I.L.A. Kollektiv

AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS?

How the imperial mode of living prevents a good life for all

With a preface by **Ulrich Brand, Barbara Muraca** and **Markus Wissen**

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Authors:
Kopp, Thomas; Becker, Maximilian; Decker, Samuel; Eicker, Jannis; Engelmann, Hannah; Eradze, Ia; Forster, Franziskus; Haller, Stella; Heuwieser, Magdalena; Hoffmann, Maja; Noever Castelos, Carla; Podstawa, Christoph; Shah, Anil; Siemons, Anne; Wenzel, Therese; Wolfinger, Lukas.

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Eating like kings

Our steaks come from Argentinian cows and the teas we enjoy snuggled on our couch are handpicked by women in India. This is the reality of the imperial food system. Kings need subjects to exploit. But is this really what we want? Or might there be a better way?

Picture yourself at your local supermarket. You fill up your trolley as you pass through the bountifully stocked aisles. Your shopping list is long; the variety of foodstuffs on offer appears endless. You feel spoilt for choice. But then … you grab something. It's that new chocolate bar that you've seen in ads — you just have to buy it. On you go to the meat counter … For more and more people in places around the globe, from Central Europe to South Africa and to China, this shopping experience is increasingly part of their everyday lives. They conveniently consume cheap food from all over the world. This form of eating, however, has an extreme downside: millions of people suffer from hunger.

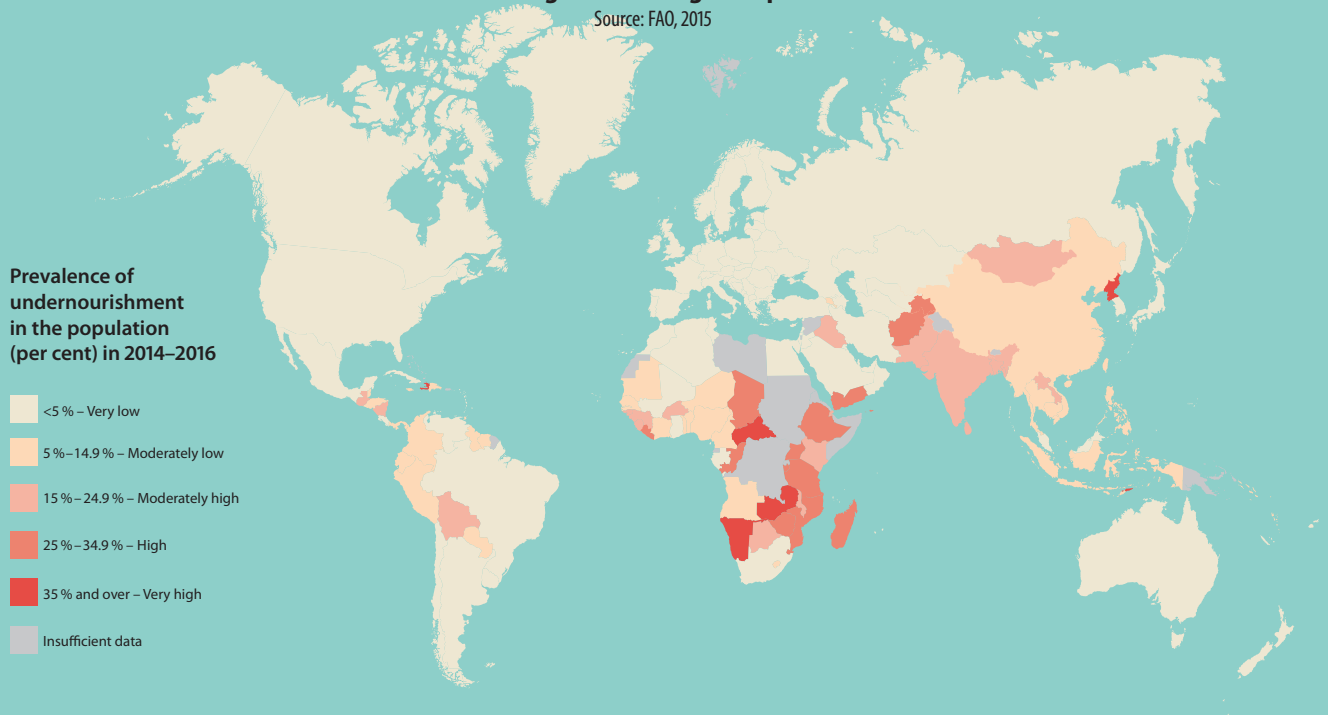
Hunger in spite of abundance – how can that be?

Even in the 21st century, hunger is a reality for 800 million people around the world (Figure 7.1).[1] It may initially seem paradoxical, but whereas small-scale farmers produce around 70 per cent of the world's food,[2] the majority of those suffering from hunger are also farmers, farmhands, shepherds or fishers.[3] At least in theory, the amount of food that is produced today could feed 12 billion people.[4] In the face of a growing global population, however, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) nonetheless considers it necessary to further increase agricultural production as it believes only this will ensure global food security.[5]

This stunning dichotomy leads to several questions. How is it possible that while one part of the global population can effectively eat whatever it likes, the other regularly goes hungry or even dies of famine? Can the usual measures to ensure food security solve this contradiction between overconsumption, on the one hand, and hunger, on the other? Why is it that despite our food system being confronted with a conversion of multiple crises (for example, food crises, shortages of resources and ecological crises), nothing changes?

To answer these questions, we will apply the concept of the imperial mode of living to our agricultural and food system and show how the imperial food structure is connected to the industrialisation of agriculture and defines the global supply of food. We shall then look at the impacts of this food system on labour and the biosphere, before also examining meat consumption, supermarkets, as well as issues related to land and soil. Together, these fields reveal how deeply ingrained the imperial diet is in our attitudes and behaviour, and show the institutions and infrastructures that not only

Figure 7.1: Hunger map
Source: FAO, 2015



make it possible but safeguard the status quo. The final section of this chapter then discusses the steps towards socio-ecological forms of food consumption that could set the wheels in motion for a completely new perspective: the idea of *good food for everyone*.

