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# Local-global linkages in the food regime: global history and the internationalization of Brazilian agribusiness

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the internationalization of the Brazilian agricultural sector through a “global history” approach. The goal of the paper is to understand the internationalization of agribusiness as a smaller part of a transformation in the global food regime. In tracing the trajectory of agribusiness internationalization in Brazil, the paper explores patterns of local-global interaction and the new opportunities that emerge in global food regimes as a result. Finally, the paper probes the internationalization of Brazilian agribusiness under the state-agrarian elite partnership that has taken advantage of local and global transformations in agribusiness in recent history.

**Keywords:** agribusiness; internationalization; food regime; local-global linkages; agrarian elites; global history

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## Introduction

This paper aims to interpret the patterns of interaction between different spaces in the global food regime. More concretely, the paper examines the internationalization of the coalition between traditional agricultural sectors with the state that occurred in Brazil at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overall, the analysis below is propelled by the following question: How did the traditional Brazilian agrarian elites, in an alignment with the national state, strengthen their power in the global agribusiness?

From a global perspective, food has served to connect different spaces around the globe (Helstosky 2015, 17). Indeed, the history of the global food trade shows that food has systematically connected diverse and far-flung countries, highlighting agriculture’s potential to create linkages between distant spaces. The challenge, however, lies in taking into

account the idiosyncrasies of local contexts in our interconnected, global economy. In terms of global food regimes, the fundamental challenge relates to connecting universal inquiries - what people eat and why - to specific local contexts and historical moments.

Since this analysis will be focusing on the strategic transformation of coalitions behind food production and consumption, a historical perspective is needed to interpret how domestic coalitions interact with the global food regime over time. As such, this paper considers *internationalization* to encompass the strategies that make local alliances and goals an integral part of the global food regime. This is to suggest that a partnership that is embedded in a particular social and political context moves beyond national borders.<sup>1</sup>

The trajectory of internationalization of the Brazilian agricultural sector will be interpreted in historical-theoretical terms. More specifically, the narrative and analysis of coalition formation behind agribusiness in Brazil will be analyzed under a “global history” approach. Under this approach, the internationalization of Brazilian agribusiness can be interpreted as a micro-history of the globe, which involves the “intersection between global processes and their local manifestations” (Conrad 2016, 129). In terms of temporality, global history interprets historical time as being constructed in such a way that there is the possibility of concurrent and multiple trajectories leading to the same or similar outcomes.

This approach also proposes a particular understanding of historical agency and spatiality. In terms of historical agency, global history considers a plurality of agents that might influence its trajectory, ranging from the local to the global scale (Phillips 2016, 63). In spatial terms, the global is intrinsically intertwined with the local, while the local inevitably carries the influence of the global, suggesting that the global and the local are not opposite to each other (Conrad 2016, 129).

Critical to the making of historical trajectories are local actors, particularly the way in which they are integrated in global contexts. In this regard, this paper makes two assumptions about space and temporality in understanding the internationalization of agribusiness in Brazil. First, this article suggests that there has been a historical coalition between agricultural elites and the national governments and, when possible, they act globally according to a common interest. This reading is not new, as in economic development there has been a recognized strategic alignment between state and capital (Evans 1979). Second, the paper infers that any potential existence of boundaries between the local and the global are permeable, which in turn implies that there are some channels of integration connecting the different spaces. However, permeability in and integration of the global food regime does not necessarily lead to uniformity; on the contrary, global food production displays important inequalities across the globe (Mazoyer and Roudart 2006, 23).

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<sup>1</sup> This definition does not focus on the business and managerial dimension as an integral part of internationalization. The managerial approach to internationalization defines it as “the decision process which led them to establish operations abroad and their approaches to the management of foreign subsidiaries” (Fleury and Fleury 2011, 3).

Brazil's transformations in the agricultural sector serve as an example of internationalization of local influence due to the impact of Brazilian agribusiness on the global food regime. Indeed, Brazil has become an important player in the global food regime. As of 2017, the agricultural sector represented approximately 23 percent of the Brazilian GDP, accounting for about 40 percent of Brazilian exports (CEPEA 2017) and representing 20 percent of the Brazilian workforce (CEPEA 2018). Furthermore, Brazil is the world's third largest agricultural producer and a leading exporter of food, being the main global exporter of beef, poultry, soybean, sugar, corn, orange juice, and coffee (Sharma and Schlesinger 2017). In 2017, Brazil's meat exports accounted for 18 percent of the global beef export market and 32 percent of the global poultry export market (FAO 2018).

This paper interprets Brazil's current influence in the global food regime as the result of changes that have been occurring in the country for over 50 years. In the 1960s, agriculture became a vital source of economic growth. As the state's role became increasingly prominent within the country's agricultural sector over the following decades, Brazil became a competitive agricultural exporter of non-tropical foods and displayed promising signs of technological innovation. Several other countries, including the BRICs and other middle-income countries, are witnessing agrarian transformations under different patterns (Cousins et al. 2018). This means that the Brazilian case might show resemblances with other cases across the globe.

