



Rethinking food regime as gender regime: agrarian change and the politics of social reproduction

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a synthetic reading of the food regime and gender regime concepts to consider current trends in deagrarianization. Its goal is to articulate a research agenda for studying the food regime through the lens of gender and labor relations. Combining insights from feminist scholarship and early debates on family farming, it underscores the role of social reproduction in shaping agro-food systems. It reconsiders family, kinship, and strong ties as a form of social organization in capitalist production, emphasizes the significance of ideology on the household level, and underscores the role of temporalities of social and biological reproduction in conceptualizing the food regime evolution.

KEYWORDS

Social reproduction; feminization of agriculture; food regime; household production; agrarian change

The literature on gender and agro-food politics has tended to follow what Nancy Fraser (2009) defines as two foundational claims to justice: recognition and redistribution. Scholars studying agriculture have increasingly recognized that women produce a significant portion of food globally (Doss 2014), yet remain financially exploited, socially marginalized, and politically disenfranchized (e.g. Allen and Sachs 2007; Bock and Shortall 2017; Jacobs 2009; Koch 2019; Pini, Brandth, and Little 2016; guest-edited special issues include Addison and Schnurr 2016; Huyer 2016; Kilic, Winters, and Carletto 2015).

Justice is also central to debates on the feminization of agriculture. While there is significant variation across regions, women's share of the population economically active in agriculture has increased substantially (sometimes doubling or tripling) over the last four decades (Abdelali-Martini et al. 2003; de Schutter 2013; Slavchevska, Kaaria, and Taivalmaa 2016). Driving these trends are changes in labor migration patterns, globalization of agro-food markets, intensification of agricultural production, armed conflicts, and climate change (FAO 2017; Bryceson 2019). Coupled with gender expectations and social pressures, these forces have created conditions where women have little choice but to assume subsistence food production or find employment as unskilled workers in commercial agriculture. Consequently, growing proportions of agricultural production are now performed by women who are underpaid or entirely unpaid.

Effects of these trends have been devastating: because women lack financial and social capital to access tools, land, credit, information, or other resources (Sheahan and Barrett 2014), their farms are more labor-intensive and up to 30 percent less productive than neighboring male-owned farms (FAO 2011; Slavchevska, Kaaria, and Taivalmaa 2016; Radel 2012). One underlying reason for these discrepancies is that working in small-scale farms and kitchen gardens is considered to be part of women's domestic work responsibilities. Emphasizing the exploitative nature of these labor arrangements in India, Pattnaik et al. (2018) pointedly argue that the changing gender patterns in agriculture are best conceptualized as the 'feminization of agrarian distress,' with emphasis on 'distress' (also Deere 1995, 2005; Deere and León 2001).

Though 'feminization of agriculture' is usually applied to the Global South and interstitial regions such as socialist and post-socialist Eastern Europe (e.g. Meurs 1994), women in the Global North are similarly operating on the margins of conventional agriculture. US women are up to three times more likely to be 'the operator of a farm in sustainable agricultural models than in productivist models' (Trauger 2004, 289). These trends have only intensified since Trauger's study in the early 2000s (e.g. Barbercheck et al. 2014; Sachs et al. 2016). Women lacking access to financial and social capital have turned to alternative agro-food networks (AFNs) and have become the face of civic efforts such as community-supported agriculture, organic farming, land conservation projects, and urban farming (Blumberg 2022; Costa 2010; Koch 2019; Mincyte and Dobernig 2016; Pilgeram and Amos 2015; Sachs et al. 2014; Sumner and Llewelyn 2011).¹ Although women taking leadership in AFNs is lauded as a step towards gender parity, it comes at a heavy cost: drawing from classical work on gender inequalities, Castellano (2016) conceptualizes women's participation in sustainable small-scale agriculture and self-provisioning as an added responsibility or 'third shift' (see also Deutsch 2011; Jarosz 2011; Laudan 2001; Mincyte and Bartkiene 2019; Mincyte, Bartkiene, and Bikauskaite 2020).

None of this is surprising. Social science research has documented how capitalism and patriarchy have become mutually constitutive, deepening the commodification of agricultural production, leading in turn to women losing their rights, status, and equitable distribution of household responsibilities (Boserup 1970; Sachs 1996). Consequently, many food activists and scholars have moved beyond recognizing women's struggles to call for redistributive justice—from fair pay to support to structural changes in agro-food systems, particularly increasing women's access to land, credit, training, and technologies; reconfiguring labor relations; enabling fair exchanges; and dealing with trauma or experiences of inequality (for an excellent overview, see Cadieux and Slocum 2015).