The road to industrial agriculture[i]

As capitalism developed, agriculture became subject to increasing industrialisation, and this has had a deep impact on its social and environmental foundations. The sector's increasing consumption of oil plays a key role (see infobox on "Fossil food").

> *»Modern agriculture has become the art of turning oil into food.«*
>
> (Clark and York, 2008)

Thanks to fossil fuels and cheap transport (Mobility), food can travel around the globe and still end up 'fresh' in our trolleys. Getting food from farms to harbours and airports and distribution centres in food industry hubs, and from there to supermarket stores, depends on a corresponding infrastructure that requires the necessary means of transport. 'Food mileage' increases further if we shop by car. To believe that locally produced food is always better in terms of lower CO_2 emissions, however, would be a misconception. A locally sourced apple that has spent considerable time in a cold store can have a worse CO_2 footprint than imported but freshly harvested fruit.[10]

Food production's considerable dependency on fossil fuels poses a significant risk to future food security. Fossil fuels are becoming scarcer, and when their prices rise (or become increasingly volatile), so too does the price of food. Geopolitical conflicts over oil and gas are also becoming more frequent.[11]

Formerly a closed loop system, the industrialisation of agriculture has led it to become a through flow system based on inputs and outputs.[12] While the former system was adapted to local conditions and produced (or bred) its own energy, seed, fertilisers, fodder and animals, the latter now depends on buying most of such inputs from external sources. This approach increases the dependency of farmers on the companies that provide inputs, such as seed, fertilisers and fodder, as well as on those who buy farmers' produce for further processing and/or direct sale.

Ever fewer corporations control the food market

Farmers now 'externally' source their inputs for production from an *anonymous (global)* market. Food becomes separated from the conditions and location of production and appears to come from "nowhere".[13] Free trade agreements further encourage these ties with the global market. A growing gap between farms that are export-oriented and those that produce for local markets develops. WTO-backed trade liberalisation has led to price dumping and rural exodus, which has destroyed the livelihoods of around 30 million smallholder farmers in the Global South.[14]

INFOBOX

Fossil food – we are eating oil

The expansion of industrial forms of production has transformed agriculture from an energy producing into an energy consuming system. The average amount of energy supplied to the agricultural industry has grown 50 fold over the past 60 years. The food sector currently consumes around 30 per cent of global energy[6] and produces 40 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.[7] To produce one calorie of food, industrial agriculture requires an estimated 10 to 15 fossil fuel calories.[8] Many people are therefore literally eating oil and this is driving climate change.

(Fossil) fuels are part of our food in numerous ways (Figure 7.2). Food processing (conserving, freezing or drying), packaging, storage, transport and preparation take up the largest share of energy in our agricultural and food system. Together, these processes account for around 70 per cent of the total energy input. Only around 30 per cent of fuel input actually goes to producing food.[9]

A highly opaque network of value chains is creating a significant concentration of power, leading an ever-smaller number of stakeholders to dominate the sector (Figure 7.3).[15] Global pesticide and seed production is controlled by a few multinational corporations. They produce nearly all genetically modified plants and own the majority of plant patents. Potential corporate mergers could now soon leave just three corporations in control of 60 per cent of the pesticide and seed market. The merger of Bayer and Monsanto would turn the conglomerate into the largest corporation in the sector, allowing it to preside over one third of commercial seed and one quarter of the market for pesticides. Having such power over the market also allows corporations to wield vast influence over legislation and politics.[16] The powerful agribusiness, food and trade corporations thus push industrialisation in all areas of food production to serve their own interests. To them, the process's inherent logic of 'grow or die' is simply unavoidable structural development. This increases the pressure on farmers to expand, intensify production and increase their buying of external inputs. They become increasingly dependent on markets and their *risk of indebtedness* (Money and finance) rises.[17]

Increasing productivity: is more always better?

The market imperatives of competition, profit maximisation, growth and productivity define agriculture. Competition leads to permanent pressure to cut wages and production costs. The productivity gains made by industrial agriculture during the second half of the 20th century are historically unique. Total output (factor 2.6) grew faster than the global population (factor 2.4) while the share of workers in the sector around the globe dropped from 65 to 42 per cent during the same period.[18] However, a narrow understanding of productivity provides the basis for these figures.

i The development of industrial agriculture is a historical process that continues to this day. It is an open and, to a certain degree, contested development, which means that its course can be changed.

Figure 7.2: Fossil fuel consumption in the food system
Source: Bomford and Heinberg, 2009, p. 4

This is because the concept ignores the social costs, such as the impact of crowding out through competition or debt, and does not consider that — regardless of severe environmental impacts — industrial agriculture's productivity gains require resources and new technologies. In a report on the environmental food crisis, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) highlights that the system has increased yields mainly by using more water and fertilisers. Agriculture today uses around 70 per cent of the world's available fresh water, three times more than 50 years ago.[19] This mode of production poses new problems: since the 1970s, the productivity gains have slowed down significantly.[20] This is partly due to decreasing natural soil fertility (humus content).[21] Current methods used in industrial agriculture (high-yield seeds, agrochemicals, monoculture production and irrigation) provide no answer to this problem. Fertilisers too have lost their capacity to boost growth further (Figures 7.4.1 and 7.4.2).[22] Accordingly, the UNEP predicts that the area occupied globally as farmland will increase. Land, however, is already the source of numerous conflicts (see below).[23]

The imperial aspects of our food

Industrial agriculture is expanding globally. In the name of progress, it is replacing other forms of production and thus destroying the livelihoods of millions of people. This process is closely tied to corporate strategies as well as economic, agricultural, trade and geopolitical policies. It is geared towards the needs of consumers with 'substantial purchasing power' (Figure 7.5)[24] and linked to what they perceive as a 'modern' and 'decent' standard of living: meat has to be cheap and exotic fruit constantly available. Industrial agriculture provides the basis for imperial patterns of food consumption. It ensures the seemingly limitless variety of foodstuffs in our supermarkets as well as our *freedom* to choose what we want to eat, as well as when and where we eat it. Our society does not question the capitalist logic that underpins this system, nor does it consider the power structures that secure this mode of food consumption. By appearing to follow the mantra that unlimited and cheap access to resources and labour from elsewhere should be available as a matter of course, our current food consumption habits are undoubtedly imperial in nature.

