

# Global governance/politics, climate justice & agrarian/social justice: linkages and challenges

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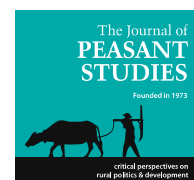
## Colloquium Paper No. 14

### Global Politics, Capitalism, Socio-Ecological Crisis, and Resistance: Exploring the Linkages and the Challenges

*Mark Tilzey*

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)  
Kortenaerkade 12, 2518AX  
The Hague, The Netherlands

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# Global Politics, Capitalism, Socio-Ecological Crisis, and Resistance: Exploring the Linkages and the Challenges

Mark Tilzey

## Abstract

*This paper engages critically with a set of broadly Marxian-based approaches to the relationship between global politics and processes of capital accumulation. This is then used to inform analysis of the dynamics underlying the multiple but inter-linked crises of food, environment (energy/climate/biodiversity), and finance. The first section assesses the work of Callinicos in his focus on renewed inter-imperialist rivalry, in which the USA is seen as wanting to secure access to, and control over, key resources to secure capital accumulation in intensifying competition with China and other capitalist powers. This approach is compared to the work of Panitch, Gindin, and Kiely in which they revive Kautsky's notion of ultra-imperialism – here US hegemonic power is assumed to lead other capitalist states in the re-organisation of the global economy. It is argued that, ultimately, both approaches examine only the external relations between the separate but linked logics of capital and global politics. They also neglect the crucial role of the biophysical domain in defining key parameters surrounding capital accumulation.*

*In the second section, the paper develops an alternative approach to understanding capitalist expansion, its relation to global politics and current crises. By drawing from Rosa Luxembourge's spatial account of the accumulation of capital and expansion into non-capitalist spaces through ongoing processes of primitive accumulation, the structuring conditions of capitalist expansion are conceptualised. Through a critical engagement with William Robinson's work on the emergence of the transnational state, and that of Jason Moore on 'world ecology', the paper develops a conceptualisation of the agency of different class fractions within the inter-state system and their relationship to the crises of food, environment, and finance. In the third section, the paper addresses resistances to these crises. The hegemony of trans-nationalised fractions of capital, often, although not always, led by the USA through 'ultra-imperialism', is challenged by sub-hegemonic national capital fractions of some BRICS, notably China and Brazil. But this merely perpetuates the crises of capitalism through policies of neo-developmentalism and neo-extractivism. These are challenged in turn by counter-hegemonic forces seeking food/land/territorial sovereignty. The dynamics of this relationship between hegemonic, sub-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces – between global politics, the state, and social movements – are examined, particularly in relation to Latin America.*

## Introduction

How are we to understand the causal processes underlying the multiple and inter-linked crises confronting humanity and extra-human nature today? And how should we understand and indeed, reflexively, strategize responses and resistances to these crises? The two questions are, of course, dialectically related – the first will necessarily underpin the second. Many, in the ‘alter-globalist’ and food activist movements particularly, are already convinced the second should be founded (rightly in the view of this paper) in a new ‘post-developmental’ set of social and socio-natural relations drawing on principles derived from agroecology and food/land sovereignty. But, this paper will argue, the strategic emphases of such resistances, and this is particularly true of those in the global North, tend to be somewhat misplaced, or to be theoretically deficient, in their focus on the scalar binary of the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ and their relative neglect of social relational issues founded on an analysis on the role of the state in its relation to capitalism. In other words, in their apparent preoccupation with scale (rather than social relations) and in their neglect or under-theorization of the state-capital nexus (as it is termed in this paper) such resistances tend to fetishize both the ‘process of globalization’ and the nature and role of ‘corporate power’. One consequence of such neglect or under-theorization of the first question above, is that the nature of the politico-economic forces constraining the ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘up-scaling’ of agroecology and food sovereignty is far more deeply set in the very character of the state-capital nexus than many might imagine. Stated otherwise, the need, indeed imperative, to put in place the principles of agroecology and food sovereignty in order to address question one above, runs up against the countervailing logic and class forces defined by profoundly entrenched capitalist social property relations – processes of capital accumulation enabled, supported, and legitimated by the state and the inter-state system as neo-imperialism.

This paper proposes, then, to identify capital accumulation in its intimate relation to the territorial form of the state – embodied as neo-imperialism – as the principal driver underlying multiple contemporary crises. This is to draw a direct linkage – an internal relation – between global politics as the territorial form of the inter-state system and the process of capital accumulation on a world-scale. David Harvey (2003) has, of course, identified the ‘new imperialism’ as underlying many, if not all, the multiple contradictions afflicting contemporary society and nature, and underpinning the current food, environment, and finance crises. But how are we to understand this ‘new imperialism’? Are the new imperialism and neoliberalism one and the same? Has capitalism outgrown the state through trans-nationalization, such that the state, the inter-state system, neoliberalism and the new imperialism are all now defined by the dictates of transnational corporations (TNCs) as often appears to be assumed by ‘alter-globalists’, many NGOs, and activists/scholars involved in the food/environmental/social justice movements? This view certainly receives some theoretical and empirical justification in the work of scholars such as William Robinson and his thesis of the transnational state (TNS). Or should we rather see the new imperialism as the product of the discrete although linked logics of the geopolitical, on the one hand, and capitalism, on the other, with those logics still dominated by one hegemonic state (USA) as proposed by Callinicos (2009) and Harvey himself. Or might we see these discrete but linked logics driven by a collective of hegemonic states, similar to Kautsky’s notion of ‘ultra-imperialism’, as proposed by Panitch and Gindin (2012) and Kiely (2010)? Building on Political Marxism (Brenner 1985, Wood 1991, Teschke 2003, Lacher 2006), neo-Gramscian theory in IR (Bieler and Morton 2001), and Regulation Theory (Boyer and Saillard 2002, Jessop 2008, Jessop and Sum 2012), we propose in this paper to develop the contention that the state and capital have an internal, or dialectical, relation so that the ‘political role’ of capital provides an approach to theorizing state geopolitics and global capitalism as underlying neo-imperialism and neoliberalism.

In this view, and anticipating our argument, capitalism and the modern state co-evolved first in Britain in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and then extended to other ‘core’ states in Western Europe and North America. Capitalism and the modern state coevolved because the latter afforded, and continues to afford, essential accumulation and legitimation functions for the former without which it would be

incapable of expanded accumulation, and without which it would implode under the weight of its social and environmental contradictions. The ‘core’ states became developed through a relationship of what Trotsky (1936) termed ‘uneven and combined development’ with a resultant ‘periphery’, in which development was distorted in favour of the ‘core’ states and ‘extroverted’ local elites. As we shall see, it makes sense for a ‘core’ state, for reasons of both accumulation and legitimation, to externalize social and environmental costs onto a periphery. The periphery is the site of imperialism and colonialism because it is here that the capitalist core attempts to maximize accumulation and cost externalization through the minimization of citizenship rights. In the core, by contrast, citizenship rights – nation-building – can be extended on the back of such enhanced global accumulation, while at the same time mitigating and legitimating capitalism at home. We see the dynamics of this process as being based centrally on class and class fractional agency through the state, such that ‘the pressures of uneven development are clearly mediated through different forms of state as nodal points of nationally specific configurations of class fractions and struggles over hegemony and/or passive revolution within accumulation conditions on a world scale’ (Morton 2010, 229).

In this conceptualization, the state-capital nexus has a hegemonic status (in its Gramscian sense) in the global North due to the conferral of more comprehensive citizenship rights on its populations, thereby dulling the efficacy of counter-hegemonic movements. In the global South, by contrast, domination is more characteristic due to the truncation of citizenship rights as an outcome of its status as a periphery. By the same token, however, effective counter-hegemonic resistances to the state-capital nexus are more likely in the global South, albeit commonly in alliance with sub-hegemonic fractions of capital. The dynamics of this relationship between hegemonic, sub-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forces – between global politics, the state, and social movements – are examined, particularly in relation to Latin America.

