

*Ernst Langthaler*

# **Food Regime Theory Meets Polanyi**

International conference *A Great Transformation?*  
*Global Perspectives on Contemporary Capitalisms*  
(Linz, 10-13 January 2017)



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# Outlook

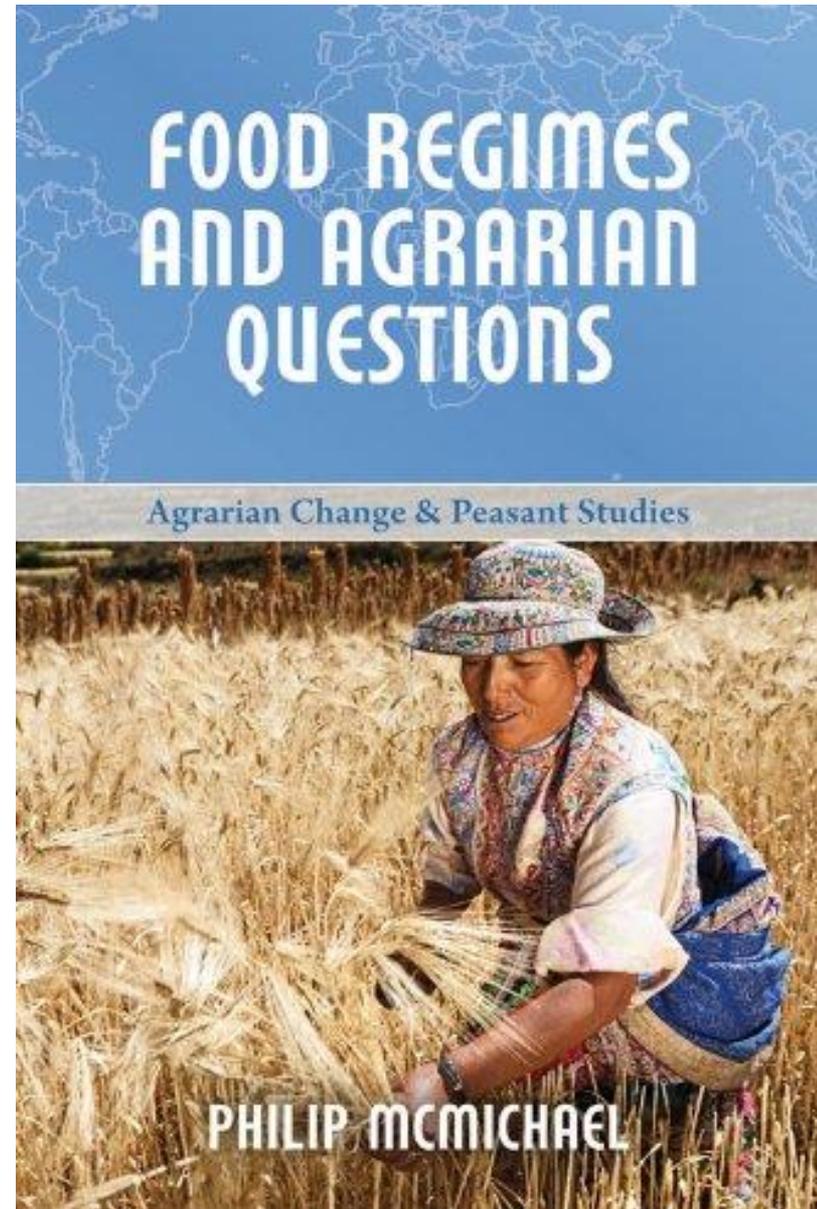
- I Food regime theory (FRT)
- II Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (TGT)
- III FRT meets TGT

