

When Food Regimes Become Hegemonic: Agrarian India through a Gramscian Lens

The concept of food regimes, as developed by Friedmann and McMichael, has proven useful in analysing how systems of food production, distribution and consumption are linked to cycles of global capital accumulation and identifying the contradictions and conflicts that underlie them. A question that food regime analysis is relatively less able to address, however, is how food regimes become established and endure with the apparent acquiescence of those who are the victims of their contradictions and inequities. In this paper, I argue that a deeper engagement with Gramsci's theory of hegemony may help to address this lacuna in food regime analysis. To illustrate my case, I draw on studies of rural India from the colonial period to the present day, highlighting the ways in which the hegemonic mechanisms of consent and coercion have been crucial to the consolidation of each of the three food regimes identified by Friedmann and McMichael.

Keywords: Food regime analysis; Hegemony; Antonio Gramsci; Corporate Food Regime; India

Introduction

Food regime analysis (FRA), as developed by Friedmann and McMichael (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989; Friedmann, 1987, 2005; McMichael, 2013) has made valuable contributions to scholarship on how food features within the history of global capitalism. In brief, FRA explores how systems for the production, distribution and consumption of food are integrated in a manner that both reflects and supports global cycles of capital accumulation. They support accumulation chiefly by developing a set of norms and rules which collectively function to keep food prices low. Low food prices not only have important pacifying effects – providing a measure of social order and political stability in the context of the rising inequality that accompanies capitalist growth – they also more directly facilitate capital accumulation by suppressing the growth of wages, creating conditions for waves of industrialisation.

An aspect of FRA that scholars have found especially useful is its periodisation of food regimes. McMichael (2013) recognises three distinct food regimes that correspond to distinct phases in the history of modern capital. The first corresponds to the colonial phase: highly exploitative relations within the agrarian sectors of colonies allowed the import of cheap food to European colonial powers. This put downward pressure on wages in Europe, contributing towards European industrialisation. The second food regime corresponds to US imperialism. The export of food aid followed by Green Revolution technologies to the Third World in the middle twentieth century was not only used to secure the geopolitical support in the context of the Cold War, it also helped stifle 'communist' agrarian reform movements, provided fuel for third world industrialisation, and delivered immense profits to US-based agribusiness. The third 'corporate' food regime corresponds to the liberalisation of agrarian economies throughout the world and the subordination of farming systems to the interests of agribusiness and finance capital. Each of these three food regimes are said to have been underlain by a set of rules and norms that both reflect the interests of dominant classes and serve to support cycles of capital accumulation. They are also said to be contradictory,

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leading to accumulation for some, but often impoverishment for others, thus generating conflict which has historically undermined food regimes and driven transitions to new regimes.

My contention in this paper is that food regime analysis is relatively underdeveloped in its engagement with the social and political mechanisms by which each of the three food regimes became consolidated. I argue that the focus of Friedmann and McMichael on the conflict, contradictions and expressions of dissent that underlie food regimes tend to draw attention away from the more historically typical situation, in which large sections of the rural population acquiesce to food regimes' principles. I suggest that a deeper dialogue between FRA and the work of Antonio Gramsci, particularly his concept of hegemony, can help to enhance understandings of the history of food regimes, as well as the more contemporary dynamics of the corporate food regime. Gramsci provides several tools that are useful to understand how agrarian classes come to consent to food regimes. To illustrate this, I draw on contemporary and historical scholarship on rural India. As a large agrarian economy, India serves as a useful focus, providing clear illustrations of how each of the three food regimes identified in FRA have been instituted and how the mechanisms of hegemony ensured their smooth operation.

Gramscian theory has proven robust in understanding rural politics and agrarian change in India. Some of the most notable scholarly contributions to understanding rural India (e.g. Kaviraj, 1988; Chatterjee, 1998; Byres, 1998; Guha, 1998) and more recent theoretical and empirical research efforts (Nilsen & Roy, 2015) have found Gramsci's theory of hegemony useful in conceptualising how large sections of the rural population endure policy and institutional arrangements that ostensibly do not serve their interests. In this paper, I highlight the contribution that Gramscian theory can make to understanding how food regimes, although developed to foster global capital accumulation, are consolidated and even accepted and embraced by those who are marginalised, exploited, or otherwise suffer as a result of their implementation. I challenge the tendency of FRA to overemphasise acts of resistance to food regimes, arguing that more attention needs to be directed towards the ways in which subaltern populations acquiesce to food regimes' underlying principles. From this perspective, food regimes are not simply an imposition, but are negotiated through subtle processes of consent building (backed by the threat of coercion) and channelling dissent down acceptable channels. I do not intend to argue against the potential for extraordinary political action by subaltern classes at key moments to drive social change – clearly there are instances where this has occurred. My point is, rather, to acknowledge that these are rarer moments and that fixation upon grand acts of resistance and outright rejection of food regimes' principles neglects the more 'normal' scenario of elite dominance and subaltern acquiescence – a scenario well-explained through Gramscian analysis.

I begin this paper by outlining some of the contributions a Gramscian perspective can make to enriching FRA. I show how attending to the dynamics of consent and coercion at various

scales can deepen our understanding of how food regimes are consolidated and contested and how transitions take place between food regimes. I then go on to illustrate these dynamics, as they have applied in India, exploring how each of the three food regimes identified in FRA have either gained or approached hegemonic status in India.

Towards a Gramscian Perspective on Food Regimes

Friedmann and McMichael's (1989) initial formulation of the food regime concept was structuralist in nature. It had a strong emphasis on the contradictory forces internal to the structure of food regimes and how these drive social change. The two food regimes presented in their initial framework were presented as projects of expansionist states – first the British colonial state and then an American imperialist state – to drive an agenda for capital accumulation. In bringing these food regimes into being, these states also unleashed other social, economic, and political forces that pulled in opposing directions to the initial impetus of the regime. In this early formulation, these contradictions were presented as mostly geopolitical. In the first food regime, the British colonial movement to create a global economic system structured around agricultural imports from colonies and manufactured exports from European metropolises generated a countermovement in the form of anti-colonial nationalisms that challenged European dominance. In the second food regime, the US imperialist movement to use food to establish national economies in postcolonial states and incorporate them within an international trade regime generated a countermovement in the form of increasingly autonomous agribusiness that undermined the boundaries of national economies. The contradictory social forces that comprise food regimes are a source of instability, but also dynamism. They give rise to dialectical transitions within food regimes, ultimately leading to the collapse of old regimes and the formation of new ones.

McMichael's subsequent analysis of a third 'corporate food regime' also has a strong emphasis on structural contradictions. Yet, at least in his work since 2005, McMichael's (2005) analysis of the contradictions inherent in this regime are more attendant to class dynamics than geopolitics. McMichael (2009) regards the corporate food regime as especially contradictory and unstable in its class and social dynamics. Its lack of market regulations leads to massive price fluctuations; the uneven application of its principles mean that it protects farmers in the developed world while leaving those in developing countries exposed; its ruthless treatment of food and land as commodities subordinates their social use values as sources of nutrition and livelihood to exchange value as profit for investors, with destructive consequences for local agroecosystems. These contradictions give rise to an expanding list of grievances, especially for smallholding farmers in the Global South, who have been either excluded from or unfavourably incorporated within the corporate food regime. These smallholders are positioned as a kind of 'historical subject' in McMichael's analysis – comparable in many respects to the Marxist proletariat. They are wellsprings of critique and

push forward radical alternatives to the corporate food regime in the form of movements for farmer autonomy and ‘food sovereignty’.