Recognizing and addressing women's systematic marginalization under capitalist agro-food systems is one step towards addressing these inequalities. Yet as Fraser (2009) shows, the politics of recognition and redistribution are much more complicated than they might seem. Indeed, a closer look at the notion of feminization of agriculture reveals its limits. First, its focus on women as a disenfranchized group paradoxically reproduces the traps of identity politics based on difference, in that the growing share of women working in agriculture is seen as a deviation from the norm of male

¹Writing about Honduras, Edelman and León (2013) have observed similar trends where women-farmers are staving off land-grabs by organizing cooperatives and keeping their farms in the family, even as their male counterparts choose to sell their lands to large landowners.

farmer.² ‘Feminization’ may capture objective changes in the demographic structures of agricultural production, but in the broader context of deagrarianization, it acquires a negative connotation where feminization of agriculture is understood as yet another dimension of the devolution of rural life epitomized by land-grabbing, smallholder dispossession, exploitation, and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, the focus on ‘feminization’ risks obfuscating parallel agrarian transformations that are inseparable from changing gender dynamics: male out-migration; changed employment structures in local and global labor markets; profound consolidation of agricultural production and land by local elites and international corporations (land-grabbing); assaults on communal rights, customary land tenure, and informal economies and non-monetized exchanges; and the demographic pattern where younger generations of rural residents migrate, leaving older women behind (Katz 2001). Thus, the shifting gender (and age) balance in agricultural production is just one piece of the larger puzzle of deagrarianization.

Finally, debates surrounding feminization of agriculture often take a macro perspective, glossing over specific social, economic, and material processes that define the ongoing agrarian change. Surprisingly, little research has attempted to connect these debates to changing gender and labor dynamics in households and extended kinship and close tie networks (for more, see Deere 1995; Jarosz 1996; Little 1994; Radel 2012; Rogers 1975; Whatmore 1988). Although family farming, smallholder agriculture, and women-led sustainable farms often operate as an extension of household-level social and biological reproduction, this otherwise nuanced literature considers gender as a separate feature of either agricultural production or global productive relations defined by surplus extraction and primitive accumulation. Few scholars have approached the household as a unit of analysis for studying agrarian change since the intense debates in the 1970s to early 1990s on family farms and non-wage labor revealed relationships between commodification of agriculture and social reproduction (see, for example, Brydon and Chant 1989; Jarosz 1996; Little 1994, 1997; Long 1984; Whatmore 1988, 1991a, b; cf. Little 2002; Razavi 2009; more recently Newton 2020). If anything, assumption has been that the household is the unit of consumption (for critiques see, Cowan 1985; Wajcman 2015).

These tensions and contradictions surrounding gender politics of deagrarianization may be viewed in several ways, but two directions seem promising: (1) a move from what Silvia Federici (2004) calls ‘women’s history,’ and (2) efforts to rethink gender as a structuring category across all social relations, as articulated in the gender regime literature (Connell 1987). In her classic *Caliban and the Witch*, Federici (2004, 21) suggests that the focus on ‘women’s history’ as separate from men’s has designated women as marginal to world history. Instead, she advocates looking ‘at history from a feminist viewpoint ... to redefine in fundamental ways the accepted historical categories and to make visible hidden structures of domination and exploitation ... [Focusing on] women, then ... signifies not just a hidden history that needs to be made visible; but a particular form

²Sub-Saharan Africa and Baltic states, particularly Lithuania and Latvia, are a notable exception to these gender norms in agricultural production where women have historically managed a significant proportion of land holdings. For a thorough discussion of regional differences in women’s participation in agriculture in Europe see Blumberg (2022); on gender normativity in US and Western European agriculture, see, for examples, Brandth (1995); Morell and Brandth (2007); Campbell, Bell, and Finney (2006); and Leap (2017).

of exploitation and, therefore, a unique perspective from which to reconsider the history of capitalist relations.'

It is no coincidence that Federici focuses on labor as the subject of primary political concern. Since gender cannot be disentangled from social relations of production, a feminist rereading of labor division challenges some underlying assumptions in classical political economy. Federici critiques dominant understandings of primitive accumulation for ignoring the central role of gendered division of labor and biological reproduction in such accumulation:

Whereas Marx examines primitive accumulation from the viewpoint of the waged male proletariat and the development of commodity production, I examine it from the viewpoint of the changes it introduced in ... the production of labor-power. Thus, my description of primitive accumulation includes a set of historical phenomena that are absent in Marx, and yet have been extremely important for capitalist accumulation. They include ... the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women's labor and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force. (Federici 2004, 20)

Federici's argument about the co-constitution of waged (productive) and unwaged (reproductive) labor in capitalism is part of the theoretical approach known as social reproduction feminism. In this literature, 'social reproduction' is defined as three overlapping forms of productive activities: biological reproduction of human bodies through feeding, healthcare, cleaning, etc.; labor force reproduction by teaching skills and behaviors; and social relations reproduction by providing various social and cultural needs (Bakker 2007; also Edholm, Harris, and Young 1978; Katz 2001). Social reproduction feminists differ from classical Marxist and even intersectionality feminists in that the latter often conceive of capitalism and patriarchy as separate political projects (Ferguson 2020; Vogel 2018). Social reproduction feminism focuses not on gender, but on social organization of capitalist domination and exploitation: gender is a social structure that cannot be isolated from the overall power relations undergirding capitalist societies.

