cheap as possible. The result for British agriculture was prolonged stagnation lasting the next thirty years or so. Unlike other Western European states, which had transitioned to capitalism much more recently and still retained substantial farming populations, Britain was less dependent on the purchasing power of domestic farm incomes – and thanks to the Empire and economic dependencies, it could rely on food imports without compromising food security. In Germany, by contrast, protectionist policy was demanded by a united front of capitalist Junkers and smaller, formerly peasant proprietors. While opposed by commerce, the urban middle class, and urban labour, the combined economic, political, and numerical strength of these classes was lower than in Britain, and they did not find support amongst influential sectors of industry or the government. As noted earlier, farm incomes in Germany were much more important markets for industry than in Britain. In addition, Germany was still geopolitically weaker and more vulnerable than Britain, heightening the importance of domestic agriculture for national food security.⁶⁸

This imperial conjuncture and its anti-liberal sentiments spawned a characteristic ideology of agrarian fundamentalism or populism featuring distinct similarities with the anti-neoliberal and nationalistic movements of today. There were fears that continued rural exodus would engender disequilibrium between agricultural and industrial growth, leading to perilous international dependencies. A wise state would therefore nurture its national agriculture, shielding it from the adverse impacts of free trade and ensuring egalitarian farm structures to retain people in rural areas rather than subordinating everything to the quest for capital accumulation. If necessary, the state should support farm incomes for the purposes of balanced development and social stability. Such beliefs were very strong during the Imperial Food Regime, criticizing orthodox economic liberalism (‘Manchesterism’) and overlapping noticeably with populist characteristics of ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalism.⁶⁹ The competitive, protectionist, and nationalistic economies of this era, bolstered by racialized ideologies of social imperialism, fomented an underlying dynamic of mutual aggression that was to erupt eventually in the First World War. In its aftermath, Germany was effectively destroyed in the short term as a competitor capitalist nation, and a temporary trend away from autocracy and towards liberalism took hold in the 1920s – until over-accumulation struck again with a vengeance towards the end of the decade, resulting in the Great Depression. This stimulated a return to autocracy and protectionism during the 1930s in the form of what I have chosen to term the Third International, or Political Productivist Food Regime.⁷⁰ This represented a twofold response to the contradictions of the renewed free trade

67 Koning, *Failure*, 168.

68 *Ibid.*

69 *Ibid.*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

70 Tilzey, *Political Ecology*; Tilzey/Sugden/Seddon, *Peasants, Capitalism, and the Work*.

interlude of the 1920s: a more market-interventionist stance that could take the form of social democracy (left-wing populism), archetypically displayed in the New Deal policies of the USA, or of right-wing populism, as exemplified by the rise of fascism – notably in Germany and Italy, though also present in many other interwar capitalist states. An important feature of national populisms on both the left and right was (and continues to be, in their current iterations) their continued subordination to capital accumulation despite attempts by both wings to mould its dynamic towards nation-centred legitimization functions.

Final comments: Imperialism resurgent in the Neo-Imperial Food Regime

The world appears to be increasingly embroiled in a conjuncture characterized by a return to heightened inter-state competition and antagonism reminiscent of the Imperial Food Regime. The consensus of the Neoliberal Food Regime that the functioning of the ‘soft power’ of the market – ostensibly according to the law of comparative advantage – is the optimum means of securing cheap food, energy, raw materials, and employment/affluence for the populations of the Global North appears to be fragmenting. Austerity policies and the migration of labour-intensive manufacturing from the imperium to the periphery under the globalist neoliberal regime have generated considerable social unrest and increasing economic inequality in the core states – though the latter are obviously nothing compared to the precarity endured by the global majority of the South under conditions of disarticulated development. While social democratic left-wing populism is one recurring response, social and economic discontent with neoliberalism is now also being widely captured, as in the 1930s, by a resurgent political right eager to scapegoat recipients of imperial capital and manufacturing – notably China – as one of the primary causes of the imperium’s relative decline. The adverse social and ecological impacts of neoliberal globalization on the livelihoods of the precariat in the Global South results in its large-scale displacement in search of employment, or simply as refugees – ironically to the Global North, the source of its impoverishment. The resulting waves of migration from South to North are themselves portrayed by the right as one of the principal causes of economic decline and unemployment in the imperium. At the same time, any effort to address the severe ecological impacts (including climate breakdown) of imperial capitalism is viewed as a cause of unemployment by constraining growth – or more extremely, in the case of the right’s ideological ‘pushback’, the impacts themselves are denied in order to facilitate unbridled resource extraction, especially of fossil fuels.

The contradictions of neoliberal capitalism today are therefore on a far larger scale and more intense than in the 1920s/30s, and moreover have a potentially perilous and unprecedented ecological dimension. Since the beginning of the new millennium, these contradictions have been manifested in three main ways: in terms of capital accumulation, whereby greatly increased wealth disparities in the Global North – especially in the more doctrinaire neoliberal Anglo-Saxon countries such as the USA and the UK – have generated a crisis of commodity under-consumption (over-accumulation), with the financial crisis of 2007 symptomatic of this tendency; relatedly, in terms of greatly increased precarity for the global majority located especially in the Global South, where the resurgence of disarticulated and export-

oriented accumulation by economic elites has generated heightened processes of primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession, especially of peasant and indigenous producers, thus creating a huge precariat unable to access even basic necessities. The 2008 food crisis was symptomatic of this trend. The final aspect, as noted, is that of unprecedented and accelerating deterioration in the biophysical fabric of the planet, compromising its continued ability to supply renewable ecosystem services to, and absorb waste from, an ever more profligate capitalism. Climate breakdown, massive loss of biodiversity, and alarming declines in the quality and quantity of soil and water resources are symptomatic of this development.