This focus on the more social aspects of food regime contradictions is largely attributable to Friedmann’s development of a more nuanced theory of how transitions occur between food regimes. Instead of seeing food regimes in fundamental opposition to organised social movements, Friedmann’s (2005) later work instead explores how food regimes are (at least in their early phases) *constituted* through the contentious politics that emerge between social movements, nation states, food producers, corporations, and consumers. While Friedmann does acknowledge that structural contradictions give rise to crises in food regimes (Friedmann, 1993), she emphasises the role of social movements in framing the nature of these crises – and how these framings influence the constitution of new regimes. While food regimes, when they function smoothly, are based on a conglomeration of implicit assumptions and rules which constitute a common worldview, when they malfunction, aspects of the system are named by the disaffected, who posit alternative approaches. The social movements that posit these alternatives engage in prolonged struggles and negotiations over the conditions under which food is produced, acquired, distributed, and consumed. New food regimes coalesce when there is a compromise between these social movements, consumers, corporations, and other established powers over how to move forward. Friedmann emphasises, however, that this is always an ‘unequal compromise’ (Friedmann, 2005: 228), favouring established powers with more institutional clout. For example, she argues that in the contemporary food regime, an ‘unequal compromise’ is emerging between the demands for greater ecological sustainability, fairer trade, and safer food raised by social movements and the growing powers of global agribusiness. The compromise takes the form of increasingly commodified ‘organics’ markets – within which organic inputs and technologies (supported by an organics industry) and sale of produce on international organics markets is favoured over forms of localised, self-sufficient and sustainable food systems. McMichael (2013: 11) would later acknowledge the importance of Friedmann’s intervention in ‘softening’ the structuralism of the initial food regime formulation and showing that how a food regime emerges is ‘not the direct expression of interest, so much as the distillation of political struggles among contending social groups’, albeit always in a context within which, due to the power of property relations, ‘a politics of capital frames the resolution’.

The development of food regime analysis has thus involved more direct recognition of the diverse social forces that go into regime constitution. Questions remain, however, on how these social forces operate and in what circumstances they are seen to be important. In both Friedmann and McMichael’s accounts, powerful transnational actors operating at the institutional level are seen to be the crucial drivers of food regime consolidation. Insofar as less powerful actors (at the national, regional, and local level) feature in the narrative, it is mostly in discussions of resistance. Food regime analysis provides intellectual tools for understanding why these actors should resist, but less on why they should (and do) consent to the formation and stabilisation of food regimes. This is not a trivial oversight, since without

some degree of cooperation at the grassroots level, food regimes would not function. Friedmann's emphasis on food regimes cohering as a result of 'unequal compromises' between previously competing social forces leaves open the question of how these compromises are reached. Further, the struggles that Friedmann and McMichael attend to are those that occur at the level of elite institutions – while more everyday, pervasive struggles are less extensively considered. While Friedmann (2005: 232) contends that when a food regime functions well, its rules appear natural – indeed, 'it appears to function without rules' – we are provided with few analytical tools to understand the social and institutional mechanisms by which this spontaneous, unconscious conformity to regime rules emerges. Likewise, while McMichael's framework proves useful for understanding the conflicting class interests that underlie food regimes which erupt in occasional instances of dissent, it has less to say on what happens between these eruptions. In other words, it tends to understate the capacity of food regimes to operate with the consent of those whom it exploits and marginalises. Recent critiques of McMichael's treatment of the corporate food regime have noted that in many instances, the political struggles of smallholding farmers in the developing world – whom McMichael positions as the historical subjects for a new food regime based on 'food sovereignty' – are frequently not directly oppositional to the principles of the corporate food regime. Indeed, often their demands are for more favourable *incorporation within* the corporate food regime – which may ultimately lead to greater regime stability, rather than undermining it (see Jansen, 2015; Bernstein, 2016).

Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides several avenues to address these lacunae in food regime analysis. A Gramscian framework is useful in identifying the mechanisms by which large social, economic, and political systems – such as food regimes – remain resilient, despite their internal contradictions. It attends to the social processes involved in consolidating a regime, such as the integration of multiple class interests, the consolidation of state power and the negotiation of the consent of subordinate classes in civil society. Detailed attention to these processes allow us to explore a core question: how do food regimes become hegemonic?

Hegemony is best understood as the historical process by which a class comes to occupy a ruling position in society and how that ruling position is maintained. Gramsci (1971: 180-1) emphasises that any class that aspires to leadership must develop modes of cooperation with other social groups with whom it has common interests. In addition to this, however, to become truly 'hegemonic,' the ruling group must learn to guide the real or perceived interests of subordinate groups – whom Gramsci refers to as 'subaltern' – such that they become harmonised with its own interests. Hegemony refers to this process by which a ruling class *leads* rather than merely *dominates*. It involves partly the use of coercion or the threat thereof, but, to a greater extent, persuasion and consent-building. Sustained hegemonic power does require a class to have extensive influence over the state, so that it may be backed up by its coercive powers and establish a legal apparatus through which its interests can be continually served. But hegemony also – and more crucially – involves intervening in civil

society and building alliances with socially influential groups and individuals to establish a broad base of consent for a system that predominantly serves the interests of the ruling group. Importantly, Gramsci's is not a totalising grand narrative of ruling class dominance – in many ways hegemony is the outcome of contingent social collisions, rather than the imposition of a vision from above. Hegemony is not necessarily the outcome of an elite conspiracy – it is far more so an outcome of class struggle, in a context in which persuading, pacifying, and compromising with one's subordinates is an objective condition of sustainable rule.

There are four key ways in which the intellectual tools of Gramscian theory can help to enrich food regime analysis. The first is an analysis of the tendential coalescence of the state and civil society as a precondition of hegemony. To become hegemonic, a ruling class needs intellectuals operating within civil society to 'civilise' large sections of the population such that their interests align with dominant interests. When these interventions into civil society are successful, the legal-coercive apparatus of the state and the intellectual action of civil society, begin to coalesce as an organic whole – an *integral state* that protects certain interests and promotes a particular form of economy, society, and way of life. In concrete historical situations, however, the integral state is never fully achieved. Hegemonic groups may need to concede certain demands to subalterns, preventing the full realisation of hegemonic interests. Core interests, however, are always maintained – otherwise one can no longer speak of 'hegemony'. When the ruling group is no longer able to maintain subaltern consent for such core interests, they tend to rely more on coercion. These moments are considered crises of hegemony – what Gramsci (1971: 210) termed an 'organic crisis' or 'crisis of authority' – and are ripe moments for both subaltern and elite groups to make new claims on power. FRA has clearly made much of these moments at which the hegemony of food regimes is weakened and within which social forces antagonised by the existing system contest the terms of a new food regime. In Gramscian terms, such crises may be understood as moments at which consent for the core principles underpinning a food regime can no longer be maintained, and only coercive power remains. Yet, while the conditions for the weakening of hegemonic bonds are clearly expressed, the consolidation of hegemony is not directly discussed, at least by Friedman and McMichael. To bring a more Gramscian perspective to FRA would entail viewing food regime consolidation not simply as the equilibrium reached at the endpoint of extended struggles between unequally endowed social forces, but also as a result of efforts to establish hegemonic structures to persuade and win consent for core food regime principles – and to legitimise the use of coercion when those principles are fundamentally challenged.