Figure 7.3: Who controls our food?
Concentrations of power in the global value chain
Source: Public Eye, 2014, p. 3

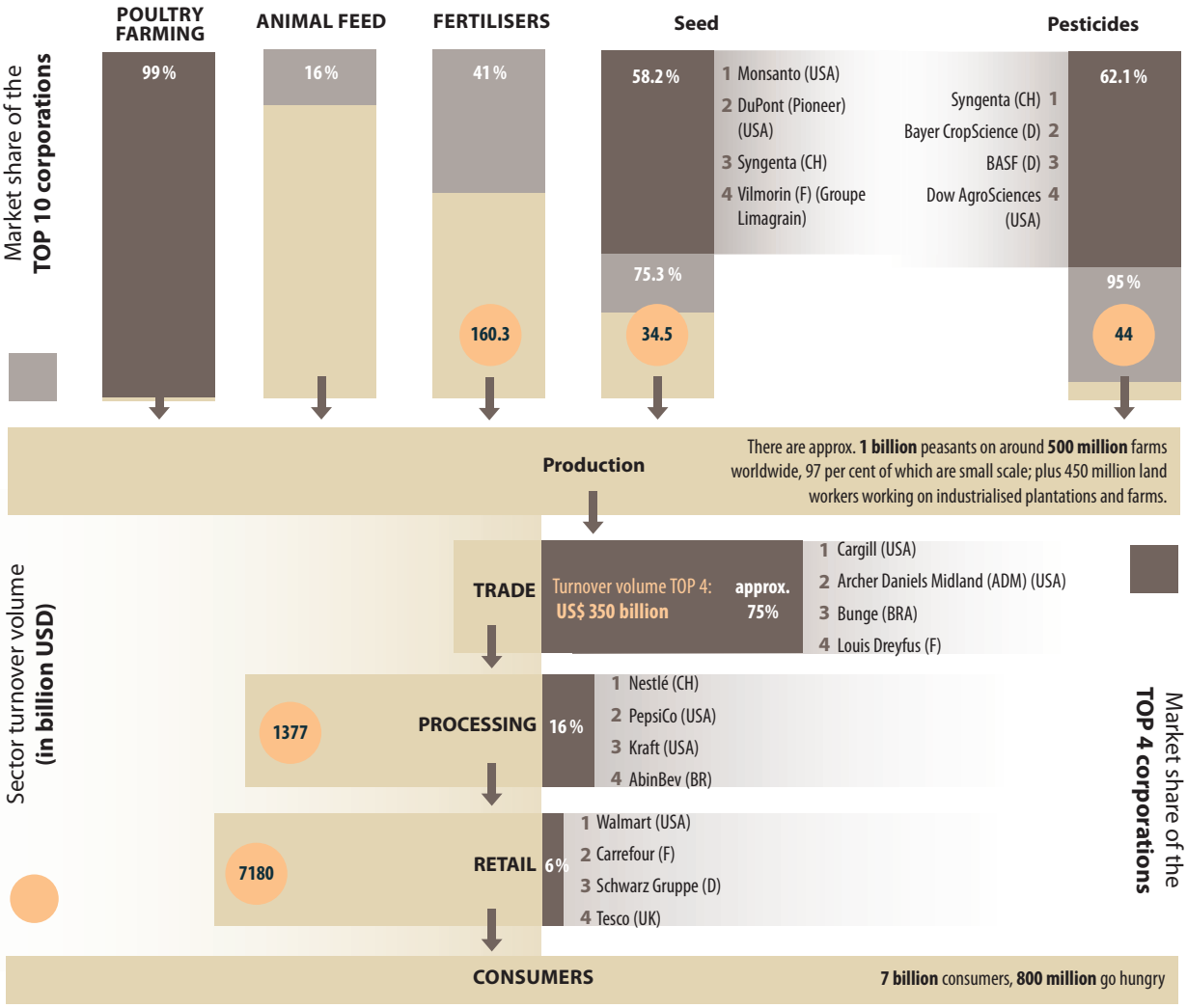


Figure 7.4.1: Global application of chemical fertilisers in millions of tonnes

Source: Alexandratos & Bruinsma, 2012, p. 129; Heinrich Böll Stiftung et al., 2015