The internationalization of local coalitions on the world stage draws on the growing literature of global history. In light of this literature, I will address how traditional Brazilian agrarian elites in coalition with the national government internationalized their alliance, turning Brazil into a more relevant player within the global food regime. I will analyze Brazil's coalition-formation as a domestic source of internationalization under two dimensions of global history, namely the local-global pattern of interaction (in contrast to a global-local pattern), and the permeability of the global context to local influences under a less hierarchical global food regime.<sup>2</sup>

These two aspects are critical in the internationalization of Brazilian agribusiness, especially in the global history approach, which foregrounds how context, space, and time are integrated in the process of shaping history. Integration here refers to the mechanism that connects spaces and temporalities (Conrad 2016, 105). Although this paper emphasizes the domestic source of internationalization, it also recognizes that there are global elements that provide a window of opportunity for the internationalization of Brazil's agrarian elites, showing that integration has both a domestic and international side.

The focus of this paper on Brazil's internationalization does not preclude the existence of other strategies in the participation of the global food regime -transnationalization, parochialization and centralization of dominance. This paper acknowledges Brazil as participating in the current

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<sup>2</sup> To this interactive pattern Phillips (2016) refer to hybrid hierarchies. These patterns have been used to understand how different spaces influence each other in processes of modernization.

global food regime through internationalization and transnationalization. Yet, in considering the concurrent influences on Brazil's participation in the global food regime, a question can be posed: why does the paper focus on internationalization as opposed to transnationalization?

My argument centers attention on internationalization for two reasons. First, in contrast to transnationalization, internationalization is a reflection of the coalition between *domestic* public and non-state actors, which, from a global historical approach, allows us to better understand the local-global connection. Second, the agribusiness segments in which internationalization occurred have been more technologically competitive and innovative, which has been critical for Brazil's growing prominence in the global food regime. Internationalization is mainly confined to the livestock and juice sector; nevertheless, the company that clearly shows the internationalization trajectory in Brazil is JBS, which has become the biggest food processing company in the world. JBS's expansion started in 2000s with the merger of several beef, pork, and poultry processing companies.

Therefore, the main objectives of this paper are threefold: first, to utilize the theoretical propositions of the global history approach and apply them to Brazil as a means of understanding the actors' pursuit of international influence in the agricultural sector; second, to show how the transformations in the global food regime have strong local components, and how the domestic elements also shape this global regime; and third, to provide tools to interpret how the particularities of the local fit into a global context. This implies that the Brazilian case presented here should be interpreted as an example of a larger repercussion, allowing for the advancement of an analytical framework based on the building blocks of global history.

For the remainder of the paper, the above argument will be developed as follows. In the first section, I elaborate on the theoretical significance of global history as a lens that conceives international transformation in conjunction with the "food regime" approach. In the second section I advance a theoretical framework to interpret the internationalization of Brazilian agribusiness by proposing a typology of strategies on a global scale. The third section of this paper explores the trajectory of Brazilian agribusiness' internationalization, underscoring the historical evolution of coalition-formation behind this internationalization. In the fourth section, I address the importance of the Brazilian case regarding some aspects of the emerging global food regime. The conclusion of the paper attempts to highlight possible contributions to the global history approach to develop frames of analysis for interpreting particular cases.

## Global History, food regimes and International Relations

In the previous section while reviewing the main aspects of the global history approach, the following traits of the approach were highlighted: the recognition of concurrent and multiple trajectories in historical processes, the existence of a plurality of agents who influence historical trajectories, and the understanding that the local and the global are part of the same continuum.

Critical to the lens of global history is the notion of transformation and changeability, which sets the parameters that separate the present from the past and future (Musgrave and Nexon 2013). This understanding also rejects the linear notion of history in the sense that it does not interpret this as a progressive movement towards a more “evolved” future.

The interpretation of history in this paper falls under Mackay and Laroche’s (2017) typological conception of the “multilinear unfamiliar.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, history is understood as having an international logic, and other trajectories might be indifferent to the particular logic of “alternative” trajectories. As such, the particularities of each trajectory inevitably create uneven developments because “differences of experience may give rise to difference of aspiration and [...] differing objectives.” (Mackay and Laroche 2017, 228). This implicitly suggests that trajectories inevitably follow an international logic. Yet, transformations are not disconnected from structural elements and their contexts. Indeed, transformations can be multidirectional, since any change in the whole result in changes to its parts, and vice-versa (Conrad 2016, 101-102). Interpreting changes in terms of trajectories instead of as linear progressions has important implications, for any alteration in the global or local context implies changes in both.

Yet, in order to understand the local-global linkages in light of the new dynamics emerging via the transformations in food production and consumption, we must also consider another theoretical position - namely, the “food regime” approach. *Food regime* theory provides another possibility in analyzing the local-global patterns and windows of opportunity emerging as a result of new forms of global food governance. More concretely, the “food regime approach” examines the intersections between the evolution of global food production and consumption, capital accumulation, and social changes. It is an approach that views agriculture in light of changes in capitalism on a global scale. The core theoretical underpinning of this approach is that the hierarchies of global food production unevenly impact the socioeconomic status of different localities across the world. Put succinctly, this theory attempts to contextualize instances of global change (Magnan 2012).