The above may be described as the ‘internal’ or political dynamics of the state-capital nexus. At the same time, however, the biophysical domain, or the ‘external’ dimension of the state-capital nexus, is crucial to the dynamics of capital accumulation, imperialism, and to understanding the causal bases of the current crises. In this paper, we use an approach to understanding the relationship between these ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dimensions through the notion of ‘differentiated unity’, whereby the two are internally or dialectically related but, at the same time, not reducible one to the other.

### **The State and Capitalism: an ‘External’ or an ‘Internal’ Relation?**

Discussion of neo-imperialism, of the relation between states and capitalism and the global unevenness of development between core and periphery, leads us back inevitably to Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Lenin 1964). At the centre of this work was a focus on the export of capital as the typical feature of modern imperialism. This was itself embedded in conditions of uneven development between the so-called economically ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’ countries. Three essential features can be identified that characterize this account of the expansion of capitalist imperialism. First, despite capitalism’s expansion on a global scale, inherent divisions remain: ‘However strong the processes of levelling the world, of levelling the economic and living conditions in different countries, considerable differences remain’ (Lenin 1964, 259). Second, there is a suggestion of a territorial (state-centred) logic to the expansion of capitalism – thus, there is ‘the inevitable striving of finance capital to extend its economic territory and even its territory in general’ (ibid, 83) (this presumably being a reference to the difference between ‘informal’ and ‘formal’ empire). The expansion of finance capital therefore heightens the unevenness and contradictions inherent in the world economy and reinforces the territorial division of the world. Third, inter-imperialist rivalries and the spatial expansion of capitalism are extended through conflictual geopolitical relations on a world scale, suggesting that there is always the immanent possibility of the ‘informal’ mechanisms of empire transmuting into more ‘formal’ (extra-economic) mechanisms.

Callinicos (2009, 2010) extends these arguments to contend that capitalist imperialism should be understood as the intersection of economic and geopolitical competition. He argues that, despite globalization, various national capitals remain dependent on the support of their specific state with the result that, at the international level, there is competition between a plurality of major capitalist states, each defending the interests of their particular capitalist class. There would seem, however, to be a difficulty with Callinicos' analysis principally in terms of his focus on two apparently distinct logics – a geopolitical one and a capitalist one. While it is important not to collapse one logic into the other, it seems, at the same time, inadequate to treat them as two separate entities since this suggests they can be understood in their 'external' (un-dialectical) relation. In failing to identify the internal relations between the two logics, there is a danger of reifying the appearance of transnational outcomes linked to nationally based struggles within state policies, and thus the geopolitical dynamic reflected in state strategies. We suggest that it would be better to conceptualize the relationship between capitalism and geopolitics in terms of what Ollman (1976, 2003) describes as a philosophy of internal relations, such that, while differentiated, each is mutually defining. Crucially, the capitalist state both guarantees the private ownership, and control over, the means of production by the capitalist class, and alleviates and legitimates the contradictions of this relation through the suppression of class difference – nation building, consumption – a process linked profoundly to the territorial and imperial character of capitalism. In other words, it is impossible to understand the essence of the apparently independent position of the 'market' or capitalism if there is no understanding of its internal relation to the 'state' or geopolitics linked to the underlying social relations of production – or perhaps, more comprehensively, the social relations of domination since, in addressing both accumulation and legitimation, we need to have reference both to the material and ideational bases of power.

### **US Hegemony, Informal Empire, and the Question of Ultra-Imperialism?**

One important controversy in classical Marxist debates on imperialism centres on the theory of 'ultra-imperialism' as propounded by Kautsky (1970). In contrast to Lenin and Bukharin, Kautsky pondered as to whether inter-imperialist rivalries between 'core' states might be subsequently replaced by a 'holy alliance of imperialists' through which the expansion of capitalism might be secured. Bukharin, like Lenin (who described Kautsky's thesis as 'ultra-nonsense'), dismissed the theory of 'ultra-imperialism' and its focus on the centralization of capital as a thesis of 'peaceful capitalism'. While Bukharin recognized that 'the great stimulus to the formation of an international state...is given by the internationalization of capitalist interests', he also insisted that 'significant as this process may be in itself, it is, however, counteracted by a still stronger tendency of capital towards nationalization and towards remaining secluded within state boundaries' (Bukharin 1929, 137-8). In other words, the antagonistic interests between states will prevail over any 'world capitalist organization'.

Contemporary speculation on the decline of US power and the onset of inter-imperialist rivalry with the rise of powers such as China reflects these tensions amongst the 'classical' thinkers. Notably, Panitch and Gindin (2012) argue that the making of global capitalism was superintended by US empire as the ultimate guarantor of capitalist interests globally. Further, they suggest that it is wrong, therefore, to assume an irresolvable contradiction between the international space of accumulation and the national space of states. Similarly, Kiely states that 'the process of internationalization did not lead to a new era based on competing national blocs of capital as theorized by Bukharin, but rather a reorganization of US hegemony and an intensification of international integration, or what came to be called (economic) globalization' (Kiely 2010, 141). Here the US extended its 'informal' empire through what Kiely calls 'free trade imperialism', enforcing neoliberal restructuring upon other countries by obliging them to open up their economies to 'free trade' (Kiely 2007, 38-9). In short, through neoliberal globalization, the US re-established its leading role within the global political economy in close co-operation with other capitalist countries of the 'core'. 'While there is considerable evidence of conflict for the Leninists to emphasize, there is much to back the 'Kautskyite' view which emphasizes co-operation' (Kiely 2010, 234).

This debate appears to be trapped between an emphasis on rivalry between capitalist states (Callinicos) and a stress on co-operation through joint management of global capitalism (Kiely, Panitch and Gindin), mirroring in some respects the classical debate over inter-imperialist rivalry versus ultra-imperialism. This tends to convey the view that the underlying dynamics of international politics are still shaped through conflict or co-operation, unintentionally reproducing mainstream state-centric tendencies (for example, ‘realist’ approaches in IR) that portray the US as a unitary actor. Such an ‘essentialist’ view of the state neglects analysis of the role of specific class fractions and intra-class contestation, and their relationship to non-capitalist classes through hegemony or passive revolution, that lends the state its character as a social relation. It is this class and social relational approach to the state, as the nexus of ‘capitalism’ and ‘politics’ – the state-capital nexus – that enables us to clarify the relationship between the ‘two logics’ of state power and capital accumulation. Thus, with respect to the US, the above approaches fail to undertake an analysis of the contradictory class dynamics shaped by the respective influences of financial and military fractions of capital. Such an analysis might have yielded a focus on the contradictory and class character of the military fractional determinations of ‘formal’ US empire (associated most with Republican and neo-conservative interests) and on that of financial fractional determinations of ‘informal’ empire within the US state (more closely associated with Democratic interests) (Harris 2005).

Below we provide an alternative approach to conceptualizing the ‘structural’ and agential dynamics (in fact, a ‘strategic-relational approach’ (Jessop 2008)) underlying imperialism (both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’) that incorporates the continuing importance of states as nodal points in global accumulation, with a focus on class agency, notably that of transnational capital. By drawing on the work of Luxemburg and Trotsky, the structuring conditions of global capitalist social relations are discussed, providing the setting within which the transnational capitalist class is involved in struggle over capitalist expansion. This relation between capital accumulation and the inter-state system may be described as an ‘internal’ relation. But this this relation is tied intimately to the ‘external’ biophysical domain, a dimension that is neglected by all discussions of imperialism, classical or contemporary, with the possible exception of Luxemburg. In addressing this dimension in a later section of this paper, we engage with the work of Moore (2015) in his discussion of ‘world ecology’. While acknowledging the inherent biophysical dependencies of capitalism, we assert the need to retain a differentiation between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dynamics, rather than collapsing them into a ‘flattened ontology’ as Moore seems to do.