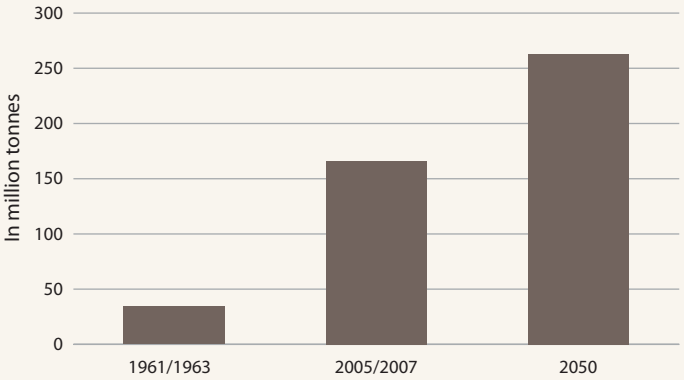
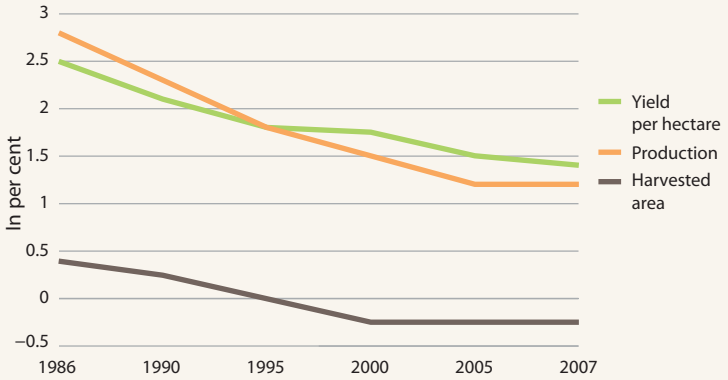


Figure 7.4.2: Yield and production growth in agriculture in per cent

Source: Alexandratos & Bruinsma, 2012, p. 129; Heinrich Böll Stiftung et al., 2015



Thirst for resources

As we have seen, industrial agriculture is a resource hungry, linear through flow system (see infobox on "Fossil food"). As such, a growing number of transnational consumers (Glossary), who are consuming ever-larger quantities of meat, exotic fruit and processed foods, are inexorably leading global resource consumption to rise. And the impacts this is having on the environment are considerable.

We are wasting food – and our planet

Livestock farming, and meat production in particular, reveal the scale of our thirst for resources and the subsequent control these industries have over farmland. As *pastures* have become scarce around the globe, further increases in meat production therefore depend increasingly on animal fodder. Fodder production, however, requires arable land. Most of the animals we raise today for slaughter eat more maize, soy, wheat and other grains instead of grass. At least 40 per cent of global cereal harvests and a large share of oilseed meals, in particular soybean meal, end up in animal troughs.[25] Wetlands, grasslands, woods and fallow lands are thus being turned into arable land. The calories that are lost by converting plants into animal products could feed 3.5 billion people.[26]

The drastic amounts of food that are lost between farm and plate are a further problematic aspect of today's food and agricultural system. Estimates reckon that up to one third of the food produced globally is thrown away. According to the FAO, this amounts to a staggering 1.3 billion tonnes annually.[27] The resources and labour needed to produce this food are simply wasted.[28]

The true costs

Figures provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) show that agriculture is currently a key contributor to climate change. Taking into account the aggregated impact of the sector on the climate (i.e. including the emissions from food processing, packaging, transport, storage and waste), between 44 and 57 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are food-related (Figure 7.6).[29] For food production, this represents a significant challenge — the sector will have to reduce its emissions substantially, not least

Figure 7.5: Household spending on food and as share of total expenditure

Source: Knoema, 2017; World Bank, 2017

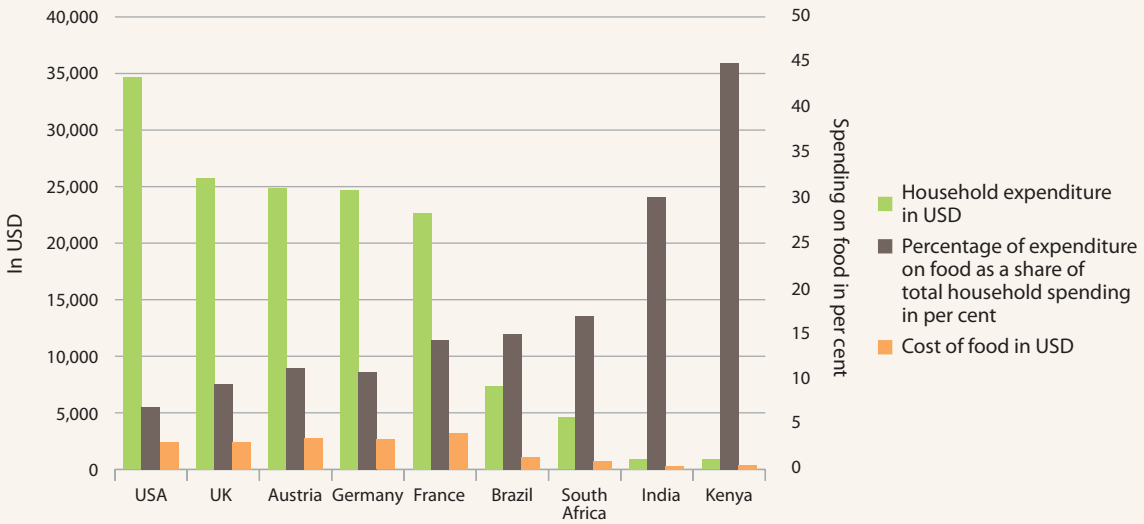
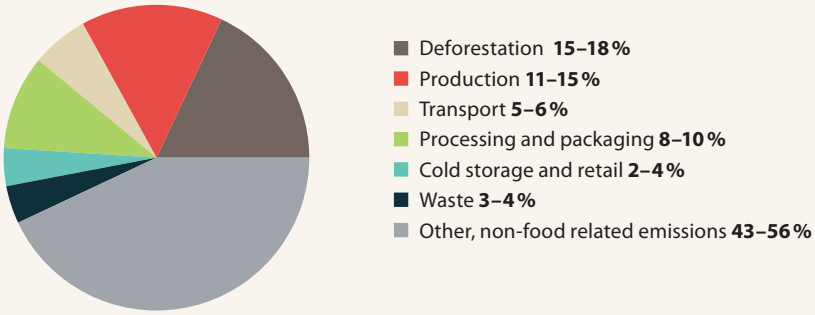