Similar argumentation appears in the scholarship on the gender regime. Connell (1987, 103–4) argues that 'gender relations are not an ideological addendum to a class-structured mode of production. ... They are not confined to domestic work, or even the division between unpaid domestic work and paid work in industry. They are a central feature of industrial organization.' Arguing against sociological role theory, Connell conceives of gender not as a stable category in the matrix of social relations, but rather as a relational process, albeit one embedded in and shaped by capitalism.³ This definition follows the social interactionist approach in viewing gender not as an inherent property of individuals or groups but as existing only in relation to others. But it also incorporates a Marxian emphasis on labor as a foundational form of social relations. In this perspective, gender and social reproduction labor are mutually constitutive. Thereby, Connell provides a useful heuristic lens to examine the interactive social, political, and economic processes through which the current exploitative mode of production has emerged.

How does the gender regime perspective change how we think about agro-food systems today? This paper presents a feminist rereading of the food regime, an approach

³Connell's focus on gender being produced through domestic and institutional relations echoes ideas that more recently have been defined as relationality (see also DiNovelli-Lang, Hébert, and Gray 2018). Here, I follow Connell's definition of gender.

that offers one of the most comprehensive analytical tools for thinking about deagrarianization and broader trends that define the capitalist system of agriculture. In the next section, I combine the gender regime perspective with Harriet Friedmann's early research on family farming to highlight three features of gendered agricultural labor—kinship relations, family-related ideologies, and temporalities of social and biological reproduction of households—as significant factors shaping the social reproduction of agricultural labor. The goal of this theoretical exploration is to articulate a research program that captures the complex, multi-scale processes that reproduce the food regime in a particular context through historically situated and culturally specific gender relations. The paper concludes with a section that summarizes the arguments and reflects on the implications of the application of the gender regime perspective.

Integrating food regime with gender regime

The food regime concept centers on an understanding of the agro-food system as 'a vehicle of a contradictory conjuncture, governed by the 'double movement' of accumulation/legitimation' (McMichael 2005, 274; also Bernstein 2016; McMichael 2013; Pritchard 2009; Winders 2009). That is, political and social institutions support the continuing processes of dispossession, alienation, and exploitation in agricultural production. Notably, this approach emphasizes the historical embeddedness of agro-food systems and the continual opening of new frontiers for capital accumulation and commodification rather than conceptualizing a regime as a paradigm or stable agro-food order (McMichael 2009). Drawing on regulation theory, world-systems approaches, and structural Marxism, the food regime tracks the constantly evolving class politics worldwide. Thereby it provides a lens for examining both the changing agro-food economy and the history of capitalism more broadly.

Based on the flows of capital and global labor divisions, food regime scholars identify three regimes (Friedmann and McMichael 1989; McMichael 2013; Pritchard 2009; Winders 2009; cf. Bernstein 2016). The colonial regime (1870–1914) is exemplified by the British Empire. In it economic and political exploitation was accompanied by consolidation of the nation-state and its institutions, formation of transnational agricultural commodity trade, and emergence of resistance/revolutionary movements against colonial rule. The second, or US-led, regime (1945–1973) corresponds to the shift to the developmental model and philanthrocapitalism. These conditions enabled the Global North to dump agricultural surplus on the Global South in the form of aid while simultaneously implementing protectionist trade measures (import substitution). At its core, this regime embodies the shift from state to capital as the organizing principle of the world economy (McMichael 2009, 146). While the trends established in the second regime continue to this day, several scholars have outlined an emerging third regime defined by liberalization of global trade, privatization of previously publicly owned assets and services, decentralization of governance, and a general shift to neoliberal globalization. McMichael (2005) conceptualizes it as a corporate regime defined by 'the deployment of price and credit relations ... as key mechanisms of 'accumulation through dispossession'' (265). Friedmann (2005) underscores efforts to incorporate environmental and social concerns into the processes of capital accumulation and dispossession. She redefines the emerging green capitalist global food system as based on the bifurcation of 'quality' agro-food

systems catering to privileged classes from conventional food commodity chains serving the vast majority of consumers (Friedmann 2005, 257).