### **The Spatial Character of Capital Accumulation and its Relation to Imperialism**

Teschke (2003) and Lacher (2006) have demonstrated that capitalism emerged within a previously existing international system of absolutist states. Once capitalist relations of production had emerged in England, however, state formation and capitalist development became inter-dependent. This was so because the transformations that brought about capitalism in England were the same as those that generated the separation of state and civil society, leading to the constitution of the capitalist state (Wood 1991). In other words, ‘the process that gave rise to English capitalism was accompanied by the development of a more clearly defined territorial sovereignty than existed elsewhere in Europe. The social transformations that brought about capitalism were the same as those that brought the nation-state to maturity’ (Wood 2002a, 19).

Several key structural dynamics can be identified as a result of the way in which capitalist social relations are constructed around the private ownership of the means of production and so-called ‘free’ wage labour. First, because capital, like labour, has to reproduce itself through the market (the need for labour to access the means of production through the market we term ‘market dependence’ (see Wood 2002b)), individual capitalists are in constant competition with one another. It is the resulting innovative impetus that makes capitalism such a dynamic – and socially and ecologically destructive – mode of production. ‘The development of capitalist production makes it constantly necessary to keep increasing the amount of capital laid out on a given industrial undertaking, and competition makes the

immanent laws of capitalist production to be felt by each individual capitalist, as external coercive laws' (Marx 1972, 588). Second, capitalism is subject to periodic crises, since this dynamic development 'inevitably' results either in a crisis of over-accumulation, when unemployed workers and surplus profits can no longer be brought together gainfully, or in a crisis of under-accumulation, when fully employed workers compromise profit-making through wage inflation.<sup>1</sup> These are 'inevitable' outcomes of capitalism in the sense that it is class system founded on the need to reduce the cost of labour, on the one hand, while needing to find a market for its commodities, on the other. Because capitalism is an inherently contradictory system, the state has a vital role to play in securing not only accumulation for capital, but also in trying to legitimate or mitigate its contradictions. Because capitalism has co-evolved with the modern, nation-state from the outset, and because the need for legitimation often takes the form of placing national identity above class identity, there is always a strong temptation for the state to attempt to externalize such contradictions, by means of 'spatio-temporal' fix (Jessop 2008), beyond the state onto what is likely, as a consequence, to become a periphery. The result is that citizens of the 'core' states are accorded certain privileges (public services, social welfare/protection, higher consumption) denied to those in the capitalist periphery (see, for example, Mooers 2014).

So one important way of overcoming crisis is through the outward expansion of capitalism under the aegis of the state, a phenomenon that we can describe as a third 'structural' tendency. It is in this respect that the notion of uneven and combined development becomes relevant. In short, in response to the crisis tendencies of capitalist social relations of production, or more appropriately domination, as mediated by the state, there is an inherent, 'structural' dynamic of expansion that takes the form of uneven and combined development. The inter-dependent development of capitalism and the state generated the following territorialized outcome:

*Having once begun in a single nation-state, and having been followed by other nationally organized processes of economic development, capitalism has spread not by erasing national boundaries but by reproducing its national organization, creating an increasing number of national economies and nation-states. The inevitably uneven development of separate, but inter-related, national entities has virtually guaranteed the persistence of national forms (Wood 1999, 7-8).*

Rosa Luxemburg had already identified 'the inherent contradictions between the unlimited expansive capacity of the productive forces and the limited expansive capacity of consumption under conditions of capitalist distribution' (Luxemburg 2003, 323). Hence she recognized that capitalism must constantly expand outward and incorporate new, non-capitalist spaces in order to overcome crises. It should perhaps be noted here, however, that the rationales behind the 'first' imperialism and the 'new imperialism' appear to differ somewhat. While both were motivated by crises in the 'core', the first appears to have been founded on inter-imperialist rivalry to capture new markets and investment opportunities, to secure essential resources for industry at home, and to secure cheap provisions for the industrial labour force; the second, in response to the crisis of Keynesianism in the 1970s, appears to have been founded primarily in a crisis of under-accumulation in the core, with respite sought through a re-location of industrial production to the periphery where higher rates of surplus value could be captured – so the periphery generates surplus value while the core retains the principal role of consumption hub through which this surplus value is realized.

In the *Accumulation of Capital*, Luxemburg analyzes the creation and expansion of the conditions for capital accumulation in non-capitalist environments:

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<sup>1</sup> Capitalism, for the same reasons, is subject to resource and ecological crises that may, or may not, be related to over- and under-accumulation crises. The former crises are always mediated through the social relations of production/domination. This relationship is discussed further below.



*From the very beginning, the forms and laws of capitalist production aim to comprise the entire globe as a store of productive forces. Capital, impelled to appropriate productive forces for purposes of exploitation, ransacks the whole world. It procures its means of production from all corners of the earth, seizing them, if necessary by force, from all levels of civilization and from all forms of society...It becomes necessary for capital progressively to dispose ever more fully of the whole globe, to acquire an unlimited choice of means of production, with regard to both quality and quantity, so as to find productive employment for the surplus value it has realized' (Luxemburg 2003, 338).*

As a result, there is a focus on processes of primitive accumulation in the dispossession of peasant producers from their means of production in order to create a reserve army of labour power in non-capitalist territories based on the wage system; on the role of the non-capitalist world in absorbing commodities and surplus value; and on how 'peripheral' states are drawn into the credit system to offset crisis conditions whilst subject to foreign interventionist, militarist, and imperialist relations. These conditions for enhanced capital accumulation can be summarized through two inter-related aspects. First, in terms of the *place* where surplus value is produced and, second, in terms of the *geopolitics* of capital's violent appropriation of the conditions necessary for accumulation.

Here there is a reconceptualization of the international that eschews a division between the 'internal' and 'external' – or states held in exterior relation to each other – to embark rather on understanding the realization of surplus value through world-market conditions and the system of states as a social totality. In Luxemburg's era, then, 'imperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment' (ibid, 426). This approach certainly seems to improve on current conceptions of imperialism, as articulated by Callinicos, for example, by attempting explicitly to internalize the dialectical relationship between the territorial logic of geopolitical power and the spatial expansion of capitalism.

### **The Question of the Transnational State: the Hegemony of Ultra-Imperialism?**

We now ask whether, in the contemporary era of transnational capital, the work of William Robinson (2003, 2004, 2007, 2011) grasps the dialectical unity-in-diversity of both geopolitics and capital accumulation in his theory of the transnational state. Robinson starts his assessment of the changes in the global economy through a focus on the social relations of production. This allows him to conceptualize the implications of globalization since the 1970s. As a result of the trans-nationalization of production, expressed in increasing FDI levels amongst other indicators, he argues that 'transnational capital has become the dominant, or hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale' (Robinson 2004, 21). Hence, through this focus on social class forces as the main agents, engendered by the production process, it is possible to incorporate recent changes in the global economy within a historical understanding of capitalism. It is no longer only national fractions of capital and labour that confront each other within specific states, there are now also transnational fractions of capital that have attained a dominant position at the global level.

Additionally, however, Robinson makes the claim that we are witness to the emergence of a transnational state (TNS), regarded as a guarantor of capital accumulation at the global level. In this way he makes the bold claim (McMichael 2001) that 'in the emerging global capitalist configuration, transnational or global space is coming to supplant national space', with the attendant view that the nation-state as an axis of world development is being superseded by transnational structures, leading in turn to the emergence of a transnational state (Robinson 2003, 19-20; Robinson 2008, 6-7). His view is that the 'inter-state system is no longer the fundamental organizing principle of world capitalism and the principal institutional framework that shapes global social forces or that explains world political dynamics' (Robinson 2011, 742). States do not disappear in this process of adjustment. 'Rather, power as the ability to shape social structures shifts from social groups and classes with interests in national accumulation to those whose interests lie in the new global circuits of

accumulation' (Robinson 2004, 109). In other words, states may retain their institutional form but lose their traditional function of securing the conditions for successful capital accumulation.