Second, Gramscian analysis considers the role of intermediate classes in the functioning of hegemony. From a Gramscian perspective, hegemony is rarely commanded by a single class that acts unilaterally. A ruling class must bring together collaborators within other groups with overlapping interests and integrate them as an *historical bloc* that shares in the benefits and responsibilities of rule. What becomes apparent in the history of food regimes is that as hegemonic projects, they are never solely enforced by the transnational class or imperialist

state that are their chief beneficiaries: they are always co-articulated with other classes who also stand to benefit. Understanding how this operates in practice may require attending to the *local* mediation of national and global regimes of accumulation in the agrarian sector. Such mediation will typically occur through a rural elite, or in some cases through decentralised institutions, who serve as nodes in a state structure that is both deep and variegated. These local actors provide stability to both the nation state and to global food regimes, by performing the hegemonic functions of shoring up local consent and exercising coercion.

Third, Gramsci draws attention to how nascent class projects depend on a supportive state apparatus. Although transnational in their scope, the successful enactment of food regimes always occurs within a national setting, making use of the legislative and coercive powers of the nation state – and to do this also presupposes the consent of the nationally dominant class(es) who *comprise* the state. Gramscian scholars of international political economy are here especially instructive. Cox (1983), for example, shows that for a class to have its interests served across national boundaries, it must first have thoroughly established itself within its own national setting, and then extend its economic and ideological influence to peripheral states by latching onto some local social or economic development. This may involve promoting its ideas amongst intellectuals within an emerging local class with whom it shares interests, or commanding influence over transnational institutions that develop consensus for a particular worldview or favourable set of policy settings. Other Gramscian scholars have noted that in the context of uneven capitalist development, any effort by a transnational capitalist class to impose its hegemony internationally encounters the obstacle of the weak development of capitalist classes in peripheral states. Morton (2007) demonstrates that in such a situation, establishing hegemony on an international scale involves ‘passive revolution’ strategies – that is, the aspiring global hegemonic class must find pathways to satisfy its interests in non-disruptive ways, that appease classes that are dominant within the existing state structure of the host country. Moreover, classes or class fragments that are influential within the state of the host country must be enlisted to enact the agenda and adjust it to local realities – legislative change cannot be done by the transnational class itself. In the context of FRA, this implies that transnationally ascendant classes do not simply impose their will on ‘passive’ third world states: to consolidate a food regime, they must respond to opportunities as they open up within the structure of the nation states that are the targets of their interventions and work with receptive and influential groups. This may entail carefully responding to shifts in the class composition of the state, which amount to shifts in the national hegemonic balance of power.

Fourth, Gramscian theory maintains that when hegemonic relations are particularly well-constructed, even *dissent* from the marginalised need not drive major reform of food regime principles but, on the contrary, provides safety valves and balances that allow for that regime’s smooth operation. One clear way of preventing dissent in civil society, for example, is to sponsor and elevate intellectuals who express public concerns with the status quo, but in

a manner that is non-threatening to hegemonic interests, providing an outlet for public frustration whilst neutralising the potential for more antagonistic expressions of dissent (e.g. Kamat, 2002). In other cases, the state may intervene in civil society to direct expressions of dissent down acceptable channels. The fact that heterogeneity persists is not always a sign that a dominant regime has failed in a hegemonic project: it can, in fact, be a sign of the regime's achievement of hegemonic status – its capacity to negotiate and live with internalised differences (see Sanyal, 2007). A successful hegemonic order is one in which even expressions of dissent become internal to the operation of a system that sustainably protects the interests of dominant groups.

These four aspects of Gramscian theory have the potential to enrich food regime analysis. While there are many uses of the term 'hegemony' in McMichael's work, this refers almost entirely to 'international hegemony' – ala Arrighi (1994) – by which dominant states exert power in international systems. How hegemony is consolidated within national and more localised settings remains underexplored. Further, the more prominent applications of food regime analysis to date have focused on how food regimes are imposed in a more-or-less coercive manner (Torrado, 2016), on their contradictions (Baines, 2015), on how they disenfranchise and bring suffering to the poor (Patel, 2007), and how they encounter resistance in the form of counter-movements (Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). What these studies miss is a focus on the more typical experience of food regimes on the ground: of local acquiescence, of the adjustment of food regime principles to meet local circumstances, of the construction of consent – whether active or passive (for a recent exception, see Jakobsen, forthcoming). A Gramscian approach has the potential to highlight some of the less epic but still important moments in the history of food regimes: of how food regime hegemony is established and sustained over time, in addition to the ways in which it breaks apart. A food regime presupposes both a project of accumulation and a transnationally mobile class (or classes) with an interest in and capacity to enact it. Yet, such enactment does not simply happen in a rarefied transnational space – it requires coordinated action at both the national and local levels. An emergent food regime must work through and, to some extent, become *nested within* a particular form of state. It also depends upon mechanisms of consent and coercion to establish local configurations of producing, distributing and consuming food that are amenable with the food regime's objectives.

In what follows, I provide a cursory sketch of how a Gramscian history of food regime hegemonies could be written in the specific case of India. To be sure, I use broad brush strokes: covering more than a century of history in a single paper – and that too of a country as diverse as India – will inevitably miss regional and local variations on the narrative. The point is not to write a comprehensive history of food regimes in India, but rather to provide clear illustrations of the value that a Gramscian perspective can bring to advance and extend the theory of food regimes.

The Colonial State and the First Food Regime

The first food regime was chiefly a product of the British colonial state. India played a pivotal role in the evolution of this regime and bore many of its negative consequences. This food regime was largely structured around the ‘colonial drain’, in which colonising powers imported cheap agricultural products from colonies such as India, while exporting manufactured and capital goods (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). In India, this was achieved not only through coercive measures, such as the suppression of Indian industry to make the country more dependent on agriculture – but also by encouraging agricultural producers to sell for the global market, partly through the construction of railways and canals. It was also made possible by the highly exploitative extraction of land rents, particularly in the East of the subcontinent. The British used revenue extracted from land rents in India to support the colonial state and to purchase Indian goods to sell them at cheap rates in Britain. The result was the impoverishment of large sections the Indian countryside, and a boost to industry in Britain through import of cheap raw materials and the lowering of wages that resulted when large volumes of cheap food and consumer goods were imported to the British market.