Figure 7.6: Food and climate change

Source: GRAIN, 2011



because greater demand and changes to food consumption patterns are set to increase greenhouse gas emissions over the coming decades. The IPCC also considers that by 2050 the food security index will drop globally by 15–40 per cent due to a number of factors, including climate change.[30]

Those responsible often shift the burdens caused by their thirst for resources upon others. The same is true of the related environmental costs (Figures 7.7 and 7.8).[31] 'Other' people and 'other' natural environments bear the consequences. These *externalised costs* are excluded from overall pricing: food becomes artificially cheap.[32] It also helps put the 'efficient' nature of industrial agriculture in a better light. The erosion and salination of soils, the excessive consumption of water or the loss of biodiversity are not considered factors. The same holds true for the growing toxicity of agriculture and increasing environmental degradation (chemical fertilisers, agrochemicals and waste).[33] According to a study conducted by KPMG, our agricultural and food industry system entails environmental costs that are equal to 225 per cent of its profits — a feat unmatched by any other industry (Figure 7.9).[34]

A thirst for resources, the squandering of food and the impacts this has on the climate and environment illustrate that our imperial food system cannot be universally applied. Moreover, this use of resources does not benefit all people to the same degree. The enforcing of private property rights, the development of new markets and the market power of a limited number of corporations, who subsequently have almost sole control over our environment, reinforce this trend (for example, the issuance of patents for seed or privatisation of water and land rights). The imperial food system is insatiable and exclusive. Accordingly, the number of conflicts over the control of our natural resources will undoubtedly rise.

Cheap labour, but for whom?

The relaxing herbal teas we enjoy are the fruits of hard physical labour, picked by people working for hunger wages in India.[35] Exploitation is integral to keeping the price of food in supermarkets low. In spite of agriculture being the sector that employs the highest number of people globally, labour conditions in the industry are almost never discussed. According to estimates pro-

Figure 7.7: Global thirst for resources

Source: FAO, 2016; Hoekstra, 2012; IAASTD, 2009a; Steinfeld et al., 2006

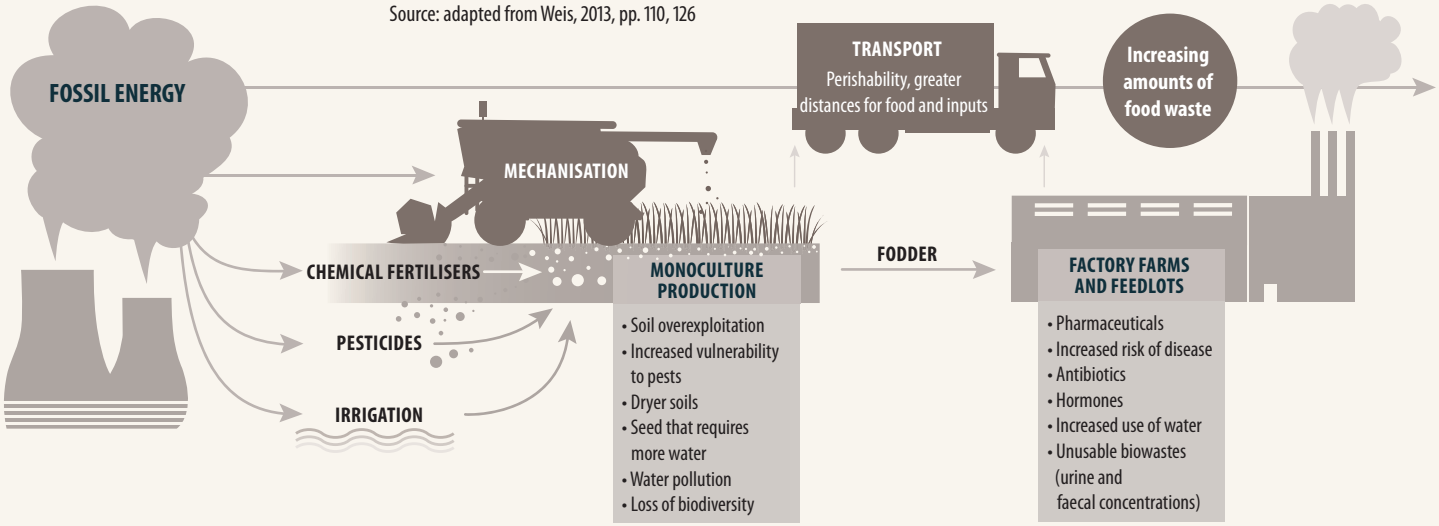
38% of global land mass is used for agriculture

75% of crop diversity has been lost since the introduction of commercial uniform seed