In order to manage and mitigate these contradictions – but not to resolve them, since that would require the supersession of capitalism itself – states re-emerged from the shadows they had been lurking in during the neoliberal era to once again assume more interventionist roles in seeking to fulfil both accumulation and legitimation functions for the state-capital nexus. As suggested, this movement against market liberalism has tended to assume two forms of national populism – the left-wing populism of social democracy and the right-wing populism of proto-fascism or full-blown fascism. These roles and forms are manifested in a number of ways which, though straddling the global North–South divide, are differentiated according to imperium and periphery. Mercantilism,⁷¹ including the deployment of extra-economic means, is used to secure food, energy, and raw materials for the imperium and the sub-imperium (especially China), wherein land-grabbing and extractivism for energy, raw materials, and plantation crops such as soy have very much become features of the Neo-Imperial Regime. Mercantilism tends to be preferred by left-wing populist imperial regimes, while extra-economic (including military) options are more likely to be deployed by right-wing populist imperial states. Imperial and sub-imperial mercantilism is complemented by a

71 Some may consider the role of mercantilism in the Neo-Imperial Regime to be overstated here. To justify its usage, it is perhaps useful to clarify how we understand the term. Mercantilism entails overt intervention in a nation's economy in order to augment and bolster state power (the state-capital nexus) at the expense of rival powers. High tariffs – particularly on manufactured goods – have historically been a characteristic of mercantilism, and they have made a symptomatic comeback under the current US Trump administration. Mercantilism therefore operates principally through commercial channels, although it does not exclude the use of extra-economic mechanisms (including military compulsion) to reinforce economic interventions. Mercantilism reflects the increased visibility of the role of (imperial) states in serving the interests of 'their' capitalists and, purportedly, of their citizens, regardless of whether this role and the related actions are economic or extra-economic. This (imperialist) activism of states in support of 'their' capitalists gives the lie to the globalist notion that capitalism has transcended the (imperialist) state – or, at a minimum, that it does not require imperialist states to police the world to further its ends. In today's conjuncture of undeniable inter-imperialist rivalry, globalist assumptions that real power has somehow shifted from states to institutions such as the WTO is clearly absurd. It is therefore a mistake to assume that mercantilism involves de-commercialisation; rather, it describes the (imperialist) state manipulation of supply and demand conditions – principally by economic means (e.g. tariffs), but also through extra-economic mechanisms. Perhaps the most important question for characterizing the current moment is that the US state-capital nexus is no longer willing to play by the rules of globalist free trade (if it ever was, since it always manipulated these rules to serve its own ends) and will no longer allow mere comparative advantage to determine the ability of US corporations to dominate any field that they choose. The current conjuncture foregrounds the logic of the imperial state-capital nexus that was always present but rendered temporarily invisible when 'free trade' appeared the best option to serve the capitalist interests of the global hegemon. When the power of the hegemon is threatened by economic rules that no longer serve its purpose, however, politics always 'trumps' economics. The pushback against neoliberalism has been building for some time, but the Trumpian introduction of tariffs perhaps marks the apotheosis of mercantilism in the Neo-Imperial Food Regime.

tendency towards protectionism with regard to domestic agriculture and manufacturing, with the USA, the EU, and China being characteristic in this context. In the periphery, left-wing populism is exemplified by the 'pink tide' states of Latin America, where neo-developmental-ist and redistributive policies have been adopted in response to neoliberal contradictions. The revenues these policies depend on, however, the perpetuation and reinforcement of primary resource extractivism, including agro-extractivism, to serve the consumption demands of the imperium and sub-imperium. These regimes therefore remain trapped in the stranglehold of peripheral dependency and deformed development. Right-wing populism in the Global South, exemplified by the regimes of Bolsonaro (Brazil) and Milei (Argentina), simply represents an acceleration of resource extractivism by imperial, sub-imperial, and domestic oligarchic capital, with rhetorical claims concerning the distribution of the benefits of such growth amongst the people having very little substance in reality. The legacy of such rightist regimes is proving to be one of even greater poverty and precarity for the majority, abject dependence on the imperium, and degraded ecosystems whose capacity to support alternative and sustainable agroecological development is seriously compromised.

In the post-neoliberal era, capitalism is again overtly exhibiting its dependence on, and intimate relation to, the state as the state-capital nexus. We have entered a perilous era of heightened inter-state competition and antagonism reminiscent of the Imperial Food Regime, and it is therefore one justly deserving of the title 'Neo-Imperial Food Regime.' As it encounters ever deeper crises defined by spiralling ecological and political turmoil, we can only speculate as to whether this regime may mark the endgame of capitalism.