The work of Ranajit Guha provides a useful point of departure for understanding hegemony in India in the context of the first food regime. Guha (1998) argues that the British colonial state in India was fundamentally detached from the masses and only ever attempted to secure consent for its rule from an infinitesimal educated Indian elite. In rural India, this was chiefly a class of rent-extracting absentee landlords known as *zamindars*. The upshot of this argument is that there was no unified political field in India that incorporated all colonial denizens, much less the tendential unity of state and civil society characteristic of hegemony. For the poor rural majority, colonial rule (and the food regime it oversaw) was *dominance*, not *hegemony*: rule by coercion, not consent. A major ambition of Guha’s historical analysis is thus to identify the voices and political perspectives of rural subaltern classes, who were crucial wellsprings of resistance that undermined the legitimacy of the colonial state (see Guha, 1982).

Guha’s work is clearly valuable in explaining instabilities within the British colonial state – and, for our purposes, of the colonial food regime. Yet, it also rests on the tenuous assumption that there were *no* organic connections between subaltern classes and the state and that exploited rural classes consisted of a relatively autonomous community of resistance. This, however, does not stand up to historical evidence, which demonstrates that both the precolonial and colonial states did make interventions into the lives of subalterns and that subaltern groups participated in the life of the state – albeit under highly unfavourable conditions (see Nilsen, 2015). Although it provoked periodic outbreaks of revolt, it is unlikely that the British regime would have extracted surpluses from the Indian countryside as long as it did without some framework for political consent. Direct interventions into civil society were, admittedly, limited. There were some efforts, such as those of the Agricultural

and Horticultural Society of India, to foster values and dispositions amongst primary agricultural producers that would make them more amenable to an agenda for intensive, export-oriented agricultural production, though these rarely penetrated beyond the Indian elite (Arnold, 2005). A cosmopolitan civil society, in which dialogue occurred between Indians and the British, remained very thin, particularly regarding the agrarian agenda. A more common form of British intervention, critical for establishing a hegemonic presence, was to bargain with politically and militarily salient rural communities, who might pose a serious risk to British dominance. For example, the British granted land rights to dominant castes in Punjab and Maharashtra, protecting them from commercial predation by merchants and money lenders, on the basis that these were believed to be 'martial races', whose discontent could cause major instability (Guha, 2013). The selective distribution of such concessions was also used to create conflict between communities and prevent the formation of a unified anti-colonial bloc – the famous 'divide and rule' tactic. Other British tactics – such as the construction of canal networks in the late colonial period – facilitated a breakdown of communal systems of land management in favour of a commercial orientation which facilitated greater exports of goods to Europe and rendered taxation easier. This, however, was more of a passive response on the part of the peasantry to new economic opportunities than 'hegemony' as Gramsci describes it. Some signs of a more 'hegemonic' engagement with the countryside are indicated in Bhattacharya's (2018) recent work, which highlights how the colonial state made efforts to shape rural consciousness by promoting systems of proprietorship, customs, and a 'way of life' that would be more amenable to its needs. This, however, was largely achieved through the denigration and suppression of subaltern classes – such as non-sedentary pastoralists – whose way of life diverged from the state's preferred model of rural socio-economic organisation, rather than a concerted effort at persuasion and consent-building in civil society. The lack of a 'thick' Anglo-Indian civil society meant that Indian compliance with British interests was not enhanced by a common consciousness. An advanced ideology justifying the British right to rule did not take root in the countryside.

Yet, there is one sense in which the colonial food regime gained a deeper level of consent, which is crucial to understanding its durability. This relates to the continuity between colonial and precolonial manifestations of power – and the fact that legitimacy was largely built from *within* precolonial political forms that continued to exist after the colonial intervention. The British paid great attention to the various ethnic communities that comprised India and those communities that commanded authority were patronised by the British and used to extract surplus (Bayly, 1989). Pamela Price (1996) has demonstrated that the precolonial kingdoms in South India maintained popular legitimacy through a culture that invested a great deal in notions of honour and status. As these kingdoms were relatively decentralised, agrarian populations had direct contact with holders of power: the legitimacy of their power was embodied in the local ruler and maintained through ritual and religious symbology. During the colonial period, the British granted elites from these kingdoms roles as intermediaries

between the rural population and the colonial state, which included zamindari roles, but also those of merchant classes and revenue collectors. Their continued legitimacy within rural communities rested upon the endurance of a political culture focused on honour, status and religious symbolism. Insofar as one can speak of a 'colonial hegemony' that upheld the first food regime, it likely evolved *within* Indian civil society, rather than through direct British interventions into it. In some cases, British officials sought to replicate the styles of governance of precolonial rulers through displays of 'spectacle and theatricality' (Bhattacharya, 2018: 27), and while they themselves rarely sought the kind of symbolic recognition from local deities that was key to the authority of Hindu rulers (Appadurai, 1981), their intermediaries *did*. When the British tried to circumvent these intermediaries in favour of more direct regimes of extraction, political instability tended to be the result (Dirks, 1988). This suggests that the colonial food regime and the colonial project more broadly were never the projects of a British colonial elite alone. Hegemony was commanded by a Gramscian *historical bloc*: a convergence of classes both foreign and Indian, who shared in the benefits of colonialism and together articulated its legitimacy. The rural elites were a key component of this 'bloc'. This goes a long way in explaining how it was possible for the colonial regime to survive for two centuries in India and why so many of its features endured even after the British officially vacated the subcontinent.

The Postcolonial State and the Second Food Regime

While the first food regime exhibited only elements of hegemony, the second food regime approximated the dynamics of 'hegemony in the world order' described by Gramscian theorists of international political economy to a far greater extent. At a global level, the second food regime was characterised by interventions in food systems to support US imperialism. It may be thought of as a regime in two phases, both of which extended internationally the power of classes dominant within the US state. The first phase consisted of the US dumping grain surpluses in post-colonial states as 'food aid'. This practice supported the industrialisation of those states, secured their political support in the context of the Cold War, and provided an outlet for US food surpluses (Friedmann & McMichael, 1989). These surpluses had accumulated as a result of the subsidised agriculture and import controls adopted in the US after decades of pressure from organised farm lobbies (Friedmann, 1993). Their dumping may thus be considered the international extension of those farm lobbies' power. The second phase, which brought the regime into maturity, consisted of the export of Green Revolution technologies. The Green Revolution, championed by US philanthropists and US-based multilateral agencies, explicitly aimed to provide a technological alternative to 'communist' land reform movements and create new markets for US-based global agribusiness (Patel, 2013). An increasingly powerful class of corporate agribusiness used Green Revolution discourses to extend its influence from the United States to Third World countries – an exercise in moral and intellectual leadership within the world order, similar to

that described by Cox (1983). Certainly, within India, US-based institutions played a strong role in steering the country away from land reforms and towards a Green Revolution pathway – and US seed and agrichemical corporations profited immensely (Brown, 1970). Yet, this transnational intervention must be seen in a national context, with due attention to the political dynamics of the Indian state and the class dynamics that underlay them. These provided a structure of opportunities which allowed for foreign interventions.