While concurring with Robinson's emphasis on the importance of transnational capital, we are sceptical about the TNS thesis. His position that states have 'become transmission belts and local executors of the transnational elite project' (2003, 62) ignores the social constitution of globalization within, and by classes in, specific forms of state (Tilzey 2006). While powerful transnational forces work within the global economy, we suggest that they continue to operate through the spatial form of the state. A further problem of the TNS thesis is that national restructuring during times of globalization is generally conceptualized as a uniform process, integrating all states in the same way into the global economy. The TNS thesis thereby offers a 'flattened' ontology that removes state forms as a significant spatial scale in the articulation of capitalism, levels out the spatial and territorial logics of capital accumulation, and elides the continuing relevance of class struggles in specific locations. Robinson misses, therefore, the continuing importance of states as nodal points in the global accumulation of capitalism, in addition to the uneven and combined developmental dynamics of global capitalism, comprising core and periphery, and the whole notion of imperialism. As Anievas has suggested, 'there remains a continuation, if not acceleration, of the hierarchies of uneven development immanent to the capitalist mode of production. This persistent developmental tendency of capitalism acts as a centrifugal force against the type of global capitalism postulated by Robinson' (Anievas 2008, 197). In short, what Robinson overlooks is the point that 'the real push for change comes from the transnational capitalist class inside the national structure, with the process conditioned by the local balance of political and economic forces' (Harris 2008, 55).

By underestimating the continued importance of the state form as nodal within global capitalism, Robinson neglects continuing struggles within, for example, the US between nationalist and globalist fractions of the ruling class (Harris 2005, 145). This intra-class contestation is also characteristic of agri-food capital (see Tilzey and Potter 2008; Winders 2009) in both the US and Europe, with long standing class fractional contention in the latter between neoliberals and neo-mercantilists (Potter and Tilzey 2005). Robinson overlooks the point that, rather than simply supporting the interests of transnational capital alone, there has been clear intra-class conflict within the US, for example, over both the means and rationale underlying trans-nationalization. There is a need, therefore, to focus on the dynamics of class struggle – it is through this focus on intra- and inter-class struggle that the internal relation between the 'logics' of capital and territory can be grasped dialectically in that both are internally related forms of expressions of the same underlying configuration of the social relations of production/domination. Relatedly, Anievas notes (2014, 114-15) how unilateralism-multilateralism (unilateralism related to nationalist fractions, multilateralism related to globalist fractions) are always-already present moments, or internally related aspects, of the extension of capitalist accumulation, including the systematic use or threat of force and violence through formal and informal empire. So although neoliberalism is most associated with informal empire, the use of force is always immanent in neoliberalism when 'peaceful' efforts to implant market relations are thwarted. But the turn to formal empire, as we shall see below, is not merely a reflection of a shift in intra-class power from globalists to nationalists, it is also a reflection of the growing cost, or constraints on the supply, of resources essential to capital accumulation. This indicates the importance of understanding the dynamics of accumulation in relation to the 'external' biophysical domain in addition to the 'internal' political one.

Before turning our attention to the importance of the biophysical domain in understanding imperialism and neo-imperialism and the multiple contradictions thereof, we conclude this section by summarizing some of its key arguments. First, the geopolitical and capital accumulation dimensions possess an internal relation. This relation is internal because the nation-state and capital are inter-dependent, with the state affording accumulation and legitimation services for capital, without which it could not survive. Second, the nature of capital accumulation is determined by the balance of class forces, both within and between classes, within the nation-state. The hegemony of any class fraction is always

provisional and depends on intra-class and inter-class compromises and alliances (Potter and Tilzey 2005). Where this balance of class forces secures, through favourable production relations, successful capital accumulation for the state, the state may project its power into the inter-state system and articulate with receptive class fractions in other states to facilitate further accumulation.

Third, this need for expanded accumulation, deriving from the fundamental character of capitalism, together with the need for legitimation to mitigate contradictions at home, leads to a process of uneven and combined development whereby the more powerful capitalist states attempt to subordinate the less powerful to service their needs – this typically gives rise to imperialism of either a formal or an informal kind. The current configuration of this relationship appears to be one dominated by a hierarchical, transatlantic bloc in which European states play an independent, yet secondary role to US imperialism (Carroll and Klassen 2010, 21). The relations between the US and other imperialist states are based on a mixture of co-operation and competition. We disagree, therefore, with the view of Panitch and Gindin, and Kiely, that European states operate within the framework of US Empire. The reason for this is that economic competition between regional blocs of capital, however hierarchical, aggravates relations between imperialist states and limits the positive sum-game of Kautskyan ‘ultra-imperialism’ – the alliance of core states in dominating the periphery. This competition is further exacerbated by the shifting hegemony of class fractions, as identified above, with some favouring ‘informal’ and others ‘formal’ methods of imperial dominion. Indeed, given the real dynamics of competition and crisis in global capitalism, highly concentrated capital tends to look to its ‘own’ state for protection and support. This tendency again refers to the accumulation function of the state. Additionally, because social relations remain wrapped in a national form, people striving to resist the effect of crises turn to their government as the agency most accountable for this situation – this again refers to the legitimation function of the state. It is possible to suggest, therefore, that inter-imperialist rivalries persist in a variety of ways. The effect of the operation of uneven and combined development is to produce a hierarchy of states and class forces in the world system, a hierarchy that may broadly be characterized as comprising a ‘socially articulated’ global North and a ‘socially disarticulated’<sup>2</sup> global South. Imperialism, as ‘globalization’, is the necessary expression of the attempt by core states (as the essential territorial form of the nation-state) to resolve their contradictions of accumulation and legitimation by means of a periphery, emphasizing the internal relation between geopolitics and accumulation.

Fourth, this means that global capitalism and its state form (global politics) are much less monolithic, and more fractured, than theorists such as Robinson would lead us to believe. There is an evident tension between the desire of transnational capitalist fractions to transcend the state and implant a global system of ‘frictionless’ capital flows, on the one hand, and the need by states to continue to respond to more nationally-based class fractions and to secure legitimacy amongst the non-capitalist citizenry, on the other. Given the nature of continuing inter-imperialist rivalry, the emergence of semi-peripheral states as the outcome of ‘globalization’ (notably the BRICS) contending to become members of the core, and the burgeoning contradictions of imperial relations concentrated largely in the South, the fracture lines in the current conjuncture are numerous. These fracture lines are at their widest in the global South because, as a periphery for the core, it is here that the contradictions of accumulation are greatest and the legitimacy of the state is lowest. Nonetheless, the state here remains the key focus of resistance to the new imperialism, and alliances between sub-hegemonic national capitalist class fractions and counter-hegemonic workers and peasants movements have succeeded in some cases in casting off the yoke of core states. A number of Latin American states are examples here and we examine the dynamics of the so-called ‘pink tide’ in a later section.

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<sup>2</sup> Social disarticulation occurs when the state-capital nexus is interested in its labour force principally from the perspective of production (its ability to generate surplus value) and not primarily from the perspective of consumption (the realization of surplus value through the sale of commodities). Social articulation implies a complementarity between the role of the labour force as producers and consumers, or a situation in which their role as consumers outweighs their significance as producers.

