

# **The food regime in the land grab**

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# Food regime change

- Transitional expressions in land grab
- Contradictions of corporate/surplus food regime anticipate new FR in making
- Institutional structures, rules & norms under construction
- Organizing principle tensions: elite-sponsored agro-industrialization vs agro-ecology (repeasantization + s/movements)

# Revaluing land & peasant ways

- In 2004, Vía Campesina: agribusiness power in pre/post-production, not in land.
- Developmentalist blind-spot: “peasant-like ways of farming often exist as *practices without theoretical representation*... Hence they cannot be properly understood, (concluding) that they do not exist or that they are (an) irrelevant anomaly” (Ploeg)  
→ self-fulfilling prophecy of ‘unproductivity’

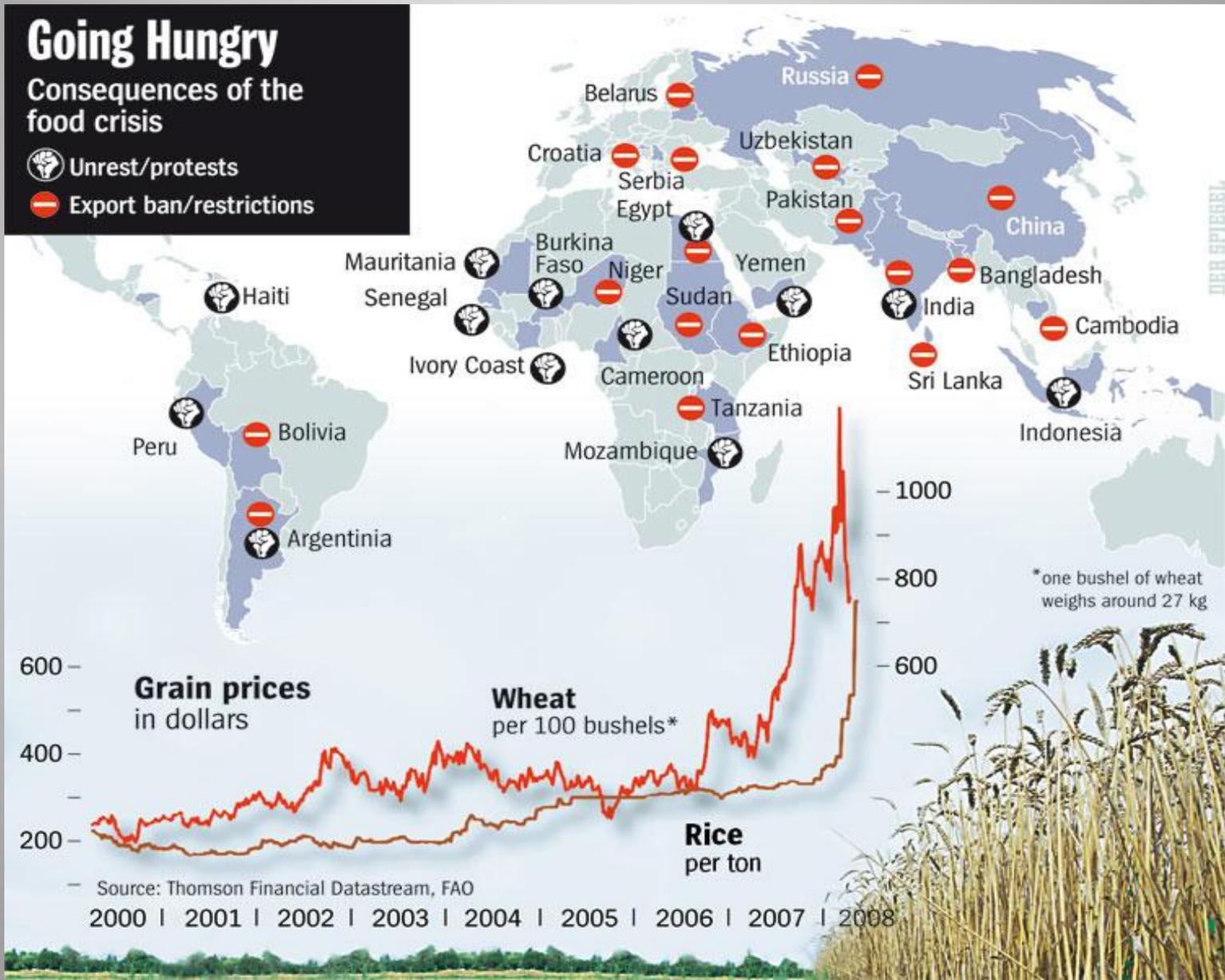
# Global ecology perspective

- ‘Rational planning of planet for Northern security’ (Sachs 1993).
- Local commons renamed global commons
- N security now represented as global food, energy & ecological security ~ peak oil/CC
- → grab for green fuel and food supply
- WB view: ‘↑ productivity & farmland expansion in non-forested areas’

# Political economy perspective

- ‘Rationing what is left of nature’ (Sachs).
- Relocating industrial/high-input agriculture
- Capital’s profitability crisis → investment in agriculture as partial solution.