Building on these theoretical foundations, scholars have complicated the periodization of and transitions between regimes by arguing for more historically, culturally, and ecologically grounded accounts of the evolving agro-food system (e.g. Niederle 2018; Campbell, Evans, and Murcott 2017; for an overview, see Jakobsen 2021). Yet even in these recent efforts to articulate more encompassing, multi-scalar models of the food regime, gender is primarily conceptualized as a consequence deriving from primitive accumulation and dispossession processes not as a structuring feature in deagrarianization processes. Such a conceptualization obscures the complex and often contradictory processes by which global labor divisions are reproduced in the household. In contrast, in early food regime debates, questions of what roles non-wage gendered labor, and by extension social reproduction, played in the commodification of agricultural production were central in discussions of the apparent recalcitrance of agricultural production to capitalism. Briefly revisiting these debates reminds us that the (now mostly forgotten) feminist reading of agricultural labor in capitalist agriculture laid the foundations for a more nuanced understanding of how the food regime manifests in specific contexts.

The concept of food regime (Friedmann and McMichael 1989) built on Friedmann's seminal work on international food systems and their relationship to family farming (Friedmann 1982, 1987).⁴ In this previous work, Friedmann had directly addressed capitalism's patriarchal nature and the unique labor division on family farms that was 'based on kinship, notably on gender and age' (1987, 248). Drawing on her research about the rise of family farming in the United States and western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Friedmann (1978a, b) showed that family farms had important competitive advantages over capitalist enterprises, including a lack of structural necessity for profit-making (a family farm serves to support social reproduction not to accumulate capital) and a propensity for self-exploitation and underconsumption in times of hardship (also Bernstein 2010; van der Ploeg 2008, 2013; Whatmore 1991a, b). Without ignoring the broader political and economic shifts then taking place in agriculture, Friedmann illustrated how social reproduction was integrated into commodity production: 'Two dimensions distinguish family farms in capitalist societies: the combination of property and labor ... and the *unity of the domestic group and the productive group*' (1987, 247; italics original). In other words, the foundational preconditions of capitalism, which transform property and labor into commodities that are sold separately, are combined on family farms. More importantly for this analysis, no pure form of wage labor exists on family farms: labor is folded into household work arrangements organized around gender.

Friedmann's focus on kinship as a social organization of production echoes the work of Chayanov (1986 [1966]). In his analysis of 1920s Russian agriculture, Chayanov argues that peasant household labor is characterized more by its social properties than by technological development, capital accumulation and investments, or maximization of revenue for individual workers. To Chayanov the consumption-labor balance principle is the underlying logic of the peasant economy where the satisfaction of entire family needs is

⁴For the purposes of this paper I rely on Friedmann's (1978b) definition of family farms. In it, marriage is understood as a unit of agricultural production that while focuses on commodity production operates with the main purpose of social reproduction of the farm household.

measured against the drudgery of labor. Chayanov also emphasizes patriarchal authority as a key social property of household production. Yet Friedmann goes further to locate family farm production in the context of labor division on a global scale and in international markets (see also van der Ploeg 2008, 2013; Blumberg 2021). More importantly, the gender regime perspective is more attuned to changing gender dynamics of relations of production within and outside the household, while Chayanov's model assumes internal relations are stable (see Friedmann 1978b, 560–561 for her engagement with Chayanov).

Among the most illuminating of the debates on agriculture and capitalism is a discussion between Friedmann (1986) and Goodman and Redclift (1985). Whereas Goodman and Redclift agree that agriculture poses a unique set of challenges in terms of its subsumption into capital, they disagree with Friedmann's contention that small commodity production on family farms is not fully commodified. For them, labor on family farms is deeply imbricated in capitalist production and 'well-adapted to the prevailing patterns of surplus appropriation' (242). Specifically, family farmers hire outside wage labor (e.g. when their children are small or leave home), extract surplus labor, and organize their production (and capital investments in technologies) around capitalist commodity production. Moreover, Friedmann's conceptualization of family farms as operating outside of capitalist production falls prey to the ideology aimed at the political and cultural legitimization of capitalized producers: 'The capitalised family producer has sought, and in large measure achieved, political legitimacy by seeking to distance himself from 'capitalism' at the ideological level, while fully embracing it at the economic level' (1985, 242). In this reading, family farms use the hegemonic and often romanticized notion of 'family' as one of the few remaining non-capitalist spaces to advance their economic goals that is, to make profit.