33% of total arable land is used to produce fodder

Figure 7.8: The hidden environmental costs of industrial agriculture

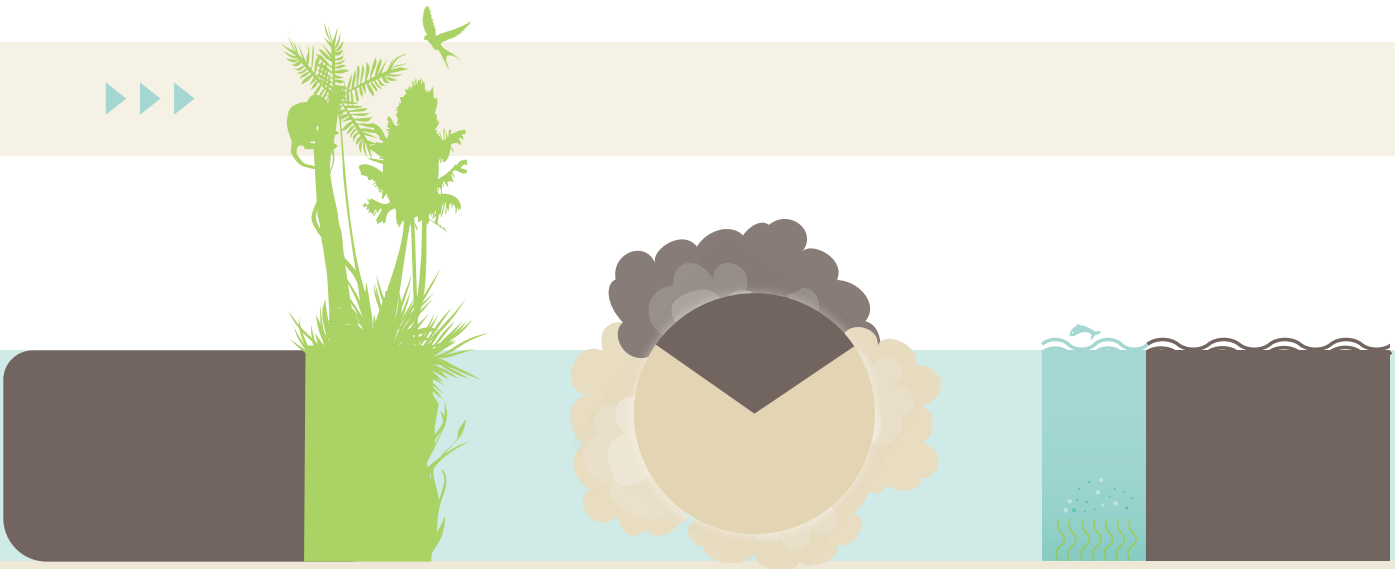
Source: adapted from Weis, 2013, pp. 110, 126



vided by the International Labour Organization (ILO), agriculture directly employs around 1.3 billion people, which is nearly half of all wage labourers globally.[36] If you include those who indirectly depend on agriculture (such as children and family members), this figure doubles.[37] A characteristic trait of the sector, however, is widespread *precarious employment* (Glossary) and the abuse of labour and human rights. While industrial agriculture has greatly increased labour productivity, many parts of the sector remain highly labour-intensive, for example, the production of vegetables and fruit or the slaughtering of animals. To cut costs, employers are increasingly turning to 'cheap' labour.[38]

Cheap often comes at a high cost to workers

Banana and tea plantation labourers are a prime example of the true cost of 'cheap produce': 200 million of these workers are chronically malnourished.[39] Poverty and hunger are thus not simply related to low income, but are also the result of discriminatory and exploitative labour conditions. Strict hierarchies on these plantations govern the relationship between workers and their superiors. Many work excessive overtime and are exposed to health hazards. There is an endemic lack of social and legal security because the standards in agriculture are not only particularly low, they are also hard to control. Moreover, unionisation is prevented, often systematically or even through the use of violence.[40] Next to construction and mining, agriculture is among the *most dangerous employment sectors*. At least 170,000 workers in the agricultural sector die each year as a result of occupational accidents, in particular those involving machinery and tools.[41] One example are slaughterhouses. The highest number of accidents in any type of industrial operation occurs in slaughterhouse production lines. Here salaries are extremely low, work is physically demanding and the psychological stress is high.[42] Furthermore, three to five million cases of pesticide poisoning occur annually, 346,000 of which are fatal.[43]



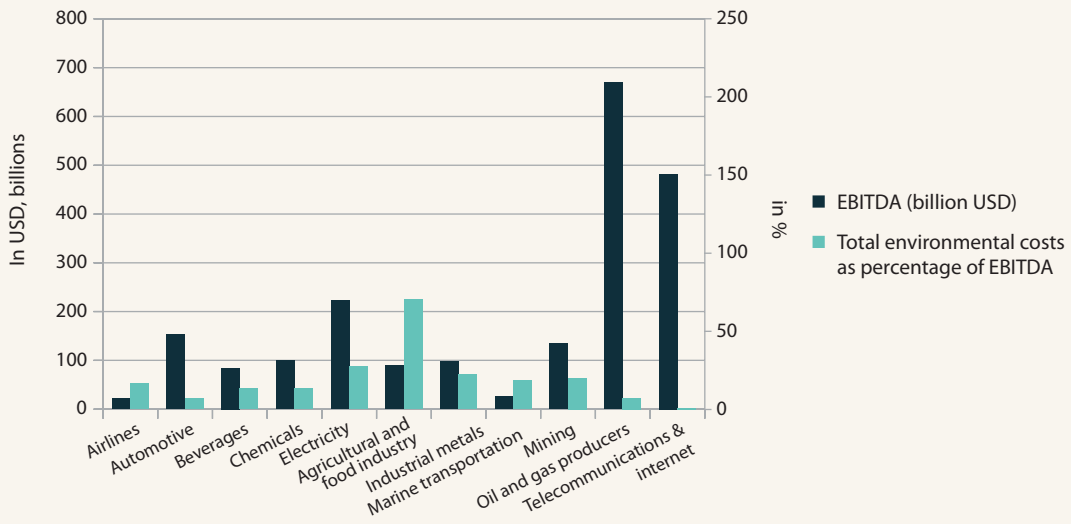
70% of deforestation in (sub)tropical regions is due to agriculture

31% of greenhouse gas emissions stem from agriculture (includes the effects of changes to land use)

70% of fresh water is used in agricultural production

Figure 7.9: EBITDA vs. external environmental costs by sector, 2010: food producer environmental costs are double EBITDA

Source: KPMG International, 2012



Modern slavery on the backs of migrants and women?