## **Integrating the Biophysical Domain into the Analysis of the New Imperialism**

Capital accumulation and imperialism are also related intrinsically to the biophysical resources comprising essential use values that, when combined with human labour power, underpin the production of surplus value. An understanding of this relationship draws on Marx's treatment of human production through the mutual constitution of its social form and material content. This approach retains the historical specificity of social systems whilst recognising their inescapable biophysical constitution and dependencies. This gives us the basis for a theory of socio-natural dialectics that throws light on social system dynamics across their historical *and* ecological dimensions. Moore (2015) has valuably delineated some of the key relations here in his elaboration of a 'world ecology' approach. While Moore appears to have successfully broken down the society-nature binary, he has, we would suggest, gone 'too far', however, by failing to sustain a necessary differentiation in the unity of the socio-natural as embodied in the 'internal' and 'external' dynamics of capitalism. In other words, he seems to collapse accumulation dynamics into the biophysical domain, thereby losing the possibility of understanding how social and class relations mediate biophysical affordances and constraints, rather than being reducible to them. He fails, through lack of a *stratified ontology*<sup>3</sup> of socio-natural relations, to specify the *political* nature of the 'internal' dynamics of capital in relation to its ecological or 'external' conditions of (re)production. We need, rather, a differentiated unity, not a flattened ontology, that allows us to recognize biophysical dependencies whilst insisting that these are mediated, and even defined, by historically specific class relations, relations furthermore, that may have nothing specifically to do with the biophysical domain. In this way, we suggest that 'internal' political processes, as specified in the earlier sections of this paper, while intimately conjoined to, and enabled by, 'external' biophysical capacities, constitute the motive force underlying capitalist dynamics.

We outline below how the 'internal' dynamics of the new imperialism are conjoined to the 'external' dynamics of the biophysical domain to generate the continuing crises of food, environment, and finance. In this section we pay particular attention to trans-nationalization and imperialism in the agri-food sector and its role in generating food crisis.

In order to understand the initial rationale underlying the new imperialism, we need first to look again at capitalism's political, or 'internal' dynamic. In this way, we suggest the initial political impulse towards imperialism in its 'informal', neoliberal guise was a direct, strategic relational response to the crisis of profitability in the states of the global North in the 1970s, with resolution sought externally through accumulation opportunities in the global South. This was achieved through financial imperialism and the insertion of 'core' capital into the predominantly disarticulated regimes of accumulation<sup>4</sup> in the periphery, where rates of surplus value generation were, and are, higher (Amin 1976, de Janvry 1981). This is so since labour is largely construed as a 'cost' for capital - the market for commodities exists primarily outside the periphery in the core economies. The increased insertion of transnational agri-food capital into the periphery since the 1970s has accelerated the process of primitive capital accumulation through land appropriation, as peasants are outcompeted for land by extroverted capitalist agriculture and are subject, not so much to generalised proletarianization, as to a

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<sup>3</sup> Approaches that completely collapse the social and the ecological ultimately succumb to a type of conflationary theorising, whereby any analytical distinction between the two realms is lost. Once we begin to see these two realms as ontologically inseparable, we lose the analytical capacity to specify causality embodied in different types of hybridity of the social and ecological. We need therefore to differentiate the unity of the social and ecological through *ontological stratification*.

<sup>4</sup> A 'regime of accumulation', in the parlance of Regulation Theory, refers to the particular ways in which capital and labour are brought together in the production process, and to the ways in which surplus value is realized in consumption.

prevailing process of semi-proletarianization, characterised by income hybridity from both auto-production and labour-selling to (agricultural/industrial) capital (Moyo 2015).<sup>5</sup>

Peasant production, the principal source of food staples in the periphery (Tittonnell 2014), is threatened by a double-squeeze. Not only is it threatened on the production side through land expropriation by extorted agri-food capital, it is also subverted on the market side by the ‘cheap’ (ecologically and energetically costly) sale of non-traditional wage foods from the trans-nationalized spaces of agri-food productivism<sup>6</sup>, and consequent changes in consumption habits towards Northern diets. The result is that semi-proletarianization, together with selective full proletarianization, generate increased market dependence and low wages, while increased dependence on food imports creates the actual, or immanent, conditions for food crisis.

The increased levels of surplus value thus generated in the periphery are then siphoned off to the core consumption hubs through industrial and financial imperialism (de Janvry 1981, 50), feeding affluent ‘high end’ consumption principally in the global North.<sup>7</sup> The movement of transnational capital out of the centre leads to selective de-development in, and disarticulation of, these economies as capital increasingly accrues power over labour, and wages stagnate due to competition from the global South. Growing wage differentials between capital and labour result, generating under-consumption crisis which capital attempts to overcome, not through wage increases, but rather through credit lending (Turner 2008). This, in turn, leads to burgeoning debt amongst wage earners which, when disclosed as ‘toxic’ under conditions of wage stagnation and increasing unemployment, generates financial crisis. Under-consumption crisis is exacerbated as governments impose austerity measures in an attempt to alleviate budget deficits incurred in supporting the losses suffered by finance capital through ‘toxic’ debt (Harvey 2010).

Core states attempt to sustain increasingly strained modes of regulation<sup>8</sup> through a combination of welfare safety nets, compensatory payments, episodic demand-side stimuli, credit lending, ‘TINA’ ideologies, and the obfuscation of relations of imperial ‘super-exploitation’ with the periphery, enabling consumerism in the North to be disassociated from its social and ecological ramifications in the South. Of particular relevance in sustaining a mode of regulation and deflecting radical alternatives in the global North are the structural impediments to change, both as imaginary and as reality, flowing from the sheer historical depth of the real subsumption of labour within capital<sup>9</sup>.

As suggested earlier, crises of capital as an ‘internal’ contradiction thus appear to alternate between ‘supply side’ and ‘demand side’ crises. The crisis of the Keynesian regime of accumulation comprised a supply side, or under-accumulation crisis, stimulating the turn to neoliberalism. The latter has, in turn, generated the current under-consumption, over-accumulation, or demand side crisis. These are ‘internal’ contradictions, although enabled concurrently by ‘external’ conditions of production. ‘Internal’ supply side crisis tends to stimulate technological innovation and the exploitation of new and cheaper conditions of production to sustain and enhance the rate of profit – hence the impulse

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<sup>5</sup> De Janvry (1981) explains why peripheral capital accumulation tendentially leads to semi-proletarianization rather than to full proletarianization, although he perhaps under-estimates the strength of peasant resistance and attachment to land in this process.

<sup>6</sup> Productivism is central to the logic of capitalism and refers to the drive to maximize productivity, the ratio of labour input to output, by means of the externalization of energy and ecological costs through the adoption of machinery and agro-chemical inputs.

<sup>7</sup> Industrial and financial imperialism is a means of surplus extraction from the periphery occurring directly as returns on foreign investments and loans, and indirectly through interest payments on external debts; capital is also invested in modern enclaves and industries in the periphery where it captures high rates of profit and repatriates a large fraction of them.

<sup>8</sup> A mode of regulation, in the parlance of Regulation Theory, refers essentially to the legitimation functions of the state in mitigating the contradictions of capital.

<sup>9</sup> Real subsumption occurs when labour is *fully* severed from the means of production and must access these through the market.

towards globalization from the 1970s. The present conjuncture is characterized by the juxtaposition of demand side crisis, due to the power of capital over labour, with a supply side crisis in the conditions of production, defined by increases in the cost of conditions of production, most particularly oil, and the ramifications of political attempts to curb greenhouse gas emissions (together with knock-on effects for fossil fuel based agriculture and consequent rise in the cost of food). The demand side crisis is exacerbated by the supply side crisis in the conditions of production, compounded by the tendency of monopoly finance capital to profit from speculation in newly deregulated futures commodities, notably food (Ghosh 2010; Isaakson 2014). The result is a paradoxical situation in which financial surplus continues to increase even as the under-consumption crisis deepens, and the conditions of production exhibit a secular, if uneven, rise in cost.