How does the food regime perspective aid the global history approach used here? The food regime theory helps to achieve one of the aims of this paper, which is to connect the local and the global. Generally speaking, this approach aims to achieve a comprehensive change in both wholes and parts, or the universal and the particular (Magnan 2012), which is one of the defining characteristics of the global history approach.

The food regime approach also allows us to understand how, under a set of explicit and implicit norms, the global food production and consumption is enmeshed in complex interests and relationships (Friedmann 2005, 228). This view of a wide constellation of actors interacting through different networks is in consonance with the global history approach. Furthermore, food regimes pay attention to historical analysis of global food structures across time (McMichael

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<sup>3</sup> The other categories are: nonlinear and (un)familiar, linear and (un)familiar, and multilinear and familiar.

2009). As mentioned above, moments of transition and change are equally important in the global history approach.

One of the primary uses of the food regime approach here is to provide a coherent interpretation of the transitions and changes in hierarchies of the three different food regimes: the first regime, the second regime, and the third regime (Bernstein 2016).<sup>4</sup> These different regimes provide an analytical lens to explore the distinct characteristics of each food regime and to see how transformations provide the opportunity for the emergence of new integrations of spaces and strategies.

In sum, this paper defines a food regime at the global stage as a set of institutions and practices widely recognized by a broad range of actors. The recognition of institutions and practices by actors are highly dependent on social relationships. This conceptualization of food regimes is anchored in the traditional IR definitions of the term regime, such as the one put forward by Krasner (1982, 186), who defines regimes as “principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge [...]”

Under this core definition, the formation of international regimes in different areas seems to favor a dominant mode of interaction, namely cooperation (Keohane 1984, Levy et al 1995, 271). Central for the pursuit of cooperation under an international regime is the notion that social institutions establish the interaction of actors (Levy et al 1995, 274). Borrowing from the traditional regime concept under IR, the global food regime concept equally recognizes the centrality of social relations (Campbell and Dixon 2009, 263).

Another element that helps flesh out our understanding of food regimes in conjunction with the traditional IR concept of regime is the concept of diverse interests. The emergence of international regimes has contributed to the presumption that international relations do not necessarily operate under zero-sum dynamics, but instead by different institutional incentives that could satisfy diverse interests (Caporaso 1993). Following the trace of the traditional IR regime theory, the food regime theory encompasses notions of complementariness but also of contradiction (Friedmann and McMichael 1989), which underline that the formation of different stages of global food regime has been built around diverse interests.

Despite the above commonalities between food regime and the traditional IR regime - particularly the reliance of institutions and rules on social relations and the recognition of diffused interests - both approaches to “regime” have important differences. Firstly, in contrast to the traditional regime approach, the food regime approach has a tendency to account for different units of analysis (*e.g.*, global, regional, local) in the functioning of the global food regime. Secondly, since the actors in the food regime are operating at different levels, the food regime approach accepts the potential of the national level to affect the global level, as actors are trying to influence not only global politics but also national politics (Otero 2004). Thirdly, while the traditional regime

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<sup>4</sup> Bernstein (2016: 643) suggests that the existence of a third regime is still questionable, and that the world might still be at a transition phase from the second regime.

approach emphasizes cooperation over contention, the food regime theory recognizes that regimes can be built around conflict over access to resources (Cáceres 2015). Lastly, despite the variety of non-state actors operating on different levels, the food regime approach recognizes the state as having a particular function, as it regulates the markets where corporations operate (Otero 2012, 290), and states can define what is legal and illegal in the conflict over resources (Cáceres 2015, 117, Magnan 2012, 375).

After situating food regime approach vis-à-vis the traditional IR regime theory and in the context of the global history approach, this paper will now turn to Brazil as a representative example in understanding how the third food regime functions.

## Linkages and Hierarchies in the Food Regimes: a typology

The strategy of internationalization in the global food regime, which is immersed in a transitional period and web of interactions, can be seen as the result of patterns of interaction - global-local and local-global - as well as transformations in the regime structures - hierarchical and less-hierarchical. These two different dimensions are important in understanding how historical agencies interact in both the local and global context.

This paper identifies four strategies that actors pursue when considering the patterns of interaction between the local and the global, as well as the hierarchy of the global food regime. The four possible strategies that emerge out of the combinations of these two dimensions are: internationalization; transnationalization; parochialization; and centralization. These types of strategy are essential to the exploration of how localities influence and are influenced by the global food regime.

Bearing in mind the hierarchy of international regimes, it is possible to suggest that the food regime at the global scale is becoming less hierarchical; indeed, between the first and the third food regimes, there have been some major changes. Currently, the global food regime presents the following characteristics: lack of a global hegemonic power; an increasing constellation of actors (*e.g.*, supermarkets); and food production and distribution chains (*e.g.*, soybean) becoming transnational under the control of corporations.