The agricultural sector employs a particularly high percentage of *migrant workers*, for example, on plantations or in food processing.[44] The inhumane working and living conditions in Almeria's 'sea of plastic',[45] where tomatoes are grown, or the orange plantations of Rosarno[46] are just two examples.[47] In the US, too, one million Latin American immigrants, 40 per cent of whom are undocumented, work in agriculture.[48] This is by no means a coincidence. As they have fewer and only weakly secured rights, an unclear residency status and are often the victims of racist discrimination,[49] undocumented migrants are easier to exploit. Often they have no other choice but to accept temporary, poorly-paid and health-damaging work.[50] Many *women* too are systematically disadvantaged and discriminated against in agriculture.[51] Their salaries are generally lower than those of men and they are often involved in unpaid tasks. In Asian[52] and African[53] countries, in particular, women tend to receive less education and training than men and have only limited access to counselling and loans.[54]

Exploitative class and gender relations as well as racist discrimination are widespread in the food sector. A closer look reveals that these conditions are in fact a precondition for and support the imperial mode of production and living. Here work is considered a 'resource' that is apparently 'cheap' and available in unlimited supply. This is why exploitation provides the basis for 'our' affluent societies' tremendous wealth.

How the imperial food system shapes our everyday lives

In the Global North, the imperial modes of living and eating have become a way of life. As we have seen, these are tied closely to the development of industrial agriculture. After looking at the production side of the imperial food system, we will now turn the spotlight on consumption. Why is it that in spite of rampant global injustices and environmental issues the system remains unchanged? Meat consumption highlights how the imperial diet and its associated privileges are anchored in our thought patterns and eating habits. Supermarkets are a good example of how institutions and stakeholders both enable and secure the imperial diet, and the issue of land shows how the infrastructures built by powerful stakeholders contribute to maintaining and generalising this mode of living.

The right to our daily steak

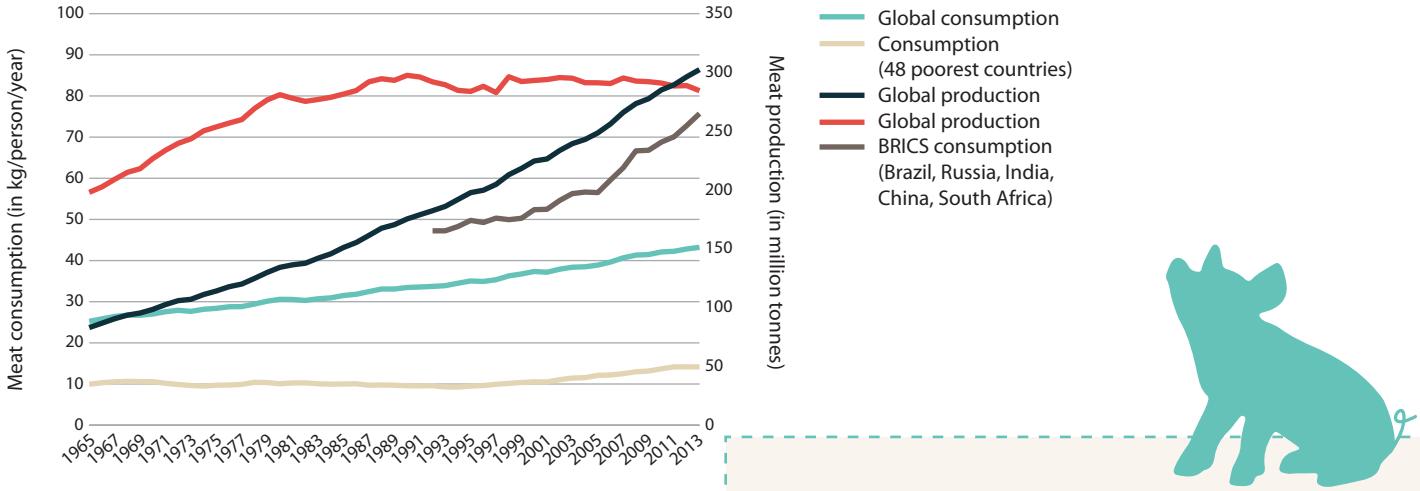
Per capita meat consumption has nearly doubled over the past 55 years. During this time, the global population has also doubled (Figure 7.10).[55] Global meat production has therefore quadrupled, going from 75 to over 300 million tonnes.[56] In 2012, 65 billion vertebrate animals were slaughtered, an average of 10 per person.[57] The global rise in meat consumption is linked to the deeply rooted conception that meat and animal products are somehow superior foods — that the proteins they offer are better than those available in plants. Cor-

15,400 litres of water are required to produce **1 kg of beef**

The relative ratio between the red area (above) and the total volume of water shown across the following pages illustrates the amount of water required to produce this small amount of beef.

Figure 7.10: Meat consumption and production

Source: FAOSTAT, 2017



respondingly, more and more people see eating meat as part of a 'better' and 'healthier' lifestyle (in accordance with Western standards).[58]

Diet in general and meat consumption in particular function as social *status markers*. People's increasing consumption of meat suggests progress, the superiority of humankind over other living creatures and nature, as well as cultural and social power. Many societies consider eating mostly red meats a symbol of 'masculinity', of 'the beast' within.[59] Advertisements portray the man stood proudly over his BBQ as some sort of 'hero'. High-gloss magazines for 'men of taste' focus on male culinary pleasures, i.e. meat and alcohol. This gendered identification with meat is also evident in the fact that German men eat on average twice as many meat and sausage products as women.[60]

This *inequality in levels of meat consumption* is a global phenomenon: in 2013 per capita meat consumption in Germany and Austria was 86 and 91 kilogrammes respectively and therefore significantly higher than the global average of 43 kilogrammes.[61] Meat consumption remains high and constant in the US and Europe, and globally it is rising in line with per capita income growth. Mainly in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), but also in Asia, the consumption and production of meat is rapidly increasing.[62] Just as there are poor and affluent nations, the gap between poor and rich also exists within societies, although it is harder to define. The upper and middle classes, in particular — a growing class of transnational consumers — are expanding their consumption of meat.[63] However, on a global scale, this development is bypassing the poor.