- Agr crops absorbed into financial chains: mix of crops (food/fuel/biomass) irrelevant to financial profit calculus.
- Food riots + override of ‘free trade’

# Export restrictions & food riots



# Post-fossil-fuel biomass project

- Leading edge of new 'bioeconomy' = land enclosure to transform plant matter into industrial commodities.
- 'Land best suited for biomass generation (LA, SSA) is least utilized' (US Sec of En)
- '...low intensive agr management systems to be replaced by 2050 by best practice agr..' (European Report, 2004)
- 'yield gap' (WB) = productivity fetish vs multifunctional understanding of farming.

# LG as vehicle of FR transition?

- Corporate ('cheap') FR: subsidized N dumping of surplus bulk cys in S mkts.
- N farm sectors losing global competitive advantage + new mercantilism: X bans &/or subsidies for agr/biomass offshoring.
- New investment patterns favor bulk cys – eg, SEA: 83% land acquired for L-Term dedicated to row crops (Borras/Franco).

# CFR: invisible hand at work

“the massive movement of food around the world is forcing the increased movement of people” (Via Campesina 2000)



# Food regime transition

- Rephrase? Massive movement of capital around the world is intensifying the movement of people...
- Whereas food dumping (CFR) = crisis of low prices & depletion of peasantry, land grabbing = **crisis of social reproduction**.
- From **surplus**, to **deficit**, food regime.