These relationships between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ contradictions are exemplified particularly well by the food crisis of 2007/8. The ultimate causes of the food crisis may be attributed to the basic accumulation dynamic of the class alliance of disarticulated capital (trans-nationalized fractions of capital), predicated upon a deepening process of primitive accumulation, engendering semi-proletarianization, or proletarianization. This constitutes an ‘internal’ contradiction of capital, one that is, however, inherently conjoined to the exploitation of ‘external’ socio-natural affordances in the generation of ecological surplus. The proximate causes, however, derive primarily from second order ‘external’ contradictions of capital, flowing from indirect and reflexive responses to the ever-increasing metabolic rift<sup>10</sup> between accumulation and the environmental conditions of production (Araghi 2009). In this way, the increase in oil prices and their consequences for global warming led the ‘automobile-oil complex’ to initiate investment of large sums of capital in the production of agro-fuels, especially in the production of sugar cane and maize for ethanol, and soybean, peanut, rapeseed and oil palm for vegetable oil. This resulted in ‘an unmitigated attack by financial capital and transnational companies on Southern tropical agriculture’ (Stedile 2015, 37).

As noted, the proximate causes of food crisis also derive from one of the more specific impacts of global financialization as an internal contradiction – the deregulation of commodity futures markets (Ghosh 2010; Isaakson 2014). The resultant trend towards greater market volatility in agri-food and fuel commodities has been compounded by a further ramification of the financial crisis in the global North. Northern finance capital has sought a more ‘secure’ home in peripheral economies through investment in fixed assets such as land, minerals, agricultural raw materials, water, agricultural production in addition to the control of renewable energy sources such as hydroelectric power and ethanol plants (Stedile 2015). This ‘internal’ contradiction has served further to reinforce agri-food productivism in the global South, to marginalize subaltern classes, and to create immanent and actual conditions for food crisis.

The financial and food crises are, therefore, but different manifestations of a single process of world accumulation through enhanced social disarticulation under the ‘informal’ empire of neoliberalism. This is generating a twin crisis of under-consumption, overlaid by the direct and indirect effects of increases in the cost of the conditions of production arising from capital’s metabolic rift – climate change, peak oil, degradation of ‘ecosystem services’. Disarticulation is represented in the ‘centre’ by under-consumption, and in the periphery by enhanced primitive accumulation, lack of access to land by subaltern classes, low wages and market vulnerability<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The metabolic rift describes capitalism’s degradation of the human and natural conditions of production

<sup>11</sup> We should note here that this analysis suggests that O’Connor’s well-known thesis of the ‘two’ contradictions of capital – ‘internal’ as under-consumption crisis, and ‘external’ as increases in the cost of the conditions of production – is, in essence, correct.

Meanwhile, transnational fractions of capital attempt further to deepen and ‘constitutionalize’ accumulation and ‘informal’ empire via a series of global and bilateral trade agreements whose intent is to supervene over other forms of law, thereby insulating neoliberal interests from ‘market restraining’ measures (Gill 2014). This expresses the projection into the inter-state system of the historic bloc of neoliberal class forces originating in the USA. At the same time, however, these agreements are characteristically asymmetrical in their content, with the global North either retaining, or introducing, mitigatory or compensatory measures not available to the global South. The objective here is for Northern states, acting principally for neoliberal class fractions, to secure enhanced accumulation opportunities internationally, whilst at the same time selectively insulating their own citizens from the full impacts of the globalization of value relations (Tilzey 2006).

Thus, under the terms of the Agriculture Agreement of the WTO, for example, the global North is permitted to retain ‘production neutral’ (‘green box’) payments in compensation for the phasing out of direct commodity supports (Potter and Tilzey 2007). *Pace* McMichael (2009), however, these compensatory payments cannot be construed as functional for neoliberalism in terms of accumulation, but rather, as ‘flanking’ measures, play the role of placating classes and class fractions opposed to globalization in order to secure continued legitimation (Tilzey 2006). Tilzey, Tilzey and Potter and Robinson (Tilzey 2006; Tilzey and Potter 2008; Robinson 2015) have demonstrated how neoliberal agri-food interests are keen to see the demise of Northern subsidies and compensatory payments, *not* their retention. Because his understanding of capital’s dynamic is reduced to the accumulation dictates of neoliberal class interests, however, Robinson, like McMichael, is incapable of explaining the continuation of Northern systems of subvention. Such compensatory payments play both a social and environmental role in the global North, securing elements of sustainability for reasons of political legitimacy, but meanwhile externalizing the hidden costs of such measures onto the global South (Tilzey and Potter 2008). This asymmetry reflects the reality that core states dare not allow disarticulation to extend too far within their own polities for fear of fracturing capital’s hegemony embodied in the mode of regulation and, consequently, provoking profound legitimation crises. Core states, either individually or as an ‘ultra- imperium’, seek, therefore, to externalize these contradictions onto the periphery and to functionalize it to serve their own needs.

Neoliberalism, embodying the hegemony of trans-nationalised class fractions of capital in the US and, latterly, EU polities (Ibid), thus pursues a policy of global accumulation whilst selectively insulating its citizens from the full impacts of economic and ecological ‘blowback’. In this way, ‘informal’ empire, together with its mitigation in the global North through the above mechanisms, has led to a characteristic pattern of contradictory socio-natural relations in the agri-food sector within the centre-periphery structure. It has generated a selective contraction of productivism in the global North, simultaneously unleashing a wave of market productivism (Tilzey 2000), via trans-nationalized fractions of agri-food capital (Stedile 2015; Moyo 2015), onto the frontiers of the global South. In other words, modes of regulation in the imperium, by slowing the rate of agri-food capital accumulation in the North, displace productivism onto the periphery. ‘Sustainability’ in the global North, within the context of the accumulation imperative of neoliberalism, can be secured only by a ‘spatio-temporal fix’ (Jessop 2008) that externalizes its costs onto the global South.

This has generated a burgeoning tripartite food, social and environmental crisis in the global South as peasant producers are placed at the mercy of volatile global markets, export crops are substituted for local food staples, and biophysical resources are despoiled through neoliberal, agri-food productivism. In this way, neoliberalism, as the generation of market dependence, defines the basis for recurrent food crises, together with the environmental and more general socio-economic crises that are structurally articulated with them. Neoliberal ‘flanking’, or legitimation, measures attempt to mitigate symptoms in one part of the system but simply externalize contradictions, via the ‘spatio-temporal fix’, onto the other part.

Since the 2007/8 crisis of food and finance, a number of developments suggest that, within the agri-food sector, the hegemony of neoliberalism, as ‘informal’ empire, is fragmenting and that ‘extra-economic’ mechanisms, more associated with ‘formal’ empire, are in the ascendant. This should not surprise us since, as we have suggested, and consistent with our thesis of the state-capital nexus, ‘formal’ empire is always immanent in imperialism when ‘economic’ mechanisms alone prove inadequate to the task of securing essential resources and surplus value from the periphery. The timing of these developments (notably the return of Democrats to power in the US) suggest that it is not a case of shifting class fractional power in the ‘core’ that is the principal cause, however, but rather a question of looming (but socially mediated) resource shortages, exacerbated by a rising tide of political resistance to imperialism in the periphery. The difficulty now for neoliberalism as ‘informal’ empire (and possibly for capitalism in general) is, firstly, the ineluctable, if variable, increase in the cost of energy and raw materials, compromising profitability; and secondly, increased resistance from social movements in the global South calling for land and national sovereignty.

In this way, money alone is becoming no longer sufficient to secure the continuing, and cheap, supplies of food and energy to the production and consumption heartlands of the ‘core’. The urge by the global North, together with the ‘BRICS’, to secure such supplies is reflected in the new turn to ‘neo-productivism’ (‘sustainable intensification’) at home and to ‘land grabbing’ in the periphery, with increasing recourse to overt state/‘formal’, and even military, action to realize these ends. With the necessary shift back to biomass, as fossil fuel becomes more expensive, land therefore again becomes the crucial battleground for the twenty-first century. Land grabbing is symptomatic of key changes in the food and fuel regime that have been taking place under neoliberalism: a second reversal of global food flows (now from the South to the North), coupled with new demand for agro-fuels (again from South to North) (McMichael 2013). This renews the problematic role of the global South, especially Africa, as an extractive zone for the benefit of an ailing, yet increasingly brutal and acquisitive neoliberalism centred in the North.