However, actors in hierarchical food regimes attempt to control the linkages between the local and the global. Hierarchy in this perspective means that the control of linkages allows actors to exercise authority in the interactions and exchanges related to global food production and consumption. States that possess global hegemonic power can impose hierarchical relationships in food regimes regulating the production and consumption of food, which entails establishing a division of labor among producing countries. That said, it can be inferred that the first and second global food regimes were hierarchical, especially since they were dominated by a small number of states. The hegemonic roles of the United Kingdom and the United States respectively determined the dynamics and linkages in the first and second food regimes. In less-hierarchical

food regimes, states lose authority as the rule of the market prevails and private corporations gain renewed importance.

As far as the patterns of interaction are concerned, local-global patterns focus on regional and domestic agencies that are attempting to influence the food regime. This influence starts from a local basis, which over time and through favorable windows of opportunity gain repercussions beyond national borders. Inversely, in the global-local connection, the globe is an important source of change, consequently affecting dissimilar localities. Table 1 shows the four strategies that are possible under the interaction between the local and the global, as well as under the structures of the global food regime.

**Table 1: Typology of strategies of states in a food regime**

	HIERARCHICAL	LESS-HIERARCHICAL
LOCAL-GLOBAL	<i>Centralization of Dominance</i>	<i>Internationalization</i>
GLOBAL-LOCAL	<i>Parochialization</i>	<i>Transnationalization</i>

Source: Own elaboration

*Internationalization* is a strategy devised by a coalition of actors. One form of this type of coalition designs grand strategies (*e.g.*, domestic, regional and global) under the active engagement of the state in using public resources. This kind of coalition-formation has been observed in Brazil's success in creating national "champions," which are leading national companies in some segments of the market that receive abundant financial support from governments for global expansion (Musacchio and Lazzarini 2014). National governments also became shareholders of these companies. This strategy has allowed Brazil to internationalize capital through joint-ventures, mergers and acquisitions abroad (Hopewell 2014). With support from the Brazilian Bank of National Development (BNDES), Brazilian companies have increased their presence in the global food regime.

The period from 2005 to 2009, as the result of state engagement in the internationalization strategy, marks the international expansion of the JBS with the support of the BNDES and the acquisition of Swift & Company in Argentina, Inalca in Europe, and Pilgram's Pride in the United States (Shefali and Schlesinger 2017). Without the support of the BNDES, other national champions expanded their activities internationally: BRF in 2005 acquired Plusfood in Europe and, more recently, small processing plants in Turkey and the UAE; and Marfrig, another major Brazilian meat processing company, acquired several companies in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile in 2007, and bought Keystone Foods in the USA in 2010 (Shefali and Schlesinger 2017).

*Transnationalization* is a strategy put forward mainly by multinational corporations that control food production chains beyond national borders. They create a transnational space in which countries in different regions of the world become main food producers and exporters, each country having a specific function in the production, processing, and export of the food.



For example, Turzi (2011) identified the “Soybean Republic” a unified geo-economic entity form across Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, which is defined as an integrated network of production, processing and distribution structured around the preferences of transnational actors (*e.g.*, grain and fertilizer multinationals).

*Parochialization* is the antipode of internationalization. Under parochialization, the local becomes connected to the global food regime through relationship channels controlled by the single largest importer of food, the UK. As the hegemonic power monopolizes the global-local linkages controlling food trade and the currency exchange, the local finds difficulties acting autonomously in such hierarchical food regime, resulting in the insulation of some localities. Nonetheless, the food regime under a hegemonic power might parochialize local spaces of food production in different ways. In localities where settler spaces are established (settler countries in Australasia and North America) the hegemonic power indirectly controls the production of food (*e.g.*, wheat, meat), and there is a complementarity between the interests of local agricultural elites and the consumption of the elites in the hegemonic state. However, in localities where food production (*e.g.*, coffee, sugar, cocoa) is more directly controlled by the hegemonic power (*e.g.*, colonized countries in tropical areas of the South Hemisphere), there are often conflicts between the local producers and the colonizer elites. In sum, under parochialization, the regime’s hegemonic power establishes without much challenge the terms of integration of the local to the global food regime. This does not mean that the different parts of the food regime under parochialization are under complete isolation - after all, the food regime under global history assumes that the local is somehow integrated with the global. For example, there are accounts that under colonialism, local cuisines in India, Malaysia, and Singapore were transformed through a process of association with the British cuisine (Leong-Salobir 2011).

*Centralization of dominance* refers to the strategy of a domestic elite coalition that attempts to impose rules and norms on the functioning of the food regime. In line with this strategy, the localities that are the main producers of food exports have no input for the global regime rules. As large-scale motorization and modernization of production became a defining feature of the food regime, a few countries dominated large-scale production. Since technological innovation in agriculture has gained relevance and few countries had the resources for technological improvement, several countries became increasingly dependent on the technological innovation of the dominant country. In this context, cooperation regarding the transfer of technology was rare.

These types of strategies can be associated with the types of regimes defined by Bernstein (2016). For example, parochialization is a strategy that often falls under the first regime, coinciding with the period of UK dominance in the world food regime. The strategy of centralization of dominance coincides with the second food regime, when there was an increase in large-scale production under the influence of the USA. Internationalization and transnationalization are better associated with the current third transitional food regime.