# Food lines



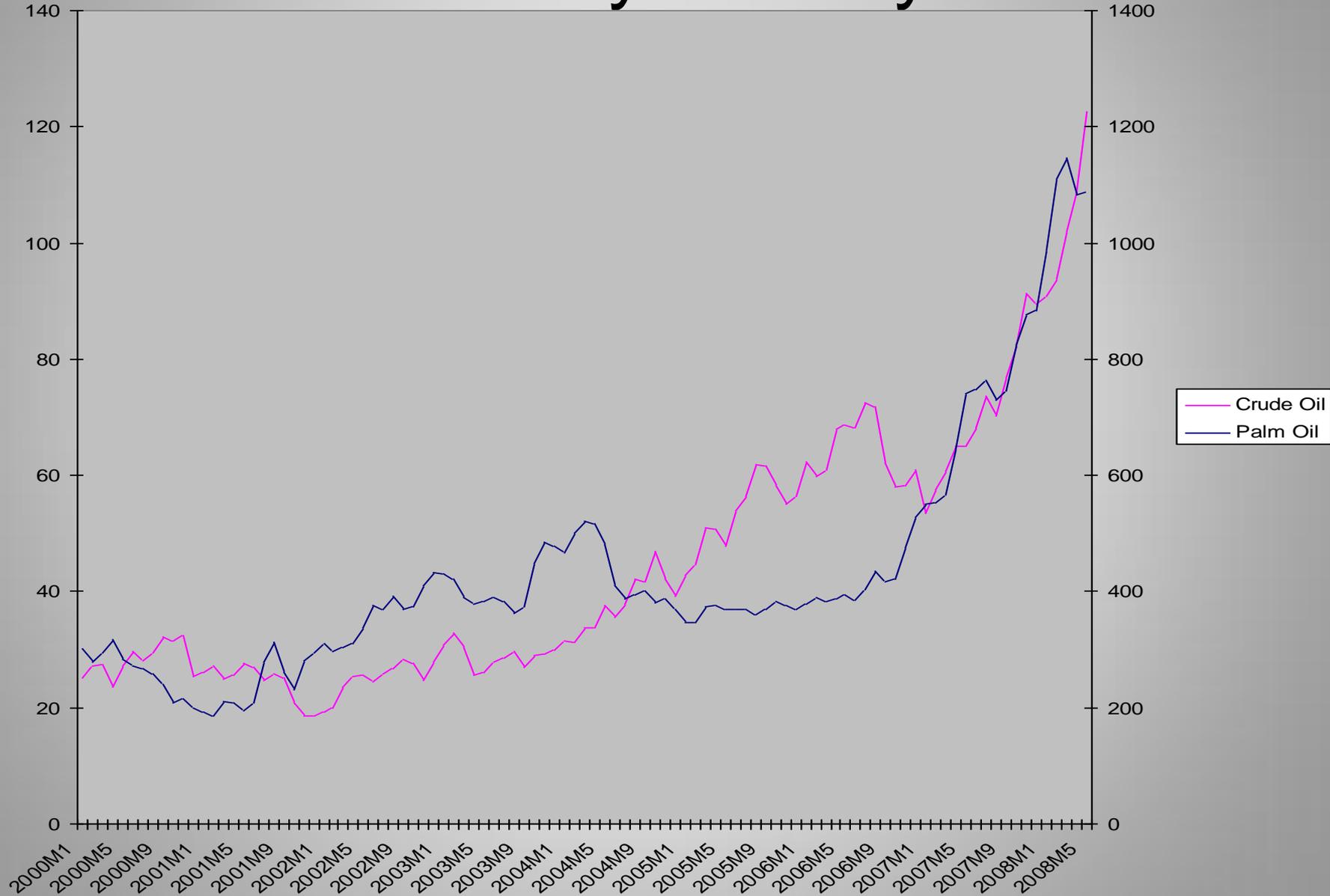
# Food riots



# Transition..

- Shift in foundations of capital accumulation towards a new extractive food/fuel regime enclosing world's remaining land & water.
- Agro-industrialization, where natural limits force, perversely, final solution for Nature.
- Peak oil → price inflation of agricultural commodities → (speculative) investment in land.

# Crude/Palm Oil synchrony 2000-09



# Deforestation in Sumatra for pulp and palm [Greenpeace, *The Guardian* 8-20-10]



# Land grab drivers

- Energy crisis, mandates/subsidies rising price of N land, Kyoto protocols, accommodating host gov'ts in South.
- Financialization: converts agr'l contracts to speculative derivatives → food price inflation, & speculations in land, food/fuels.
- 2003-08: cy index holdings ↑\$131-\$317m
- 2004-07: venture cap in biofuels ↑ 800%

# Crisis of agro-industrialization

- Declining profitability of ind'l agriculture.
- Declining biophysical productivity (nitrogen use efficiency ↓ 60-20%, 1950s-90s).
- Loss of biodiversity & ecosystem services
- Rising cost of 'biophysical override' (Weis)
- Rising energy costs & climate change risk.
- Recognition in IAASTD Report (2008).
- → offshoring of agro-capital...

# Land grab enablers

- Domestic construction of land rents + *new* mercantilist approach to food security.
- Enabled by W/Bank: rhetoric of ‘yield gap’ & ‘agriculture for development’
- IFIs: modernize agriculture w value chains
- AGRA: GR as export agr (agribusiness mkts) & ‘land mobility’ (Gates Foundation)
- Publicly-enabled global enclosure of nat res. (cf subsidized cheap food regime).

# In sum: food regime shift..

- Agro-industrialization relocating = enclosure of nat/res W for global mkt.
- Shift in geo-political co-ordinates, eg, N→S/EE, S→S, Oil states → S...
- LG deepens Corp/FR: 'agr w/out farmers'
- LG signals turning point: geo-pol patterns & bioeconomy: capital centers on biomass (final subord'n landed property & ecology).
- Opposing (self) organizing principle: 'repeasantization'/agroecology...