Responding to Goodman and Redclift, Friedmann (1986) makes two points that are central for the kind of feminist reading of the food regime that Federici and Connell inspire: the contradictory nature of social reproduction labor and the focus on relations in production. For Friedmann, in order to conceptualize the place of family farming in capitalist production, one needs to accept contradictions implicit in the combination of social reproduction labor with (small) commodity production on family farms: 'There is a material basis for the non-capitalist aspect of the ideology that Goodman and Redclift emphasize. Farmers derive their ideas of themselves as 'non-capitalist' from the same place they conceive of themselves as 'capitalist'—their contradictory experience' (187). In other words, family farmers operate as both capitalist and non-capitalist producers.

Second, drawing on Burawoy's (1985) analytical distinction between relations of production versus relations *in* production, Friedmann suggests looking more closely at household-level labor processes to understand the social organization of commodity production on family farms:

At least as important in distinguishing family farms from capitalist ones are their relations *in* production, or labour process. Here the principles of kinship and patriarchy prevail. The division of labour, patterns of domination and struggle, and cyclical life of the enterprise, are all shaped by gender and generation. If there is a uniquely 'rural labour process' ... it lies not only in land [as Goodman and Redclift argue], but also in the tension between family relations and commodity relations. As Beruux and Benaux-Wiame (1981, p. 156) put it for artisanal

families, marriage functions like a 'relation of production.' (Friedmann 1986, 187; *italics original*)

Here, Friedmann understands gender as a relational category constituted through kinship and intergenerational relations, akin to the gender regime approach. That marriage forms a particular unit of productive relations is key here, because it highlights a social organization of labor relations that differs from those in capitalism. Although it is integrated with and competes in capitalist markets, marriage eclipses the extraction of surplus in capitalist relations of production. This does not mean that marriage is free from exploitation; as many scholars of social reproduction labor have argued, domination and exploitation are defining features of the domestic sphere, but they are wrapped into 'the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life' (Katz 2001, 711; see also Bhattacharya 2017; Bakker 2007; Ferguson 2020), making them a distinct site for negotiating the capitalist agro-food system with non-commodified work.

Notably, Friedmann is not the only scholar who underscored the role of gendered family relations in small commodity production and capitalist agriculture. Sachs (1983; also Jarosz 1991) developed a theoretical framework for studying women's place in agricultural production that has shaped generations of agrarian feminists. Similarly, researchers have critiqued the Marxian political economy approach as class- and production-reductionist and gender-blind by highlighting consumption and household reproduction as sites for both enabling and challenging capitalism (e.g. Little 1994; Whatmore 1988). Whatmore (1991a) moved beyond Friedmann, arguing that not all household labor was non-commodified and that the domestic political economy was best understood through gendered labor division (also Jarosz 1996; Lem 1988). Notably, Whatmore (1991a, b) directly engaged with Connell (1997) to argue that labor on family farms is reproduced through a gender regime that operates in the broader gender order. Yet, unlike Friedmann and the relational approach to gender and social reproduction articulated by Federici and other feminist scholars, Whatmore (1991a) argued that capitalism and patriarchy operated as two relatively autonomous domains (Argent 1999, 4).

Despite its substantive contribution to the scholarship, this important research has gained little traction in subsequent debates on agrarian change and capitalism, including research on food regimes. One reason is that the focus on gender has often been misread as portraying women as a separate, marginalized demographic category rather than as structuring agents. More broadly, the 1990s marked a major shift in the scholarship from agrarian political economy where 'the main areas of debate have shifted from materialist concerns about uneven development, transformation of the family farm, and the role of the state to the related questions of consumption and social nature' (Marsden et al. 1996, 361).⁵ Consequently, feminist approaches that emphasize the structuring effects of gender relations have rarely been integrated into our understanding of deagrarianization.

⁵This trend is rooted in classical Marxian and functionalist approaches arguing that industrialization coupled with the introduction of new domestic technologies resulted in significantly curtailing family functions and transforming the household from a unit of production to a unit of consumption (e.g., Parsons and Bales 1955). Feminist scholars have countered these assumptions by showing that most of the new household technologies eliminated work usually performed by men and children, while routine household maintenance tasks and care labor continued to require a disproportionate amount of time and effort from women. This suggests that in housework, as in the agricultural sector, industrialization, modernization, and capitalist-subsumption have been uneven and contradictory (Cowan 1985; Wajcman 2015).

Taking a broad view of this scholarship, the following sub-section summarizes the key characteristics of the relational approach to the global agrarian condition and outlines a preliminary research agenda for studying agro-food systems.

Three dimensions of a relational food regime

The early writings on labor politics on family farms yield a feminist rendering of the food regime which can be summarized in three insights that can undergird a research agenda aimed at deepening our understanding of the food regime by accounting for gendered labor relations. These are a focus on kinship relations, contradictory ideological justifications at the household level, and the role of household reproduction temporalities in food regime dynamics.