In the framework presented here, the coalitions in the agricultural sector are simultaneously influenced, on the one hand, by global-local and local-global patterns, and on the other hand, by the hierarchical structures of the global food regime.

## Transformations of Brazilian Agribusiness

The globe is undergoing an agrarian transformation that is taking place across disparate spaces. The driving factors behind these transformations are many: commodification and globalization of the agribusiness (Escher 2018); economic changes in the international food markets (Turzi 2011); strategic intervention of states in the agricultural sectors (Hopewell 2016); and conflictive land governance, - especially in developing regions (Scoones et al. 2018). As such, I argue that while these different elements are indeed present in the global agrarian transformation, they also inevitably catalyze transformation at the local level, evident in actions such as coalition-formation.

Focusing on the process of coalition-formation in the Brazilian agricultural sector, the purpose of this section is to illustrate this process under the interpretation of history outlined earlier, according to which a historical trajectory has some particularities, follows an internal logic, and is influenced by some structural and contextual elements. This section is devoted to tracing a trajectory by observing its distinctive periods and associating each period with a form of interaction between its main actors. The purpose of this exercise is to give a broad overview of the dynamics of agribusiness in its internationalization strategy.

As previously stated, the internationalization of agrarian elites in Brazil falls under the local-global pattern, or the less-hierarchical food regime. In other words, local elites strengthen their power before building a global strategy to internationalize their influence. This internationalization occurs due to the alignment of interests between local elites and national governments, which become more active participants in the global food regime.

This alignment evolved through three different modes of elite interaction with the state in the agricultural sector. These modes of interaction can be simply classified as *conflictive*, *accommodative*, and *cooperative*. The conflictive is when the preferences of actors of the coalition are different and there is an attempt to adapt preferences to achieve a common beneficial goal. In the accommodative mode, actors are willing to adapt their preferences despite their differing nature since they have a common goal. In the cooperative mode, their preferences and goals are aligned.

I also suggest that there is a slow transformation in the mode of interaction in the agricultural sector from the 1930s to the present. The mode has been transformed from being conflictive to cooperative. Table 2 summarizes the slow alignment of elite preferences and goals in three distinct phases: *Outward-Looking Phase* (T1), *Inward-Looking Phase* (T2), *Internationalization Phase* (T3).

**Table 2: Actors, Preferences and Periodization of the internationalization of coalition in Brazil**

	<b>T1</b> <b>Outward-Looking</b> <b>(1930-1950)</b>	<b>T2</b> <b>Inward-Looking</b> <b>(1950-1980)</b>	<b>T3</b> <b>Internationalization</b> <b>(1980-present)</b>
<b>National political elites</b>	- Consolidation of a central state power and improve state capacity	- Increase credit for agriculture production to compensate for low industrial production - Higher investment in agriculture research and technology	- Provide credit to the agribusiness segment (livestock) with least foreign presence - Creation of “national champions”
<b>Agribusiness elites</b>	- Maintain their local social and political control to facilitate local production for export	- Access to credit	- Grain segment: access to a transnational production chain - Livestock and biofuel segments: access to credit to internationalize
<b>Mode of coalition interaction</b>	<i>Conflictive</i>	<i>Accommodative</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>

Source: Own elaboration

The *Outward-Looking Phase* (1930s-1950s) marks the beginning of the shift in power and the emergence of organized mobilization due to a centralization of power directed by the national government. This is a phase of “national development” programs requiring a coalition between capital and state. Given Brazil’s need for foreign capital to implement national development, this coalition was outward looking, as it was dependent on foreign capital. This dependency on foreign capital created conflicting preferences and goals among the different groups in the coalition. For example, the Brazilian industrial class entered into conflict with foreign investors regarding exchange rates and tariff policies (Hewlett 1975, 137).<sup>5</sup> This phase is punctuated by conflict in the state-capital coalition.

In the 1930s Brazil was able to create a large yet fragile coalition between the state, military, business, and labor (Schneider 2004, 105). Between the 1930s and 1940s, Getulio Vargas, despite his discourse of change, did not dramatically shift the balance of power, since his administration did not substantially empower labor (Welch 2016). During the 1940s, the industrial associations gained power and became influential lobbyists behind the industrialization of the country. Despite this influence, the national industrial sector lacked the capital necessary to fund Brazil’s industrialization. As a consequence, the state started to turn to international capital. The agricultural sector in this phase of national development was thus neglected through industrialization.

In the *Inward-Looking Phase* (1950s-1980s) Brazil became more self-reliant and the capital-state coalition evolved into a predominantly domestic coalition, in which the agricultural sector gained renewed prominence as an important source of economic growth. Despite the different preferences between a state that pursued industrialization and the agricultural elites that were looking for state subsidies, this period created an accommodative mode of interaction as the state and the

<sup>5</sup> In the mid-1950s, the Brazilian government, in order to accommodate the interests of the foreign capital, created a complex system of exchange rate controls to favor foreign capital by allowing them to import equipment and also by lowering the costs of foreign remittances.

agribusiness elites were pursuing a common goal - namely, a capable agricultural sector to supply the domestic market.