# FRT's intellectual context

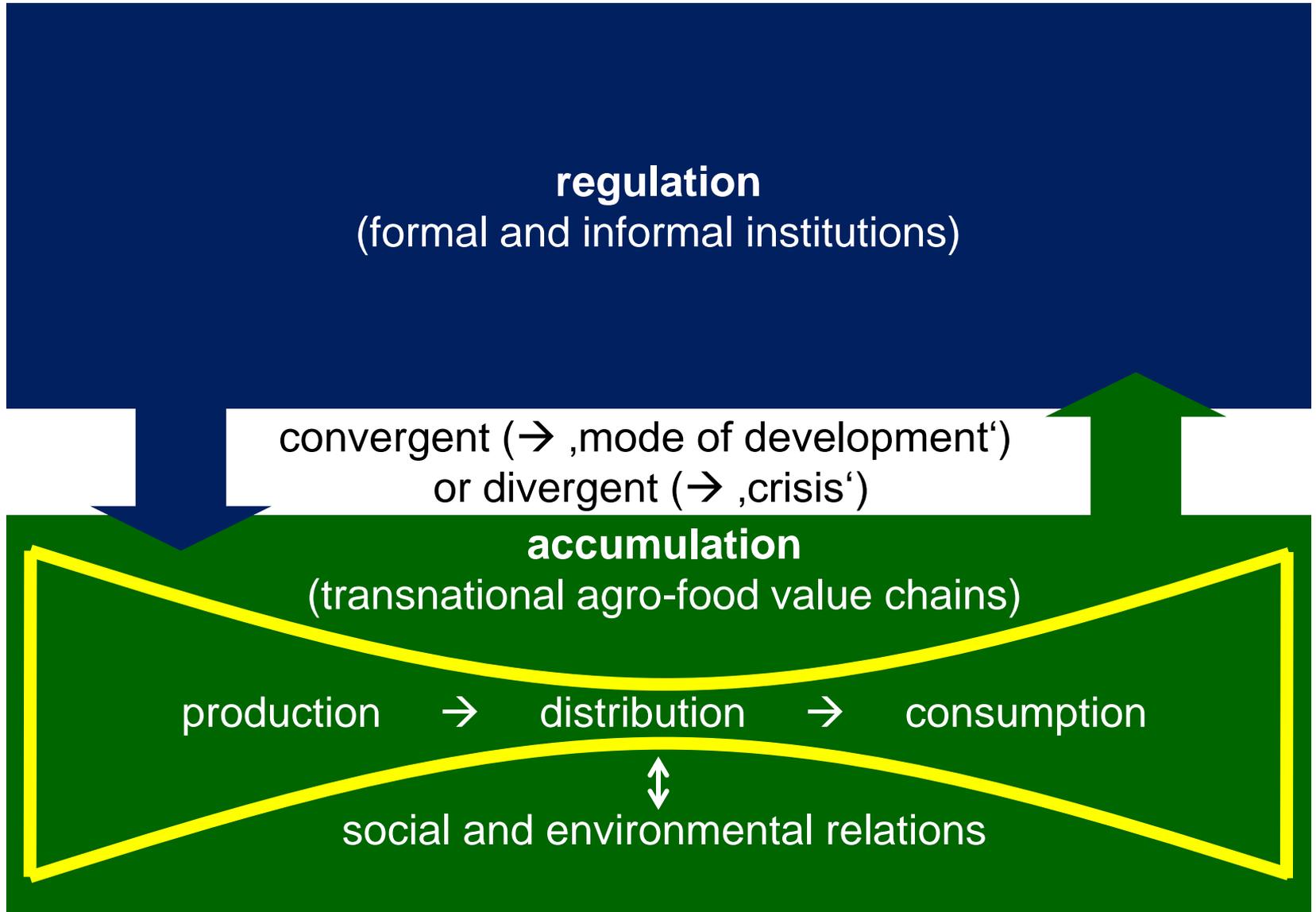
**Provenance:** North-American development sociology in the 1980s

## Points of reference:

- **world-systems analysis:** unequal regional development (centers and peripheries) due to inter-regional economic and political dependencies
- **regulation theory:** different modes of development (Liberalism, Fordism, Post-Fordism etc.) due to regimes of capital accumulation and political-economic regulation



# FRT's general elements



# FRT's specific elements

	First food regime ( <i>extensive regime</i> )	Second food regime ( <i>intensive regime</i> )	Third food regime ( <i>corporate regime</i> )
<b>Timespan</b>	1870s-1930s	1940s-1970s	Since 1980s
<b>Key commodities</b>	Grain and meat	Grain and oilseeds	Grain, oilseeds and 'fresh' products
<b>Ecological relations</b>	Extensive growth (frontier movement)	Capital-intensive growth (productivity)	Capital-intensive growth (extensive/intensive)
<b>Social relations</b>	Commercial family farming (Europ. style)	Commercial family farming (US style)	Corporate farming (incl. wage labour)
<b>Source of trade</b>	European settler colonies	USA	USA & NACs (e.g. Brazil)
<b>Target of trade</b>	UK / Europe	'Third World'	Developing and emerging countries
<b>Central actors</b>	UK	USA	WTO & TNCs
<b>Guiding ideology</b>	Classical liberalism	Productivist neomercantilism	Neoliberalism
<b>Institutional framework</b>	Gold standard Free trade	Bretton Woods system GATT	WTO, IMF & WB