### **The New Imperialism, the State, and Resistances in Latin America**

We now examine how relations between the new imperialism, particularly as ‘informal’ empire, the state, and resistances to empire in Latin America may be understood through the theoretical perspective developed in this paper. The preceding section has suggested that neoliberalism, as ‘informal’ empire, although still hegemonic in the North, and dominant in the South, is increasingly crisis prone and subject, therefore, to a variety of resistances. Some of these are reformist or sub-hegemonic, reflecting the interest of states, in conjunction with more nationally focused fractions of capital, in re-asserting national sovereignty, whilst others are more radical, or counter-hegemonic, and seek a post-developmental path in which food sovereignty and agroecology are of central importance. We are therefore passing through a crucial period, socio-politically and ecologically, in which a number alternative politico-ecological discourses and systems, some systemic and others anti-systemic, are being defined and contested.

These trends are well demonstrated in Latin America, where there has been widespread resistance to the socially polarising consequences of neoliberalism and to the progressive loss of national sovereignty (including sovereignty over food) that has accompanied the deepening of ‘extroverted’ dependent development, a reflection of the hegemony of trans-nationalized fractions of capital. Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Venezuela all represent examples of states where popular forces, comprising peasants, semi-proletarians, proletarians and landless, indigenous groups (in Bolivia and Ecuador particularly), and more endogenously oriented class fractions of the bourgeoisies, have succeeded, with varying degrees of success, in resisting and displacing the dominance of the ‘disarticulated alliance’. What these countries have in common is a new commitment to greater state guidance and interventionism in the economy, a greater formal or substantive commitment to national food sovereignty, and the introduction of social programmes to alleviate the severe income disparities characteristic of the neoliberal era.



The above named states have engaged in processes of ‘passive revolution’ (reform from above, led by nationally-oriented fractions of capital, but in alliance with proletarians, peasants and indigenous people) that has been characterized as neo-developmentalism (some refer to it as neo-extractivism). Despite some countries (Bolivia and Venezuela particularly) seeking to address the causes of semi-proletarianisation, landlessness and *precarismo* through structural measures such as land reform, all these states, nevertheless, continue to pursue policies of both energy and mineral extraction (often on lands of indigenous peoples), and of productivist, export agriculture, in order to fund social programmes and infrastructure development. In Ecuador and Brazil, particularly, largely due to continuing opposition from an entrenched landed oligarchy and their governments’ apparent willingness to overlook this in the search for export earnings, little progress has been made with respect to land reform in favour of the semi-proletariat and landless (Giunta 2014; Spronck and Webber 2016).

As a result, increasing tensions have become apparent between these neo-developmental regimes and their erstwhile constituencies of support among the peasantry, indigenous groups, semi-proletarians and landless, often members of La Via Campesina (LVC, the global movement of peasants and small farmers). For these constituencies, tensions focus around access to land and the means of production, and around the neo-developmental focus on economic growth as a means of bypassing the need to address the structural causes of land poverty and landlessness. In this way food (and land) sovereignty has become a highly contested discourse, deriving initially from re-assertions of national sovereignty as a counter-narrative to neoliberalism, but now often appropriated by neo-developmentalism. As such it runs counter to both agroecological principles and the equitable distribution of land as core elements of food sovereignty as defined by LVC. This discursive tension and ambiguity is expressed in the constitutionalization of food sovereignty in Ecuador and Bolivia, for example. The appropriation of food sovereignty discourse by the governments of those countries, in the service of neo-developmental ends, is increasingly contested by peasant and indigenous movements seeking *post-developmental* *buen vivir* (good living) (Tilzey 2015).

These ‘sub-hegemonic’ resistances to neoliberalism, often in (precarious) alliance with counter-hegemonic movements, derive in important respects from ‘internal’ dynamics of capitalism that can be understood only from the class analytical and state-capital nexus perspective developed in this paper. One key fracture line for neoliberalism, therefore, and one that cannot be understood from a perspective of a monolithic or fully trans-nationalised capitalism such as advocated by Robinson (2015), is the emergence of the BRICS and specifically China (and to a lesser extent Brazil and Russia) as sub-hegemonic or sub-imperial powers (Bond and Garcia 2015). China, in particular, has deployed neoliberal globalization as a strategic means of strengthening the industrial and military infrastructure of the state as a counterweight to the USA. While its growth trajectory is highly contradictory across both the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dynamics of capitalism, and is heavily dependent on global Northern consumption, China’s emergence as a key site of capital accumulation has, nevertheless, opened up a space for other states in the global South to re-assert more nationally-based capitalist development or, at least, for national fractions of capital to selectively displace global Northern dominance. This, as noted above, has coincided with widespread disenchantment with neoliberalism in the global South, and in Latin America particularly. The boom in primary commodity prices stimulated by China’s growth has enabled sub-hegemonic fractions of national capital to ally with non-capitalist class forces to install a wave of centre-left regimes in Latin America particularly (Spronck and Webber 2016).

Such regimes, however, are highly contradictory both politically and ecologically. As noted, they have been able to support social welfare programmes and infrastructure development only through resource extraction fed by the Chinese commodity boom. But they have been reluctant to put in place sustainable food production and livelihood systems based on land redistribution precisely because the growth model is premised on the perpetuation of extractivism and agro-export productivism. So while these regimes have relied heavily upon peasant and indigenous support to secure electoral success, and

have included provisions for food sovereignty in their new constitutions, moves towards substantive implementation of these provisions, through key measures such as land reform, have scarcely progressed beyond formal commitments. Consequently, these agrarian and indigenous constituencies of support are becoming increasingly alienated from centre-left regimes such as those in Bolivia, Brazil and Ecuador. Moreover, the current decline in primary commodity prices will see a reduction in government budgets for social programmes and a renewed focus on austerity, with a resultant melting away of urban working class support for these regimes.

Such contradictions are reviving divisions on the political left and intensifying debates amongst peasant and indigenous constituencies, particularly, concerning the respective strategic merits of ‘autonomist’ or ‘dual powers’<sup>12</sup> approaches to securing socially equitable and ecologically sustainable futures (Mooers 2014; Geddes 2015). Neo-developmentalism thus alleviates, but does not resolve, the political contradictions of ‘systemic’ modes of production that derive from the structural failure to address the land question and market dependence. Similarly, it is ecologically contradictory through its continued foundation in open-ended growth, extractivism, and productivism, forms of production that run counter to the imperative to re-configure societies as negative entropic and circular energetic systems. ‘Systemic’ responses to crises of neoliberalism, manifested as further ‘varieties of capitalism’, would thus seem incapable of averting a longer-term, epochal crisis<sup>13</sup> of capitalism in general.

### **The Promise of Counter-hegemony as Agroecology and Food Sovereignty?**

Counter-hegemonic movements assume their most comprehensive oppositional form on the extractive frontier of the global South, and in Latin America particularly, as rural and radical social movements of subaltern classes assert their right to reclaim both the land and the nation (Moyo and Yeros 2005, 2011). These social movements comprise the peasants, semi-proletarians, landless and indigenous peoples who, as explained earlier, have often lent their support initially to neo-developmental regimes, but who have become increasingly disillusioned with policies that have failed to address the structural causes of land poverty and market dependence, and have simultaneously despoiled, through extractivism, the foundations of their livelihoods.