At the time of the British departure, there was no single domestic class that could be said to have hegemonic power in India. The Indian bourgeoisie were influential within the ruling Congress Party and there was broad consensus within planning circles that the development of industrial capital was tantamount if India was to ‘catch up’ to the developed nations of the West. For rural India, this meant chiefly what Byres (1991) has termed ‘agrarian transition’: an appropriation of surplus capital, food and labour away from the countryside and towards the city to fuel industrial growth. Yet, the Indian bourgeoisie had been weakened by colonialism and lacked the political reach into India’s villages to lead the predominantly agrarian new nation in a hegemonic fashion to achieve this end. Semi-feudal rural elites – former *zamindars* and others – commanded much greater political clout than the bourgeoisie across much of the country and, though delegitimised by the Independence struggle for their collaboration with the British, were still influential in local civil societies. As such, several analysts have suggested that in the decades following its Independence, India followed a ‘passive revolution’ strategy of capitalist development (Kaviraj, 1988; Chatterjee, 1998; Byres, 1998). Gramsci’s term ‘passive revolution’ refers to a situation in which the bourgeoisie seeks to initiate capitalist transformation, even though it lacks exclusive hegemonic status. The Indian bourgeoisie *shared* hegemonic power with other dominant classes through constant negotiation, resulting in an uneven advance of capitalist development. Thus, though it may have been in their interests to align with the US for food policies that would support industrialisation, they would, nonetheless, need to do so in constant dialogue with other classes – particularly the rural elite, whose interests often ran in different directions. The rural elite were critical in shoring up electoral support for Congress in rural areas and in the grassroots implementation of development projects (Chatterjee, 1998): no project of agrarian transformation could take place without their consent and cooperation. Moreover, if international forces were to advance their interests in the Indian countryside, they too would need to do so in a manner that enlisted the active support and participation of these classes that were instrumental in the advance of the country’s passive revolution (see Morgan, 2007: Chapter 6).

Alongside the need to consolidate industrial capital, the newly Independent state faced a chronic problem of food shortages. As Siegel (2018) outlines, after Partition, India had lost 31 per cent of its fertile land to Pakistan and the spectre of famine loomed large. Although there was consensus that increasing domestic food production was paramount, there were barriers to achieving this in the short term, which led to a two-decades long reliance on food imports. Imports were largely provided by the US at subsidised prices, providing an outlet for

US food surpluses, which threatened to undermine the support prices that farmers' lobbies had secured. While the receipt of these imports supported the objectives of the emergent food regime – upholding a system of subsidised agriculture centred on the US (Friedmann, 1993) – it never proceeded with the active consent of the Indian population. Food aid was only reluctantly accepted by the Indian state as a temporary response to dire circumstances and was strongly opposed domestically by both capitalist farmers and food merchants (Siegel, 2018). The food regime at this stage thus cannot be considered hegemonic, but rather a contingent assemblage of interests.

In the decades after Independence, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, presented land reform as the preferred method of dealing with the shortfall in domestic food production. This was based on broadly socialist assumptions that a fairer distribution of land was essential not only for equity, but also for productivity and political stability. The land reform process, however, became constrained by the structure of India's passive revolution. While an initial phase of land reforms entailing the state purchasing and redistributing surplus land held by large absentee landlords proceeded with little organised resistance (Herring, 1983), later efforts to redistribute land to improve production were thwarted by politically influential rural elites. In the mid-1950s, an effort was made to introduce land ceilings. However, as Herring (1983) outlines, while the Central Government and the Planning Commission were able to issue directives for reform, policy formation ultimately was a matter for state governments – and state governments frequently came under the influence of landed elites. Meanwhile, the intended beneficiaries of land reform – smallholders and landless agricultural labourers – were insufficiently organised to push for the effective implementation of reforms. In Varshney's (1995: 46) terms, the land reform agenda lacked 'political microfoundations'. Even within the central government, the will for reforms weakened over time, as an increasingly influential class of capitalist farmers argued that land ceilings would punish enterprising farmers seeking to develop more productive, industrial farming. By the late 1950s, a clear binary had emerged at the central level between 'progressive' (i.e., capitalist) and 'parasitic' (feudal, absentee, zamindar-style) landlords. This led to a key concession in land-reform policy: capitalist farmers became exempt from land ceiling laws. This provided both a loophole for rural elites to avoid land losses and channelled their activity into a capitalist mode of agricultural production. It also positioned capitalist farmers as the key players in India's passive revolution.

The partial failure of land reform, combined with India's reliance on increasingly unreliable US food aid, was becoming a cause for concern. A mood set in amongst Indian planners that a change was in order: that rural development initiatives needed to focus more explicitly upon food production (see Varshney, 1995). International actors took advantage of this opening. Development 'experts' – chiefly from US government and transnational non-governmental institutions such as the Ford Foundation – had become nested within the Indian state in the decade following Independence as advisors on rural development programmes (Sinha, 2008). More than 800 agricultural experts were deployed to India by the US Technical Cooperation

Mission to advise on reforms to the extension system, while US land grant universities helped to establish eight agricultural universities across India by 1966 (Siegel, 2018). These international forces extended the intellectual resources developed through the technological and social revolutions in US agriculture and were highly influential in guiding India down a 'Green Revolution' model of development during its moment of crisis, consolidating the second food regime.

India's Green Revolution involved collaborations between US-based capitalist philanthropic foundations (notably the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations), transnational agribusiness, the Indian state, and state agricultural universities. As a major departure from more socialist land reform policies, it favoured technological interventions for intensive agriculture – hybrid variety seeds, chemical inputs and modern irrigation systems. The international interests behind the Green Revolution were evident – the US state's desire to provide pro-capitalist alternatives to 'communist' land redistribution (Patel, 2013) and the consolidation of a massive market for US-based agri-input industries (Brown, 1970). Yet, there were domestic forces at play, too, which are crucial to understanding how the Green Revolution built consent in India. Capitalist farmers with medium-sized holdings who had benefitted from land reforms had been lobbying government for new commercial opportunities for several years and their political representatives clearly wanted new technologies to be made available to farmers (Baker, 1984; Varshney, 1995). The new technologies were introduced in a few select regions with high potential for intensive agriculture. These regions experienced a rapid expansion in output. Although the benefits of the new technology were highly unequal and caused social conflict in the short-term (Frankel, 1971), for commercially-oriented medium-to-large-holding farmers in targeted regions, the benefits were substantial. These farmers consolidated significant economic, social and political power as a result of the Green Revolution and became crucial as a class to the hegemonic contours of the second food regime in India.

Although state extension services and agriculture universities played an initial role in persuading farmers to adopt the new technology and more commercial approaches to farming, it was only after a class of beneficiaries emerged that truly hegemonic dynamics became evident. In the early 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi significantly altered the Congress Party structure in a manner that further marginalised the old guard of erstwhile zamindar elites. An emergent class of medium-to-large holding capitalist farmers were quick to fill the power vacuum (Gupta, 1998). Although this class had benefitted greatly from the Green Revolution technologies, they also recognised problems with it as a model of agrarian development, particularly high costs of inputs, reduced prices for outputs, and the corresponding increase in farmer indebtedness. They formed powerful oppositional blocs to demand improvements in the terms of trade for agriculture, chiefly through subsidies for inputs and support prices and special procurement rates for key agricultural commodities. Farmers in regions that had consolidated early gains from Green Revolution technologies

effectively lobbied for substantial year-on-year increases in procurement rates for the crops they were growing, with flow-on effects on market rates (Mitra, 1977).