# Polanyi's ,double movement'

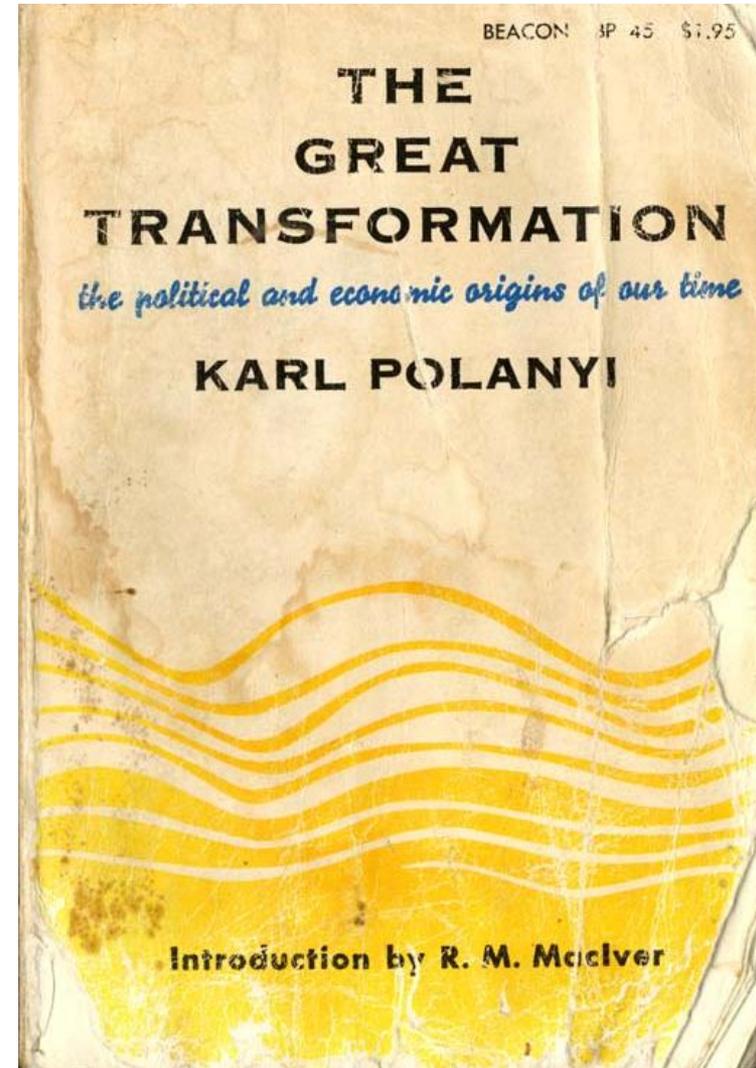
„In order to comprehend German fascism, we must revert to Ricardian England.” (TGT, p. 32)