In response, these constituencies increasingly advocate a model of post-capitalist socio-ecological relations that challenges market dependence, asserts the state/nation as the *key* focus of, and medium for, emancipation, centred around sustainable, non-fossil fuel based production. More than this, however, these constituencies, and particularly indigenous people, are destabilizing assumptions about state-ness, seeking, as they are, the redistribution and de-concentration of power away from the state (Picq 2014). Key and overlapping principles that guide this model are derived from agroecology (Altieri 1995), and food sovereignty (as summarized in the Nyeleni Declaration of 2007).

Food sovereignty, as advocated by its global Southern advocates (see Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck 2011), emphasizes *social relational* transformation towards national (perhaps post-national) and land (resource) sovereignty, with social equality. Similarly, it emphasizes the need for a supersession of market dependence and a problematization of the ‘state’, both as complicit in the new imperial project, but also as potential challenger to it. This approach appears to combine a normative ‘autonomism’

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<sup>12</sup> Autonomist approaches advocate grassroots struggle ‘outside’ bourgeois forms of the state and a withdrawal to local ‘autonomous’ zones of resistance (e.g. Zapatistas in Mexico, MST in Brazil); dual powers approaches consider it premature to call for a dispersion of power before power has been secured – the strategy here is to radically transform the state in order then to disperse power downwards.

<sup>13</sup> Moore (2015) refers to an epochal (or terminal) crisis of capitalism when it is no longer feasible, through closure of the extractive frontier and consequent prohibitive costs of accumulation/capitalization, to generate ecological surplus/surplus value for continued accumulation.

with a ‘dual powers’ strategy. The radical fraction thus seeks to transform the jurisdictional authority of the state by challenging the state system, as a class relational system, so as to enable the state, as a key nexus for emancipatory change, to define socially equitable and ecologically sustainable policies for agriculture and food (Moyo and Yeros 2011). This process captures the paradox of the state both as a constrainer and as a potential enabler of emancipatory change (McKeon 2015). This paradox is possible precisely because the state is not a ‘thing’ but, as we have emphasized in this paper, itself a social relation internally related to the balance of class forces in ‘civil society’. In this way, food sovereignty challenges the institutional relations of the new imperialism that, embodied in the state and inter-state system, underlie mass dispossession and market dependence.

The state here, therefore, is seen to be an essential means to an end, not an end in itself, marking a clear disjuncture between ‘re-peasantization’ discourse and that of the ‘old’ left and neo-developmentalism. For the former, new social relations are founded on strong rural community development, embodying a re-unification of ‘community’<sup>14</sup> members with the means of production, socialization of the means of production as a common pool resource (vested in the community under devolved democratic control), adoption of a circular economy, and satisfaction of human needs according to criteria of human well-being and ecological sustainability. This constitutes an agrarian transition *in reverse*, in which the agrarian question is resolved in favour of the peasantry and the environment.

Together, agroecology and food sovereignty appear to have the capacity both to feed the world sustainably (Badgeley et al. 2007; Tittone 2014) and provide appropriate livelihoods for the great majority *as peasants*, now re-united with the means of production through conferral of land sovereignty on devolved community authorities. If the widespread adoption agroecology and food sovereignty depend upon such a final resolution, then this, in turn, must rest upon reclaiming the land from the classes of the disarticulated alliance and from neo-developmentalism, in other words, through claims of land sovereignty and the redistribution of rights in land.

Land sovereignty, in its turn, can realistically come about only through a process of reclaiming the nation (Moyo and Yeros 2011), in which new assertions of national sovereignty utilize the key jurisdictional authority of the state to transform class relations away from state centrality to the benefit of the semi-proletarian, landless, and indigenous majority. As Amin suggests (2015, 30) ‘... a land tenure reform conceived from the perspective of the creation of a real, efficient and democratic alternative supported by prosperous peasant family production must define the role of the state (principal inalienable owner) and the institutions and mechanisms of administering access to land and the means of production.’ This social relational transformation, re-asserting the political authority of community (commons) as solidarity, or moral, economy, and subverting the institutional separation of the ‘economy’ and ‘polity’ of the modern state, finally removes the market (capitalism) as essential mediator between people and their means of livelihood.

## Conclusion

This paper has suggested that capital and the state have an internal relation, such that the state-capital nexus in the form of the modern nation-state has been, and remains, a crucial entity underlying the dynamics of capital and resistances to it. Capital’s drive to expand into non-capitalist spaces, rendering them as a periphery, is enabled by the imperial nation-state both to enhance accumulation and to

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<sup>14</sup> Defined as a community of people living together and practicing common ownership, sometimes in reference to communal forms of organization that preceded the modern state, for example, the *ayllu* in the Andes. We should be wary, however, of de-historicizing and idealizing such ‘traditional’ and customary forms of social organization, these being frequently inegalitarian, patriarchal and embedded in wider systems of hierarchy such as the Incan state. As Amin (2015: 23) notes, ‘...there is no reason to heap excessive praise upon these traditional rights as a number of anti-imperialist, nationalist ideologies unfortunately do.’

mitigate class antagonisms at home. This takes place through a process of ‘uneven and combined development’. This process, as imperialism, has led to the appearance of a broadly bi-polar world system of states, comprising a ‘core’ of the global North, and a ‘periphery’ of the global South. The new imperialism, perhaps associated most with the ‘informal’ empire of neoliberal globalization, rather than leading to full trans-nationalization and the appearance of a TNS, has, rather, led to the emergence of a sub-imperium, notably the BRICS countries, as potential challengers to the global Northern imperium. This development suggests the enduring character of inter-imperialist rivalry and the territorialized nature of capital in the form of the state-capital nexus. While the BRICS, and especially China, constitute a challenge to the Northern imperium and appear to be contributing to the fracturing of neoliberalism as ‘informal’ empire, these states are, nonetheless, wedded centrally to capitalism, albeit perhaps of a more neo-developmental kind. As such they remain highly contradictory, both politically and ecologically. Indeed, the development model being pursued by Brazil and other states in Latin America appears already to be unravelling beneath the weight of these twin contradictions.

It is under these circumstances of deepening ecological crisis and persistent social inequality that counter-hegemonic movements are proposing agroecology and food sovereignty as post-developmental solutions to the impasse of capitalism. These mobilizations of the semi-proletarian peasant and indigenous majorities in the global South see capitalist social relations, as market dependence, to be a poor satisfier of the social, cultural, and natural foundations of life. They see capitalism as a purveyor of unsustainable affluence to a global minority at the expense of basic need satisfaction for the global majority. The antidote to this condition, a condition arising from the suffocating stranglehold of imperial and, increasingly, sub-imperial relations, lies, in their view, in the fracturing of market dependence through assertions of national and, more specifically, land (territorial) sovereignty.

‘Reclaiming the nation’ suggests that the state, through a ‘dual powers’ strategy, can be a critical target to steer social relations in progressive directions towards agroecologically based food and land sovereignty. Needless to say, the political obstacles to such social relational transformations remain daunting. Nonetheless, as McKeon has noted (McKeon 2015, 3) ‘this time it may be different. Boundless hunger for profits is running up against the finite resources of the planet.’ It may be hoped, therefore, that, as the twin political and ecological contradictions of the state-capital nexus persist, grow and coalesce, strategic relational responses of counter-hegemonic groups will gradually turn the tide of history in favour of agroecology and food sovereignty.

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## **About the Author(s)**

**Dr Mark Tilzey** is Senior Research Fellow in the Governance of Food Systems for Resilience. His research interests lie in political ecology, food regimes, agrarian change and agroecology, agri-environmental politics and governance, and the international political economy of agri-food systems. His research currently focuses on the political ecology of neoliberalism in the agri-food and environment sectors, changes in agri-food and environmental governance, and on the study of interest groups and social movements proposing/opposing these trends, and on nature-society relations more broadly. These concerns focus around 'post-development' theory with particular reference to agroecology and food sovereignty.