The issue of food prices highlights the dynamic nature of food regime hegemonies. Note that, according to McMichael (2013: 11), the provision of 'cheap food' is among the chief objectives of a capitalist food regime – and indeed, if the Green Revolution had simply been 'imposed' on rural populations without any political push-back, that would have likely been the result. Yet, in order to win the consent of classes critical to the operation of the regime – namely, middle-to-large commercial farmers – compromise on the issue of food prices was required. Through the purchase of agri-inputs, farmers became more integrated into supply chains dominated by American agribusiness – as per regime objectives – but only insofar as farmers could be provided with prices that accorded with their aspirations. Yet, despite the apparently oppositional nature of farmers' demands for food price increases, they ultimately had the effect of strengthening the foundational assumptions of the food regime. As Gupta (1998) outlines, farmers' movements, which became particularly strong in India from the 1970s onwards, articulated demands for food price increases in a manner that drew on the discourses of the Green Revolution – claiming better food prices would 'incentivise' them to use new technologies to increase food output – and hence lent legitimacy to those discourses. Recognising their potential to leverage benefits for themselves in this situation, they emerged as key intermediaries of the second food regime, effectively articulating its hegemony by announcing the benefits of American agri-technologies to subordinate classes, while simultaneously consolidating political dominance across large parts of rural India. To win the political support of subordinate classes, they themselves behaved hegemonically, campaigning for anti-poverty policies that provided benefits to the rural poor – ostensibly against their own class interests (Gupta, 1998).

These capitalist farmer-led peasant movements gained significant institutional power throughout the 1970s and 1980s. They included initially the Bharatiya Kranti Dal – a political party started by Chaudhary Charan Singh – and later the Bharatiya Kisan Union (in the North), the Shetkari Sanghathana (in the West), and the Karnataka Rajya Raita Sangha (in the South). For all of these movements, relatively well-off capitalist farmers formed the core support base, yet they effectively mobilised a populist vision that incorporated the countryside as a whole. They articulated a central antagonism of rural 'Bharat'¹ versus urban 'India', mobilising theories of urban bias and placing great emphasis on the unequal terms of trade between the countryside and the city. As Gupta (1998) describes, on the ground level, the activities of these movements involved mass refusals to repay debts and the shutdown of the offices of government procurement agencies when set prices for agricultural outputs were deemed too low. Though their core agenda was improving the terms of trade for agriculture to the chief benefit of market-oriented landholders, they always claimed to act on behalf of the rural community as a whole. They gave substance to these claims by also campaigning for

¹ 'Bharat' is the Sanskrit word for the region roughly corresponding to the Indian subcontinent.

rural schools and electrification. Activists involved in farmers' movements showed their solidarity with the rural poor by avoiding overt displays of their wealth and wearing simple, rustic clothes.

This class thus became key to the hegemonic dynamics of the second food regime. Though they gave voice to those disaffected by the Green Revolution, they channelled dissent down acceptable pathways, never questioning the underlying principles of the regime – namely, the facilitation of commercial, highly capitalised agriculture and the consolidation of a domestic food market for India. Indeed, the concessions that they won through their oppositional activity served not only as a safety valve on discontent, but also made the new approach to agriculture accessible and desirable for smallholding farmers. They developed a much broader basis of consent for the second food regime, approximating the 'integral state' described by Gramsci, in which activity in civil society provides vital support for agenda of the state and dominant classes.

The Neoliberal State and the Third Food Regime

From the mid-1970s onwards, food crises, mounting trade wars, and the declining structural power of the United States in world food trade resulted in a gradual but decisive decline in global support for the system of subsidised agriculture that had underpinned the second food regime (Friedmann, 1993). At the same time, the second food regime had empowered agribusinesses – including suppliers of agri-inputs and food processors – and extended their global reach. The third, so-called 'corporate' food regime is characterised by the dominance of this class, who have consolidated a loose global food regime not directly through an imperialist state (though relying on crucial support from the United States government), but rather through transnational institutions – particularly the World Trade Organisation, but also other agents of 'neoliberalism', such as the IMF and World Bank. In developing countries, such as India, this regime has entailed the liberalisation and financialisation of agrarian sectors, and a redirection of agricultural output away from goals of national self-sufficiency, towards provisioning for the global market – with agribusiness being the core beneficiary (McMichael, 2013). Patnaik (1996, 2009) argues that neoliberal structural adjustment packages introduced by transnational institutions have facilitated an increase in agri-exports to the global North through two mechanisms. First, free trade policies have encouraged farmers to engage in cash cropping for the global market. Second, neoliberal structural adjustment reduced government expenditure, especially in rural areas, undermining domestic purchasing power and domestic expenditure on food, 'freeing up' agricultural goods to be directed outwards as exports.

McMichael's analysis suggests that transnational agribusiness leverages states in this process, to facilitate the conversion of smallholder dominated agriculture to more lucrative ventures such as biofuels production (McMichael, 2010) and to conduct coercive 'land grabs' whereby

land held by farmers and communities has been transferred to business for plantation development (McMichael, 2012). Yet, a Gramscian perspective on draws attention to the way in which this power of transnational capital is only possible when classes dominant within particular nation states are enlisted to act as ‘authors’ of liberalisation policies that allow transnational capital its ascendancy (Morton, 2007). These local forces ‘indigenise’ neoliberal doctrine, and make adjustments to local realities, managing the balance of consent and coercion. This process is crucial to understanding the contemporary dynamics and future trajectories of the ‘corporate food regime’.

The liberalisation of India’s rural sector since the early 1990s represented a profound shift in the political economy of agriculture, severely compromising the economic position of all but the wealthiest of agrarian classes. Chatterjee (2008) suggests that this shift was possible because of a change in the dynamics of India’s ‘passive revolution’: decades of capitalist development and pro-business reforms in the 1980s had empowered the urban bourgeoisie relative to the rural elite, allowing for more extensive pro-capitalist reforms with less consideration for preserving rural class interests. If we can speak of a ‘corporate food regime’ in India, it took shape as the hegemonic influence of small-to-medium capitalist farmers over the Indian state receded and the urban bourgeoisie crafted policies that allowed a greater role for capital in all sectors of the economy, including agriculture. Nonetheless, some support from influential rural classes remained politically relevant – given their salience in articulating local consent and the electoral power of rural voters – so the state undertook agricultural liberalisation with caution (Chatterjee, 1998). From 1991 onwards, liberalisation occurred in a phased manner and mostly at the discretion of state governments, rather than the Centre (Corbridge *et al*, 2013). Although this slow implementation may have softened some of the deleterious effects of liberalisation, it nonetheless brought about significant distress in the countryside with profound consequences for the operation of hegemony.