## Transformation I (,Speenhamland‘): marketization (1790s-1830s)

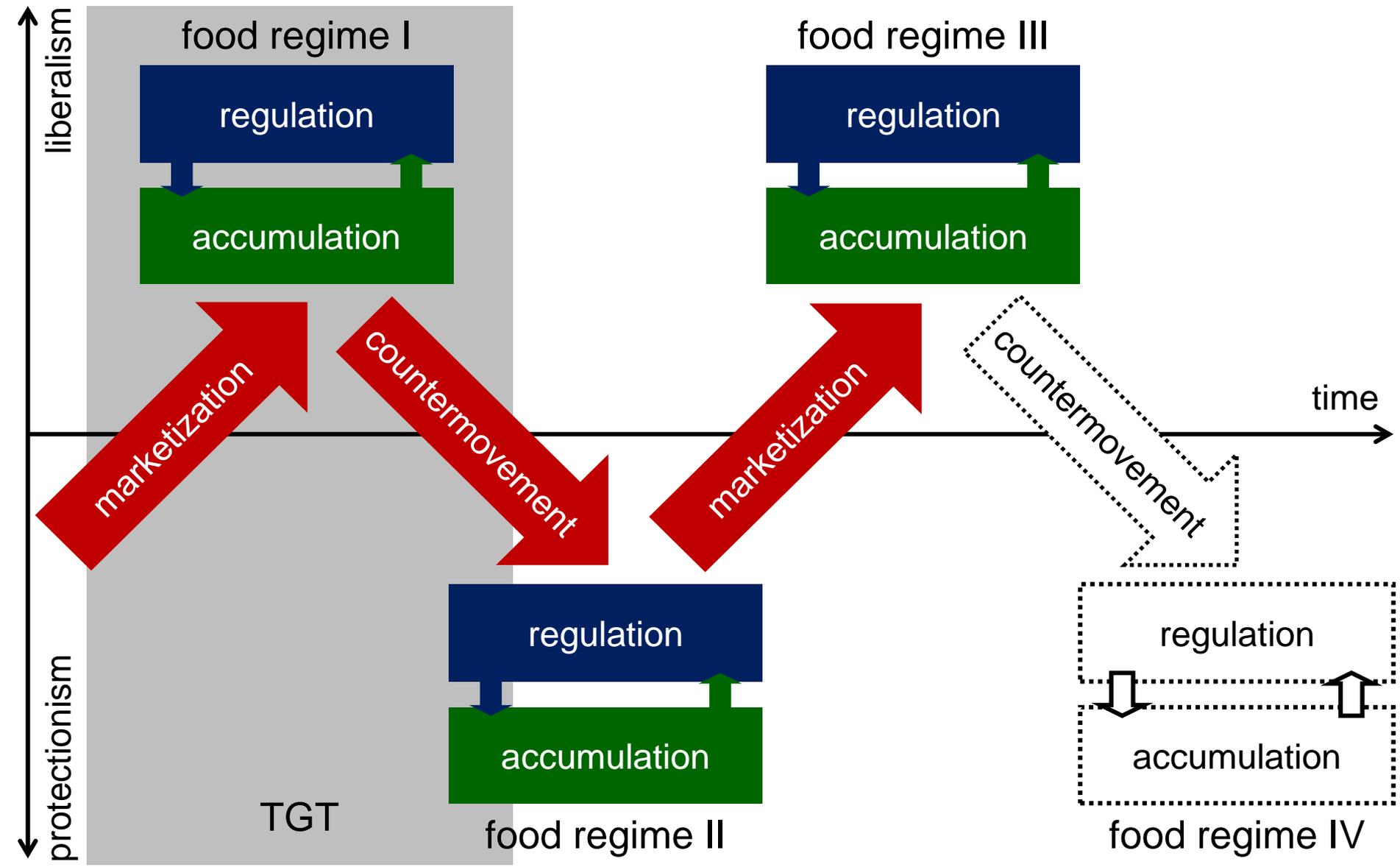
- Application of technological innovations (e.g. steam engine) by industrial capital
- Application of Smithian-Ricardian economics (e.g. self-regulating market) by liberal state

## Transformation II (,great transformation‘): countermovement (1870s-1930s)

- Societal self-protection (e.g. tariffs)
- Disruptive strains (e.g. economic crisis)
- Regime formation (e.g. fascism)



# Food regime transformations: pendular model



# Double movements of food regimes

	<b>First food regime (<i>extensive regime</i>)</b>	<b>Second food regime (<i>intensive regime</i>)</b>	<b>Third food regime (<i>corporate regime</i>)</b>
<b>Timespan</b>	1870s-1930s	1940s-1970s	Since 1980s
<b>Key commodities</b>	Grain and meat	Grain and oilseeds	Grain, oilseeds and ,fresh' products
<b>Ecological relations</b>	Extensive growth (frontier movement)	Capital-intensive growth (productivism)	Flexible (extensive/intensive) growth
<b>Social relations</b>	Commercial family farming (Europ. style)	Commercial family farming (US style)	Corporate farming (incl. wage labour)
<b>Source of trade</b>	European settler colonies	USA	USA & NACs (e.g. Brazil)
<b>Target of trade</b>	UK / Europe	,Third World'	Developing and emerging countries
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<b>(Counter-) Movement</b>	Protectionist movement (e.g. German tariffs 1879)	Neoliberal movement (e.g. Cairns Group in GATT/WTO 1986)	Food sovereignty movement (e.g. <i>La Via Campesina</i> 1993)