First, the recognition of marriage and kinship relationships as relations in production offers a useful standpoint for a nuanced understanding of the social organization of labor processes. It illuminates how capitalist exploitation weaves into close relationships and daily routines of social reproduction labor. It suggests that both the rural household and expanded kinship networks should become the nexus of labor relations in food regime analyses.

To illustrate, as the literature has documented, agricultural labor on the global scale relies on migrant labor forces. These labor migration patterns are in turn shaped by strong ties⁶: agricultural workers tend to migrate in tightly knit social units organized around kinship and friendship to places where they have established trusted connections. In other words, both extended kinship and what scholars in the English-speaking academia call ‘imaginary kinship’ or non-blood-based, long-term friendships, structure labor migration patterns just as much as do labor demand, migrants’ skillsets, immigration policies, or the material aspects of agricultural production such as seasonal cycles. While generations of scholars have examined agricultural labor migration and exploitation patterns in the context of the current food regime, a relational feminist perspective broadens the scope of these analyses by tracking how kinship and strong tie networks foreground the reproduction of the global food system. As McNally and Ferguson (2017) explain, ‘the physical movement of migrant workers across borders [is just as important as]... the counter-flows of chunks of their wages (in the form of remittances), as well as the work of nurturing and educating children, currently reliant on those remittances, who will likely compose part of the global reserve army of labor available for migration to the capitalist core.’

Indeed, the role of remittances and other forms of support resulting from migration pathways in the Global South and interstitial regions cannot be overestimated. In Lithuania, for example, foreign remittances in 2005–2020 constituted on average 3.3 percent of the country’s GDP (around 1 billion euros, or \$1.16 US annually; European Migration

⁶Granovetter’s (1973) defines the strength of social ties as a ‘combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie’ (1361). Notably, his influential study of information diffusion patterns reveals that knowledge spreads easier through weak ties (acquaintances, casual encounters with strangers, etc.) than through strong ties (family and close friends). However, in the context of precarious and often informal labor arrangements, scholars have shown that strong ties are central for providing safety nets, meeting basic biological needs through care labor in everyday setting, and attending to social and cultural obligations (e.g., Mezzadri 2019; Shah and Lerche 2020). To paraphrase Granovetter, it is the strength of strong ties that foregrounds social reproduction in agriculture and beyond.

Network 2020). In 2019 this percentage exceeded the contribution of the *entire* agricultural sector to Lithuania's GDP (3.2 percent; Official Statistics Portal 2019). Notably, this number excludes undocumented cash transfers and direct payments for education, healthcare, childcare, elder care, housing, vacations, and various goods and services. It also omits financial investments, including purchases of land, farms, and individual garden plots for self-provisioning in peri-urban areas (Lith. *sodas*, also known as *dachas*). To be clear, not all of these transfers come from emigrants working in the agricultural sector. The point here is a conceptual one; namely, that rethinking kinship and strong ties as units of production can generate a more comprehensive understanding of the organization and regional dynamics of the current food regime as well as its effects on local economies.

Moreover, such an approach also provides methodological tools for moving beyond the capital- and Western-centric analyses of agricultural labor politics that tend to dominate the field. A relational gender regime approach recognized that the lives of migrant workers do not begin and end in the fields or food-processing plants. Instead, networks of kinship and strong ties undergird a transnational dimension of agricultural labor arrangements and their reliance on social reproduction, in both the short and long terms. It also reveals intricate if uneven interdependencies between destination and origin countries and reconceptualizes the food regime as a international, multi-scalar process grounded in specific social contexts (see also Lapegna and Perelmutter 2020; Rioux 2018). In short, linking family obligations and strong tie socialities to labor politics on a global scale offers an opportunity to better understand the uneven and contradictory processes through which food regime manifests in different locales.

Second, Friedmann's argument about the ideologies surrounding family farming is another key contribution of the gender regime approach: one's consciousness, cross-generational family obligations, and mutual aid expectations in kinship networks drive both the making and unmaking of capitalism. In order to account for the views from below, we must take seriously an *emic* perspective of the farmers and agricultural workers who understand their labor in terms of care for land and as a way to provide for aging parents, children, etc., without losing sight of the pervasive romanticization and commodification of family that it engenders. Methodologically, such an approach gives voice to and accounts for social relations and subject positions in food regime analyses. Thereby, integrating the gender regime and food regime perspectives deepens our understanding of the ideological and affective dimensions of agricultural labor politics. It is important because it offers a more nuanced understanding of agency and its manifestations across different social structures in agro-food systems: how actors understand and experience their agency (or the lack thereof) can have far-reaching implications for developing alternative pathways and mobilizations against the current food regime.