During the time in which Brazil reduced its presence in the global trade in favor of building a national industry, national policies favored the establishment of high tariffs and the concession of subsidized loans (Pang 2002, 127). The sectors that benefited the most from these policies were the automobile, heavy machinery, chemical, and construction industries.<sup>6</sup> Agricultural policies and methods of productions also began to change: in the 1960s, the growth of the Brazilian urban population created higher demand for agricultural products, while the slowdown of industrial production, due to the effects of the ISI, forced the country to rely on agricultural production, thus leading to land expansion. The new economic reliance on agricultural production initiated a phase called “conservative modernization,” which implied that agricultural expansion through public credit was funded by channeling capital from the protected industrial sector to the agricultural sector (Santana and Nascimento 2012).

As a result, an alliance between the state, agro-industry, and the agricultural sectors was created (Helfand 1999, 8). During this period, policymaking followed a corporatist model, and several agricultural associations were created (*e.g.*, the *Confederação Nacional da Agricultura* – CNA, the *Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras* – OCB, the *Sociedade Rural Brasileira* - SRB) to lobby before the government. The main objective of lobbying was to keep subsidies as a compensation in lieu of a food price policy to maintain low food prices. The main state actors during this period were the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Brazil, the Central Bank, the Agriculture Commission of the National Congress, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the National Council for Agricultural Policy (Helfand 1999, 10).

In the *Internationalization Phase* (1980s-present) the coalition behind agribusiness became more segmented. Some segments, such as grain producers, became transnational by being part of a regional production chain, while others, such as the livestock and food processing segments, became part of an international chain. Within these segments, there is a greater alignment between preferences and goals of the different groups composing the agribusiness coalition.

In this phase the domestic agribusiness coalition was redesigned, and as the policy process became more transparent, actors became more strategic. Along with the collapse of the ISI economic model, the 1982 debt crisis, and the transition of political regime, the coalition opened the way to changes in agricultural policies. The main shift was the elaboration and further transparency of agricultural policies (Helfand 1999). This also meant that the agricultural subsidies gradually were reduced from the 1980s, and the agribusiness coalition had to be rethought.

With the transformation of agribusiness, the increase of the number of policy actors with democratization led to the coming together of the different organizations under the unified *Frente Ampla da Agropecuária Brasileira* (FAA), which became an effective lobbying group. However, the

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<sup>6</sup> In Brazil agricultural elites have a strong connection to the urban elites (Paulino 2014). This resembles one of the alliance configurations envisioned by Moore (1966) in which the capitalists become allied with the landed aristocracy.

structure of policymaking changed little; the only difference was that the policymaking process became more institutionalized (Leite 2016).

The internationalization trajectory of Brazilian agribusiness ironically came to fruition while Brazil was trying to become a more industrialized country and rely less on its agricultural sector. In the long term, however, Brazil strengthened its agricultural sector and became technologically innovative and competitive in different segments of the agribusiness. In effect, the transformation of Brazilian agricultural sector is often attributed to agricultural modernization with the active involvement of the Brazilian Enterprise for Agricultural Research (EMBRAPA), created in 1973 to foster agricultural development through research.

As far as the internal logic of this trajectory is concerned, it went through different phases, each one connected with a distinct period of economic development and with a different mode of actor interaction. Since economic incentives and political windows of opportunity largely determine coalitions (Solingen 2001), the alignment of economic interests can explain the changing mode of actor interactions within the coalition over time. The structural element that has been a constant in this trajectory is the dependence of Brazil on foreign capital, which only is overcome with the internationalization of agribusiness.

As it has been shown above, coalition-formation is an important element behind economic development because it generates consensus and aligns interests in the achievement of goals. Coalition-formation in Brazil, which has been reliant on a historical alliance between the state, domestic capital, and foreign capital (Evans 1979), has been critical for the transformations in the agricultural sector. The historical understanding of the evolution of coalition-formation, even if it is very general, highlights the multiplicity of actors involved and the interaction between different spaces, all within the particular context of coalition-formation in Brazil. Through a historical account of coalition-formation across three distinct periods of Brazilian agrarian transformation, this section revealed the critical role of state activism in the in this process of change.

Nonetheless, it is possible to suggest that the coalition behind agribusiness expansion historically has sidelined some actors. Small farmers remain with limited access to credit and peasants continue to experience land conflicts (Paulino 2014). Even during the socially progressive governments in Brazil (2003-2016), there was little reconfiguration of the foundation of elite coalitions (North 2018, 4), provided that interests of the traditional agricultural sector were progressively met. As a reflection of the maintenance of a close alignment between state and agribusiness in the past decade, government policies in Brazil have indirectly favored an increase in the size of *latifúndios*, and the reduction of rural employment, due to mechanization and intensification of land conflict (Bohn 2018).