The initial years after the adoption of this more corporate-led, open-market agricultural model were marked by significant instability. The export orientation of agriculture since the early 1990s has shifted land use patterns away from food grains towards higher value crops, such that per capita production and per capita availability of the former reduced markedly and consistently between 1991-2 and 2003-4 (Patnaik, 2009). There were also problems with the broader neoliberal framework that underpinned the shift to this food regime. The acceptance of global prices on agricultural commodities and the deregulation of rural credit markets made farming a far more precarious venture (Reddy & Mishra, 2009). Meanwhile, the subsidies on agricultural inputs were gradually (though not completely) eroded, undermining one of the key foundations of consent for the previous food regime. Indeed, it initially seemed as if there were no clear consent mechanisms for the corporate food regime. While the state gradually withdrew from the provision of rural welfare, there was a view that NGOs might ensure stability by providing rural development services (Randeria, 2003) and act as consent-builders for further liberalisation (Ghosh, 2009). Yet, NGOs tended to be ineffective at generating consent, not least because they lacked a mandate for universal provisioning and

had weak accountability mechanisms. Further, NGOs were contradictory ambassadors of the newly dominant ideology, as although they received funds from transnational capital, their leaders often retained passionate anti-establishment commitments (Ghosh, 2009; Brown, 2018). This inability to generate meaningful mechanisms for consent-building meant that the corporate food regime, at least during its first decade in India, was overly dependent upon coercion. This was evident in frequent instances of dominant landholding classes violently suppressing subaltern classes' demands for land redistribution in the context of growing livelihood insecurity (Walker, 2008). It appeared the class interests behind the corporate food regime were faced with a Gramscian 'crisis of authority': they were dominant only through use of force or a lack of perceived alternatives, rather than through ethico-political leadership (see Brown, 2013). The third food regime lacked the foundation of consent that is necessary to become hegemonic.

By the early 2000s, however, the Indian state had recognised that it could not remain idle or rely upon coercion, given the scale of rural disaffection. Chatterjee (2008) argues that by this time, the threat of political instability from 'dangerous classes' – i.e., those displaced from the countryside by the ongoing agrarian crisis – had forced the state to develop mechanisms to manage liberalisation's worst effects. This took the form of progressive legislation and new development initiatives led by the state and elite sections of civil society to ensure continuing access to some means of rural livelihood generation within the otherwise highly liberalised economic environment. Chatterjee suggests that introducing new universal rights would be a step too far – potentially compromising the hegemonic interests of capital in rural India. He suggests that, therefore, the state and civil society have selectively allocated resources to specific groups, to divide the rural population and prevent the organisation of dissent. Subsequent studies have shown that a range of state and civil society interventions into regions affected by extensive land acquisition have had precisely this effect (e.g. Steur, 2015).

Chatterjee's analysis notwithstanding, there *has* been a more transformative 'new rights agenda' that has developed in India since 2004 (Ruparelia, 2013), which has led to class compromises that may have given the corporate food regime some of the mechanisms required to operate in a more hegemonic manner. Through a series of popular policies, the state has been shoring up consent for what may be a new paradigm for liberalisation in agriculture and a new hegemonic dynamic of the corporate food regime. It is noteworthy that these changes were not initiated by the transnational classes who are the chief beneficiaries of the corporate food regime, nor their domestic class allies. The legislative agenda was, rather, developed by middle class activist groups, often in dialogue with subaltern social movements (Ruparelia, 2013). This implies the ongoing significance of 'passive revolution' to the hegemonic dynamics of the corporate food regime: rarely does transnational agribusiness or finance 'lead' in developing consent mechanisms – it must rely on domestic classes to develop a framework for its interests to be served in a politically manageable fashion. The new policies first began to be introduced after the 2004 elections, in which the electoral

defeat of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was largely attributed to a rural backlash against the pattern of development since liberalisation (Corbridge and Srivastava, 2013). Policies introduced by the new Congress-led government recognised rights to livelihood and encouraged fuller participation in the state. While these policies did not compromise on the basic principles of the corporate food regime – global food market integration and agri-business dominance – they have nonetheless made its impacts more manageable and socially acceptable for rural subaltern classes. Perhaps the most notable new policy initiative was the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). The Act mandated poor rural households be provided with 100 days' paid work per year at the official minimum wage, to undertake projects addressing local needs, as determined by local elected bodies. NREGA ultimately functioned as a tool of governance, reigning in the worst effects of liberalisation, not only by providing employment in neglected areas, but also by upgrading local infrastructure (Price, 2011). Other legislative measures, such as the Right to Information Act, the Forest Rights Act, and ongoing efforts to decentralise governance also move in this direction, and have the effect of providing outlets for dissent that are not threatening to core hegemonic interests.

Another crucially important piece of legislation has been the Right to Food Act (2013), which mandates that the state provides access to food for citizens living below or close to the poverty line. Pritchard et al (2016) argue that the Right to Food Act reflects growing recognition within both Indian civil society and multilateral agencies that neither the market-led approaches of the corporate food regime, nor an exclusive focus on increased production (as in the Green Revolution) will unproblematically lead to increased food security for the majority. They suggest the Act can be seen as a kind of state-led counter movement to the negative side-effects of the corporate food regime. Yet, Jakobsen (forthcoming) argues that this overlooks the extent to which Right to Food legislation served to entrench the hegemony of neoliberal principles in agriculture. The introduction of the Act occurred alongside a series of moves to privatise India's food procurement agencies and de-universalise its Public Distribution System. Thus, the Right to Food Act simultaneously serves to build consent amongst India's poorer citizens and creates further opportunities for corporate capital accumulation from its agri-food system.

Corporate influence is also ensuring that relatively 'progressive' activity in civil society and state programs is helping develop consent for social change to further develop the corporate food regime. The growing number of civil society initiatives for 'organic farming', for instance, develop consent for the integration of Indian agriculture into what Friedmann (2005) calls the 'corporate-environmentalist food regime'. This is far from a fringe activity: several state governments in India's mountainous regions – historically far removed from the dynamics of corporate agriculture – have adopted policies of developing as 'organic states' and facilitated smallholding farmers to gain internationally recognised organic certificates to sell to the global market (Galvin, 2014). Selling 'clean and green' food products to wealthy global consumers at premium prices creates opportunities for profiteering by corporations

who control the supply chains. This is especially noteworthy, as sustainable farming initiatives are frequently identified in FRA as exemplars of the ‘food sovereignty’ movement – supposedly in *opposition* to the corporate food regime. Yet, as Brown (2018) outlines, the organisations promoting organic and other forms of sustainable farming are largely financially dependent on transnational donors and the state, who are more interested in promoting market integration than ‘food sovereignty’. This means organic farming organisations are often agents of deepening the hegemony of the corporate food regime, rather than undermining it. Similarly, the ambitious *Skill India* mission – a massive program for developing vocational training opportunities for rural youth that has been in place since 2013 – goes beyond merely alleviating the negative consequences of the corporate food regime, and instead builds active consent for it. Globalised agribusiness has been directly involved in formulating curricula for this scheme’s agricultural courses. These courses not only aim to build ‘human capital’ to support the growth of the formal agribusiness sector, but also help establish consent for that growth by encouraging an entrepreneurial and pro-corporate disposition amongst rural youth. If successful, *Skill India* will build consent for the corporate food regime by encouraging young farmers to adopt more corporate, efficient, consolidated, and market-oriented approaches to agriculture, with mechanised systems of production, cold storage facilities, and global market integration. Where NGOs had done this in pockets, *Skill India* would provide the resources to do so on a far more coordinated national scale.