Recognizing the value of situated experience and agency is important for understanding the evolution of capitalist agro-food systems, but family ideologies and affect-based justifications also shape immediate actions (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). For example, Puerto Rico imports almost all of its food while exporting its labor force, placing the country in a profoundly precarious and dependent position in the global agro-food system. Meanwhile, the younger generation justifies their decision to emigrate (primarily to the United States) as a form of rebellion against their oppressive patriarchal families. In this case, the deeply felt experiences of patriarchy play no small part in driving labor out-

migration and supplying cheap labor to the US, which in turn shape the dynamics of the food regime across the broader region.⁷

Notably, this kind of ideological justification differs from the legitimization of capitalism articulated in current conceptualizations of the food regime. Unlike cultural ideas that legitimize capitalist agricultural production on national, regional, and global scales (Campbell, Evans, and Murcott 2017), the ideological justifications outlined above operate on the kinship level and are mired in contradictions. As Friedmann concludes, household members quite commonly idealize (white, nuclear, heteronormative) family farming to increase profits while simultaneously feeling oppressed and mobilizing against the corporatization of agricultural production.

In the case of Puerto Rican outmigration, patriarchal authority based on gender and age simultaneously maintains the household as a coherent social unit (albeit through exploitation and domination) and serves as a catalyst for the younger generation to emigrate. Central in this scenario is the broader economic and political context in which family ideologies are negotiated. As Lem (1988, 513) suggests, it is in times of 'high mobility' that family ideologies are contested and households become more exposed to forces of commodification (such as joining labor markets): 'in the context in which there is the high mobility of all factors of production (including labor) the commodification effect acts to mediate and express the prevailing sources of conflict and resistance to the demands of household reproduction.' Identifying and examining the moments of crises and the subsequent renegotiation of family ideologies constitutes another potentially productive research area for studying labor politics in the food regime.

Finally, the relational gender regime perspective reminds us to account for household- and kinship-level temporalities of social and biological reproduction when examining shifts in the labor-capital-state nexus of the food regime. This means recognizing that changing gender roles, decisions to have (or not have) children, and cultural expectations around intergenerational relationships (e.g. whether children should care for their aging parents or be 'free' to migrate elsewhere) influence how the food regime manifests in particular places. Here the gender regime approach invites us to integrate demographic shifts and intergenerational relations shaped by gender dynamics into an analysis of the food regime's evolution.

For example, the rapid aging of rural populations and precipitously low birth rates across Eastern Europe are bound to change labor and land markets across the region and in Western Europe, which has come to depend on steady supplies of cheap migrant labor and land in the East (Dzenovska 2020; Wegren and O'Brian 2018). Since the European Union's (EU) agricultural sector plays a significant role in agricultural commodity markets worldwide (the Common Agricultural Policy funding makes one-third of the total EU budget), the fall in fertility rates and ageing of rural populations in Eastern Europe will have rippling effects not only on food production patterns and agricultural labor migration patterns in Europe, but also on international food supply chains. Here as anywhere else, historically and socially embedded temporalities of household

⁷This example was suggested by Martin Cobian during the discussion of the paper at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at the City University of New York on December 9, 2020. For more on food regime politics in Puerto Rico, see Martin Cobian's forthcoming dissertation *Breaking the Colonial Food Chain: The Import Food Fix, Alternative Agri-food Movements and the Struggle for Food Sovereignty in Puerto Rico*.

biological reproduction will shape the dynamics of the emerging food regime on the local, regional and global scales.

Such a focus on temporalities in social and biological reproduction also provides an entry point for including local and regional history into analyses of food regime structures. As the recent war on Ukraine—along with various neocolonial and blatantly imperialist advances in other countries—demonstrates, the regional operation of the current food regime cannot be reduced to neoliberalization, financialization, or deepening internationalization of agricultural production. Rather, histories of nationalistic imperialism, colonialism, and historical imaginaries continue to play out in the forms of armed invasions, terrorization of civilian populations, forced displacement, and other forms of violence that profoundly shape biological reproduction of entire ethnic, religious and other populations around the world. Whether these conflicts produce refugee and internal displacement crises that require food aid or lead to policies that interrupt international trade networks, they transform agro-food systems on local, regional, and often global levels. Gendered social reproduction labor within and outside of kinship and personal-relationship networks play a key role in mediating the effects of violence-inflicted food issues at various scales and thus should be included in the analyses of the food regime. More broadly, a more sustained focus on shifting ideological, social and biological reproduction patterns allows us to move beyond the current understanding of the food regime as an all-encompassing, cohesive system to interrogate crises and disruptions in the food regime.