# Questioning the pendular model



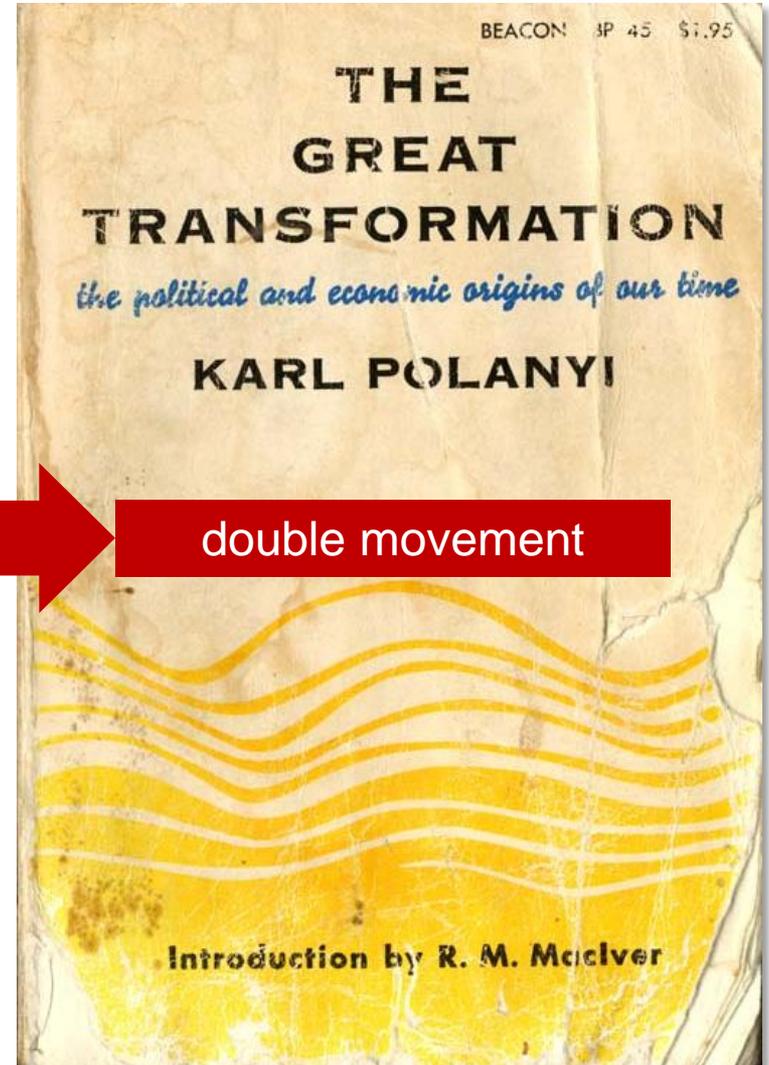
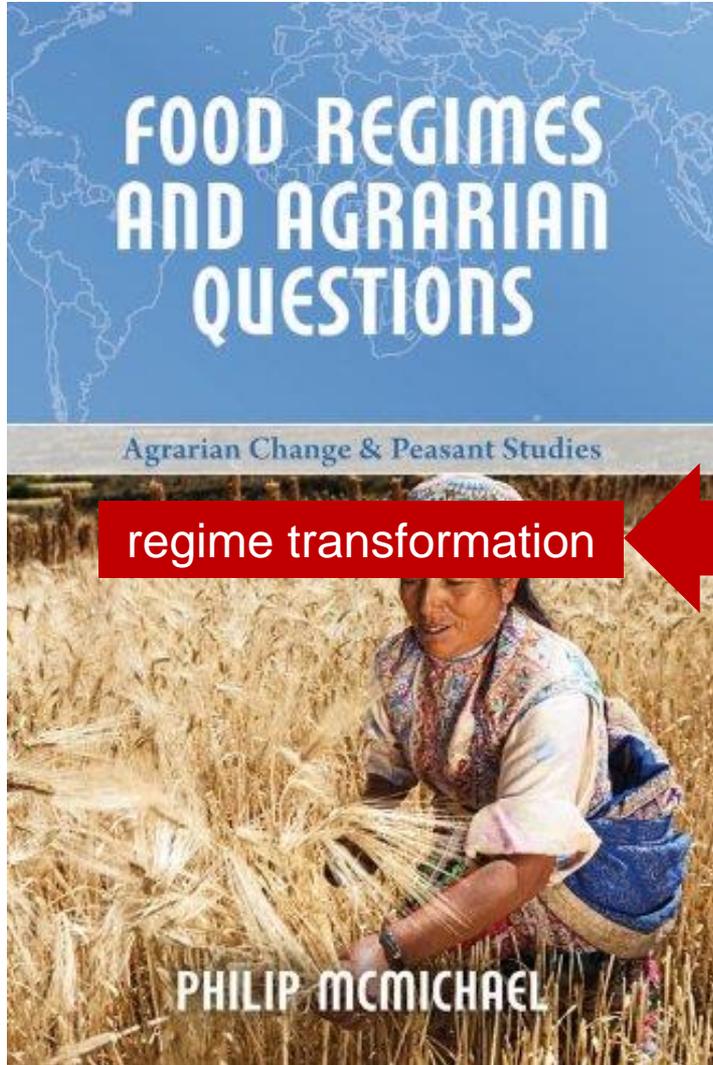
## Long-term trends (19th–21st centuries):

- Growth of state power
- Growth of corporate power
- Growth of social and environmental burden

## Multiplicity of countermovements (e.g. 1930s):

- Socialist regulation (e.g. Soviet Union) → national scope
- Fascist regulation (e.g. Germany) → continental scope
- Democratic regulation (e.g. USA) → Western scope

# Conclusion



Work in progress!