While the consequences of the growth of agribusiness to social and human development are still poorly understood, the exclusion of important actors in agricultural production produced wide consequences to socio-political development (Bello 2018). However, the exclusion of the peasantry, for example, finds its roots in politics (Scoones et al 2018). In Brazil, this has been even more apparent in the growing land conflict in states where the agribusiness production is strongest (Ioris 2017). There is also a plausible connection between agribusiness presence in the

Brazilian states and social investment, as the power of the agribusiness representatives seems to be negatively related to public investment in education (Wegenast 2010).

## Brazil in the Global Food Regime

The main characteristics of Brazilian agribusiness are the following: a highly competitive export agricultural sector (Hopewell 2014, 2016); a technologically advanced sector (Martha, Contini and Alves 2013); a segmented sector with policy networking (Leite 2016); and a growing power and autonomy of agricultural business elite (Hopewell 2014). In light of these characteristics, how does Brazil participate in the current global food regime?

These current characteristics within the context of the global food regime transition have been the result of historical transformations; more specifically, they are related to transformations in the global regime structure and state activism. That considered, the case of Brazil helps conceptualize the current phase of the global food regime on several fronts. First, the active Brazilian participation in the current food regime shows the importance of domestic coalition-making for global actions and strategies. Second, the case of Brazil suggests that the state remains, despite the widening constellation of actors, a critical coordinating actor capable of accommodating different preferences and building common strategies. Lastly, Brazil shows that countries can simultaneously harbor different strategies to participate in international regimes, exemplified by their internationalization strategy under state-agrarian elites, as well as their transnationalization, which mainly relies on international corporations.

Focusing on the third food regime, this paper implies that the analysis of the Brazilian case is, at its core, about a regime in transition – in other words, during the transition from one regime to the next, there exists windows of opportunity to forge new alliances (Giménez and Shattuck 2011). Critical to understanding the current transformation of the global food regime is the observation that there is the emergence of new actors, including cooperatives (Pritchard 1998), the introduction of new technologies (Pechlaner and Otero 2008), changes in the consumption patterns and in the financing of production (Burch and Lawrence 2009), the emergence of new cultural and nutritional approaches to food consumption (Dixon 2009), and the creation of new territories (Cáceres 2015).

Specifically to the Brazilian case, as previously argued, the strength of the agribusiness sector can be seen as a reflection of the coexistence of the two strategies - internationalization and transnationalization - pursued by Brazil in the global food regime. These strategies are both the result of structural transformations at the global food regime, and the emergence of domestic elements. While internationalization is partly the consequence of a domestic coalition of actors, transnationalization is more a direct consequence of the global influence of multinational corporations in the control of food production chains.

## Brazilian State Activism in the Third Food Regime

Considering all the elements that characterize the emerging transitional context of the global food regime, Brazilian state activism is interpreted in terms of a historical coalition between state and agribusiness. In Brazil, the pattern of coalition-formation changed from an initial position of sidelining the agricultural sector in the 1940s to having a prominent position in the food regime, especially after the 1990s. Historically, coalitions within productive sectors of the economy in Brazil have been based on the triangular interests between state, national capital, and international capital. The state has been a critical actor, especially in the industrialization of the country, and is now an essential actor in agriculture.

Since the 1950s, the Brazilian state has been a driving entity behind this agribusiness development. The state has historically had a big role in investment and economic policy steering. The participation of the Brazilian state in the economy was built on the prominence of its State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). But in the 1990s, after an era of macroeconomic imbalances and the accelerating process of industrialization, Brazil underwent a process of economic liberalization. In this process, the state took the role of driving the transformations in agribusiness, although the reforms in the agricultural sector started in the 1980s in the aftermath of the economic crisis. The more recent involvement of the state in agriculture has been coined “state-sponsored agricultural development” (Hopewell 2016).

More recently, from the mid-2000s, the interpretation that I embrace regarding Brazil’s state activism in the internationalization of its agribusiness is closer to the one that Musacchio and Lazzarini (2016) offers, as it echoes their emphasis on the partnership between national champions and the state. This partnership allows the state to become an important actor in the free market while increasing the possibility of the state to benefit politically.<sup>7</sup> In this partnership the state, - through the Brazilian Bank of National Development (BNDES), - provides credit for the expansion of the national champion. In the particular case of the livestock segment of Brazil’s agribusiness, the national champions were made up of several companies that merged and received credit from the BNDES for their international expansion. Most of the national champions belonged to the basic commodities sector, which, in addition to agribusiness, included mining and oil.

The main Brazilian national champions as of 2009 in the agribusiness are JBS, BRF, and Marfrig. From 2005 to 2016, companies in the agribusiness that received most loans from the BNDES were JBS, BRF, Marfrig, and Bertin (BNDES 2017: 242). Two of these companies, JBS and BRF, became some of the main Brazilian food exporters. By 2004, food and agribusiness companies appeared as the main beneficiaries of loans from the BNDES (Musacchio and Lazzarini 2014, 265), and from 2005 to 2009, the period of international mergers and the acquisition of the Brazilian companies, the BNDES disbursed approximately \$8 billion to the meat processing industry, and JBS alone received approximately 50 percent of the BNDES funds provided to the meat industry (Arbix and Caseiro 2011, 227).