To summarize the contribution of these insights, the gender regime deepens the focus of the food regime approach by shifting the focus from institutions, policies, commodity production, and markets to social reproduction in general and the social organization of relations in production, more specifically. Because gendered labor relations are culturally and historically situated, such a view provides a more granular understanding of the mechanisms through which the food regime situates in particular settings. Moreover, it increases the explanatory power of the political economy framework by incorporating gendered/non-commodified labor politics into the analyses of primitive accumulation in the agrarian context.

Summary and broader implications

This paper has synthesized the food regime and gender regime concepts to develop a more comprehensive approach to studying capitalist agro-food systems. To the extent that women play an important role in agro-food systems, feminization of agriculture is a defining characteristic of the contemporary food regime. However, I sought to move beyond recognition of women's labor and redistribution policies as the main focus in the current literature to present a more relational reading of the troubling trends in the global food regime. Relying on feminist insights and Friedmann's (1978a, b) early writings on family farming underscores the role of relations in production in shaping agro-food systems and capitalism, more broadly. A focus on social reproduction in intergenerational households linked through kinship relations and strong ties yields new understandings of how the global food regime is experienced on the ground and reproduced on the regional and global scales. In addition, the relational gender regime approach reveals that family relationships involve more than altruistic love and selfless care for each other, even if families normatively, ideologically, and emotionally subscribe to these values. Instead,

they have their *sui generis* logic of power interplays, exploitation, and domination that are markedly different from surplus appropriation in capitalism. From a gender regime perspective, the food regime is wrought with contradictions not only because it is capitalist, but also because it is shaped by dynamic tensions rooted in social reproduction labor embedded in particular regional histories. Therefore, I propose we reevaluate the focus on capital-state-labor nexus in the current periodization of the food regime from a relational perspective that is more attentive to family, kinship and strong ties as a form of social organization in capitalist production; family ideologies that both reproduce and challenge capitalism; and historically situated temporalities of labor reproduction cycles.

An obvious critique of such a synthetic approach is that in the context of financialization and an unprecedented influx of capital into automation of agricultural production, the role of kinship networks, family ideologies, and agricultural labor will increasingly diminish in the capital-intensive, smart-technology-driven agriculture that Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and industry leaders are envisioning. (Think of precision agriculture, vertical farming, robotic milking and plowing technologies, etc.). In this future, migrant labor disappears and gendered labor on farms becomes less relevant as fieldwork is replaced by office work. In short, the shift of power from labor to capital is complete.

The counterargument is straightforward: regardless of current trends in financialization and technological innovation, social reproduction labor has become more—not less—important. On the one hand, this is because these processes rely on neoliberal deregulation and thus are inseparable from the demise of the welfare state and its institutions aimed at protectioning the social and economic well-being of society as a whole. As Bakker argues: in late capitalism ‘the everyday activities of maintaining life and reproducing the next generation are increasingly being realized through the unpaid and paid resources of (largely) women, as states withdraw from public provisioning’ (2007, 541). On the other hand, financialization and automation are as profitable as they are in part because they externalize environmental, social, and financial risks. While we have begun accounting for environmental costs of industrial agriculture (and rightly so!), financial risks and the attendant insecurities fall disproportionately at the household/kinship level rather than being mitigated by various state regulatory and market mechanisms. Take the chicken industry, for example, where producers such as Perdue own every aspect of their vertically integrated production system (from hatcheries to transportation to slaughterhouses), with the exception of the riskiest part—raising chickens, which is outsourced to family-run operations (Barber 2014, 150). This means that households, kinship networks, and strong ties are not only performing social and biological reproduction labor, but also operate as social units absorbing risks of the new agrarian economy.

More broadly, the feminist reading of the food regime sheds light on one of the key questions that have animated scholarly debate surrounding agrarian change; namely, whether agriculture can be completely subsumed by capitalism. Applying a feminist reading to the food regime gives new meanings to emerging trends in capitalist production. Scholars show that informal labor arrangements are now the dominant mode of capitalist production across different economic sectors, including high-tech manufacturing (Boeri 2016; McKay 2006; Mezzadri 2019). Arguing for the incorporation of social reproduction into current analyses of capitalism, Mezzadri (2019) suggests we rethink our understanding of value-producing labor itself. Indeed, in agriculture, informal labor

along with non-waged care responsibilities and non-monetized transactions continue to play an outsized role in the current organization of commodity production. Therefore, if we define capitalism as a system built on the appropriation of surplus labor that is sold on markets, agriculture has indeed been subsumed into capitalism. But if we view the emerging food regime as one where labor is impossible to disentangle from kinship relationships, informal obligations, and double or triple exploitation through non-capitalist family arrangements, then we have much more work to do to conceptualize what kind of capitalism is operating in agriculture today.

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