The state-led initiatives described above mostly take the form of a ‘passive revolution’ in which domestic classes are leading the charge to make corporate dominance in the agrarian sector more socially acceptable – yet there are some ways in which transnational agribusiness is embedding itself in local civil society and providing grassroots leadership for its principles. Contract farming is especially illustrative of this. Contract farming offers agribusiness a means of taking control over agricultural production without the complications and risks associated with acquiring land or attempting to manage the labour process themselves (Sarkar, 2014). Contracts offer farmers guaranteed procurement, while agribusiness benefits by securing a consistent supply of produce at standardised quality. Further, as contract farming allows agribusiness to monitor the production process more closely, they are able to ensure conformity to intellectual property laws, restricting farmers’ from reusing corporate-supplied seed (see Sarkar, 2014). Contract farming often proves exploitative, as agribusiness develops monopsonic power and traps farmers in debt relations. There is an ever-present possibility of contract farming becoming coercive after initially enlisting farmers under more consensual terms. Contractors have been known to behave in predatory ways, enlisting farmers from regions with few available livelihood alternatives, to secure their participation in contracts on unfavourable terms (Vicol, 2017). Nonetheless, contract farming also introduces mechanisms for consent-building and hegemony, which may allow agribusiness to consolidate a more durable and socially and politically acceptable position in the Indian countryside. As Vicol (2017) describes, agribusinesses often rely on local agents to enlist

participation in contract farming. These agents have extensive local connections and knowledge, and are crucial in developing trust and legitimacy for contract farming schemes at the grassroots level. In other words, they are enlisted as interlocutors of agribusiness hegemony. The contract mechanism itself also forces an element of dynamism and flexibility on agribusiness, encouraging a greater focus on securing farmer consent over time. Because contracts are renewed on a year-by-year basis, if farmers are unsatisfied with the terms of the contract, they are unlikely re-sign – provided they have livelihood alternatives. Singh (2004) describes how farmers in Punjab, for example, largely rejected initial attempts by agribusiness to foster contract farming in the 1990s, as they were unable to secure a fair share of profits and were treated as dependents of the contractors. This led to the emergence of contracts with more favourable terms emerging in the early 2000s, which recognised farmers as more equal partners – and these contracts have been more successful in the long term. These developments point to contract farming as a potentially more hegemonic form of agribusiness control, which gives agribusiness a more grounded presence in rural India.

Importantly, to suggest that the corporate food regime has developed more advanced ‘hegemonic mechanisms’ does not necessarily imply that there is any great enthusiasm for it on the ground. Its hegemony is far from complete and the lack of organised forces in civil society rallying support for corporate agriculture suggests it does not (yet) resemble the ‘integral state’ that Gramsci described. However, it does appear a process of accommodation has been set in place to enable a kind of reluctant acceptance: perhaps even a resignation of a lack of clear pathways to viable alternatives. As a study of opposition to land acquisition in Southern India shows, some corporate efforts to foster consent amongst the rural population, such as Corporate Social Responsibility obligations, often do not so much build consent as they undermine the efficacy and speed of resistance (Steuer, 2015). Yet, precisely the fact that there are now organised, legally enforced *mechanisms* suggests that neoliberalism and the corporate food regime are approaching a more mature hegemonic position in India. If the first ten years of a liberalised regime in Indian agriculture were marked by a kind of ad hoc approach to responding to successive crises, the most recent decade has been marked by new mechanisms to develop grassroots consent and to neutralise dissent through less coercive means (Nilsen & Roy, 2015).

Conclusion

The focus on structural contradictions within food regime analysis has provided valuable tools for the study of global agrarian change. It allows the identification of conflicts underlying food regimes and shows how these conflicts can drive transitions within and between food regimes. A Gramscian perspective that attends to how food regimes become hegemonic has the potential to add further depth to the analysis, highlighting how food regimes become consolidated and how they remain durable despite their underlying

contradictions, notably by drawing attention to the development of mechanisms for consent-building.

By examining the evolution of food regimes in India, I have illustrated four key ways in which a Gramscian perspective can enrich food regime analysis. First, the concept of the 'integral state' – the tendential coalescence of state and civil society that is characteristic of hegemony – provides insights into the mechanisms by which consent for food regimes is established. In India, this was particularly apparent in the second food regime, where extension services and agricultural universities, along with leaders of farmers' movements, articulated new discourses that built popular consent for a new, commercial approach to agriculture amongst various strata of the peasantry. There are also some initial steps towards the development of a more 'integral state' in the contemporary food regime, where recent progressive legislation serves to soften the negative impacts of the food regime whilst also shaping civil society in such a way as to ensure that expressions of dissent are not threatening to the core interests of that regime. Second, the idea of an 'historical bloc' – whereby class collaborators, who share in the benefits of a regime, work together to articulate hegemony on the ground – proves fruitful in understanding how consent was established at a grassroots level for the exploitative social relations characteristic of food regimes. In India, though food regimes may have been initiated by imperialist states or transnational classes, they would not have endured without the emergence of a class of beneficiaries – usually comprised of a 'rural elite' – who provide leadership for the food regime and enlist support amongst subordinate classes. Third, Gramscian analysis shows how in order for transnational food regimes to work in a national setting, they must find strategic opportunities within the changing class composition of nation states. This was evident in the case of the second food regime, where the green revolution was pushed by transnational forces, but only became 'hegemonic' when working through a state structure within which small-to-medium capitalist farmers were becoming increasingly influential. Likewise, the third food regime – which has been more beneficial to agribusiness and finance capital – would not have been possible were it not for the declining influence of landed rural classes over the Indian state structure. Fourth, the Gramscian insight that a well-functioning hegemonic system is able to subordinate even expressions of dissent to hegemonic interests sheds light on the ways in which food regimes mature. This is evident in the way in which farmers' movements were able to articulate discontent for the Green Revolution in a manner that further consolidated corporate agriculture, and how contemporary developments such as the Right to Information Act and Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives serve to funnel dissent down channels that are not threatening to corporate interests.

Overlooking these factors is not without consequence. The treatment of the corporate food regime by McMichael and others exhibits an excessive focus on the instabilities within the regime and the resistance that it has generated, overlooking some of the ways in which the corporate food regime may be becoming more versatile and accommodating. The focus on rural India in this paper shows that, as in previous regimes, the class interests pushing for the

consolidation of the corporate food regime have developed mechanisms for enlisting local consent within civil society. The state has also stepped in to manage dissent and provide livelihood alternatives for those whom the corporate food regime marginalises. There is also some evidence that local beneficiaries of corporate agriculture are being enlisted as grassroots ambassadors who lend this emerging food regime legitimacy. The corporate food regime proves to be more than an unstable assemblage of contradictions giving birth to its own antithesis through its irreducible antagonism with rural communities. Indeed, it may be moving to a more hegemonic configuration. Rural India is not in the 'crisis of authority' that appeared to be widespread just a decade or so ago – improved mechanisms have been put in place to establish consent, or otherwise dissipate dissent, for a liberalised food regime with a heavy agribusiness and private sector role. Without attending to these and other processes of hegemony, understandings of the development of this 'regime in progress' will be incomplete.

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