<sup>7</sup> The understanding that the state is an important player in the free-market and that it can profit politically from the markets reflects Bremmer’s (2010: 65) definition of “state capitalism,” which is a system that “state dominates markets, primarily for political gain.”

In addition to state activism, global windows of opportunities were created, allowing the agribusiness in Brazil to enter the global stage through the creation of transitional spaces encompassing its territory. Growing demand for food has been a chief driver in the global transformations of the food market (Turzi 2017, 14). Changes in the global context include transformations in the demand for agricultural products and technological innovations in the supply chain. The change in the supply chain, due to the comparatively small profitability in the grain sector as a consequence of high input costs of production, encourages corporations to achieve large scale production (Turzi 2011, 62-63). In this tactic of “leveraging scale advantage,” corporations attempt to achieve a dominant position in financing large scale production and controlling transport and storage infrastructure (Turzi 2011).

Soybean multinationals (*e.g.*, Bunge, ADM, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus), having South America as their basis of expansion, adopted transatlantic connections across a global network of corporations and the alignment of interests between public and private actors in the production of soybean (Craviotti 2018, 69).

Brazil’s state activism has also been seen in the area of international technical cooperation. The Brazilian International Development Agency (ABC) and the EMBRAPA are engaged in providing technical assistance in the global promotion of bioenergy through the production of ethanol, - an initiative that in addition to the advancement of environmental sustainability helps to ascertain the Brazilian geopolitical interests worldwide (Fulquet and Pelfini 2015). Although state activism through the so-called “ethanol policy” allows for actors to embrace new roles in the global food regime, there are still limits. Brazil’s experience in the biofuel global cooperation strategy might illustrate this partial success of state activism. Despite the benefits of “innovation-promoting institutions” (*e.g.*, Copersucar) (Doner et al. 2009), which were essential for the production of ethanol and state support of Brazilian producers, Brazil has not sustained domestic production and has not been able to create a global demand for ethanol. Reasons for this include mismanagement in the sugarcane production, political crisis in a highly subsidized sector, and lack of vision to carry out its “ethanol diplomacy” (Afionis et al. 2016).

In sum, under the internationalization strategy, Brazil redefined its participation in the current food regime. State activism played a critical role in this strategy. In addition, this strategy had several structural components, such as the creation of a window of opportunity as food regimes become less hierarchical, the redefinition of domestic coalitions, and the investment in the biotechnology field.

## Conclusion

Overall, this paper outlined the trajectory of internationalization in Brazilian agribusiness. More specifically, this paper provided an analysis of the nature and characteristics of what some analysts call the “third food regime” that is a part of what has been described as a “post-Western world order.”



Moreover, this paper attempted to establish a bridge between disciplinary approaches, including the global history approach and food regime theory. Lastly, by analyzing Brazil's agribusiness internationalization, this paper implicitly investigated the plethora of ways in which disparate parts of the globe are connected through agribusiness.

After setting the foundations that allowed us to understand Brazil as a local-history that immersed in the broader global food regime, the paper proposed a typology of strategies that conflate changes in the structure of the global with the patterns of local-global interaction. This typology has helped us to explain the new role of Brazil in what appears to be the nascent period of a global third food regime. However, this typology is equally instrumental in revisiting the changes in global capitalism beyond Brazil, allowing us to consider how different parts of the world are dealing with these changes. Based on the case of Brazil featured here, regions outside the traditional "core" countries are proactively influencing what used to be the geographical core of capitalism.

The paper puts together several theories, including global history and food regime approaches, which, despite their similar stance on global issues, have not been in direct communication. In light of these different literatures, yet nevertheless under the larger umbrella of a global history approach, the paper has shown through Brazil's internationalization in agribusiness that it is the result of a historical process which follows its own local trajectory and eventually becomes a global history.

In the particular case of Brazil, this article attempts to interpret the role of Brazil in contemporary global politics and economics. For example, it helps us see how within the agricultural sector Brazil exercises what it has been called "hegemonic consensus" in its foreign policy (Borges 2005, Gardini and Almeida 2016). The Brazilian government thus provides an example of how to expand global influence through international cooperation in a way that does not resemble the North-South model. Furthermore, Brazil is engaged in knowledge sharing and alliances to create autonomy for its international partners (Gardini and Almeida 2016, 16). There is evidence that Brazil exercises its new role under greater cooperation in a changing global food regime.

There is much potential to expand upon the research presented in this paper. Methodologically, global history provides a consistent framework to interpret complex problems such as the transformation in global agriculture. As such, future studies in this area should use the global history approach to analyze the issue of land governance, which this paper has not addressed. Empirically, as the global history approach gives a particular importance to the role of the local in relation to the global, more regional and country case analyses should be developed in order to understand the more recent global agrarian transformations.

Overall, this paper interprets history as a set of assumptions that are necessary in understanding the past and present, and that might aid in creating predictions about the future. While the global history approach is still relatively new, its ability to interpret complex issues is promising. As shown in this paper, global history offers the possibility to develop a comprehensive framework of analysis for complex current phenomena such as the emergence of a new global food regime.

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