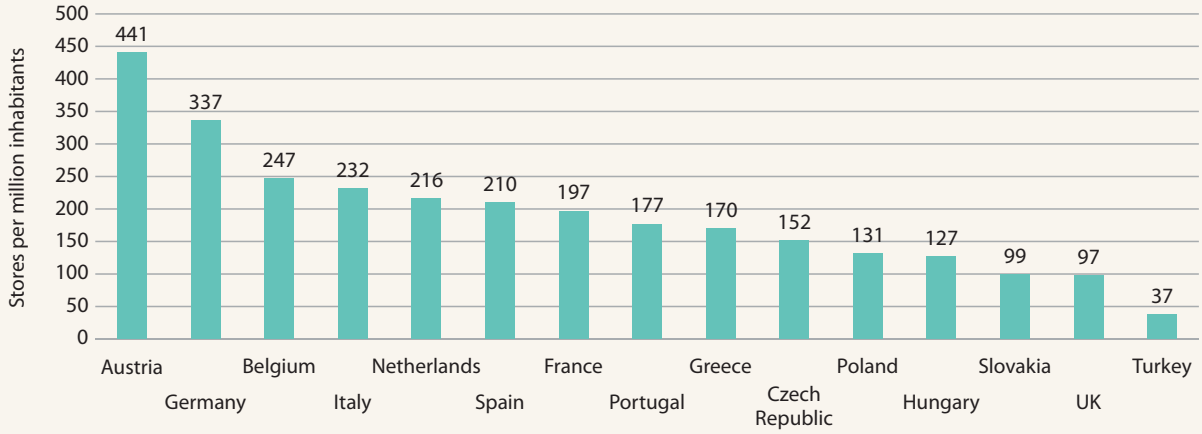
INFOBOX

Humankind and animals – "Humans are animals that have forgotten that they are animals"[64]

In our relationship with animals, there exists a characteristic contradiction. For our beloved pet dog, we buy premium dog food that contains lamb or veal. Whether we see an animal as a pet, food or as essential to research (Education and knowledge), or even exterminate it as a pest, depends solely on the context. Rabbits, for example, may fall into any of these four categories.[65] On the one hand, we identify with animals from a very young age: we read about them in children's stories and build emotional relationships with our pets (and occasionally with livestock animals too). On the other hand, we consider animals to be our exact opposite: they are in their natural state, instinct driven or viewed as the *other*. We use their names as terms of abuse — or see them as just a piece of meat on our plate. Industrial agriculture reduces animal bodies to a mere means of production, a fact that is closely tied to the development of industrial capitalism. Decades before Ford's Model T assembly lines, the slaughterhouse production lines in Chicago allowed managers to centrally control the speed of work (Historical overview).[66] This development allowed for a dramatic increase in the volume and speed of meat production, and had a negative knock-on effect on workers and animals.[67] Fences and boxes ensure the permanent access to animal bodies that are controlled from birth right up to their death. Modern chicken slaughteries can kill and process several hundred thousand chickens per day.[68] This also makes the infrastructure of industrial meat production possible, which creates a spatial and hence emotional distance between (livestock) animals and people. It is no longer possible to know where the animal came from, what it ate and how it was held and slaughtered.
For years, farmers and animal rights activists have argued over whether an animal-friendly approach to livestock farming is at all possible. The idyllic settings of meat advertisements and more and more labels promoting animal-friendly meat products suggest that everything is as it should be. But cheap and continuously available industrial meat products remain the norm in society.
We eat them every day — for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Figure 7.11: Supermarket density in European retail by stores per million inhabitants

Source: Monopoly commission, 2012



Being able to consume meat is a privilege. People who eat greater amounts of meat and animal products, such as milk, eggs and cheese, also have a greater impact on the biosphere and contribute more to the exploitation of animals. Resource-intensive, environmentally damaging and exploitative, a predominantly meat-based diet is on the rise globally. Those who profit from the system seem to think it is somehow natural, or even their right, to claim a particularly large chunk of the cake for themselves, while many others go empty-handed. As consumers have this attitude so deeply ingrained in their consciousness, they are prone to be blind to the consequences of their actions.

What makes it onto the supermarket shelf? Supermarkets' role as gatekeepers in our food system

Supermarkets have become integral to our lives. But why? In our latitudes, they largely organise the sale of food to consumers. Yet, why do we think this is 'super'? Numerous promises make this model so attractive: commodity abundance, nearly permanent availability — even for 'people with little time' — the feeling of independence that 'free' choice affords; and, not least, cheap prices. Advertisements attract us with promising slogans such as "best price offers" and "the customer is king". People rarely ask who bears the real costs and whether, how and for whom supermarkets fulfil these promises. To answer these questions, we need to look 'behind' the façade of supermarket shelves.

> *Big eats small then bigger eats big.«*
>
> (Reardon et al., 2003)

Since the early 1990s, the *balance of power in our food system* has shifted consistently to the benefit of the food retail industry. Supermarkets today play an important role as 'gatekeepers' between producers and consumers. In many countries this has led to a corresponding concentration of markets and business power. In Germany, the five leading supermarket chains (Edeka, Rewe, Aldi, Lidl and Metro) control around 90 per cent of the market,[69] whereas in Austria, the dominant chains (Rewe, Spar and Hofer) control an 87 per cent market share.[70] These figures are linked to a key overall development: the saturation of food markets in the Global North (Figure 7.11)[71] and, correspondingly, harsh competition over market shares.

To prevail in spite of competition, supermarkets have developed several strategies. First, they introduce an increasing number of (new) products onto the market. According to estimates, food retail businesses annually launch around 12,000 new products in the UK alone.[72] Furthermore, they attempt to add 'new' meanings to products, presenting them in 'idyllic rural settings', or by linking them to 'health benefits' and 'well-being'. Moreover, product labels make claims to be particularly 'fair', 'CO_2-neutral' or 'environmentally friendly'.

Secondly, supermarkets fight hard price battles. The power supermarkets have in the industry allows them to set and cut prices — at the expense of workers,[73] farmers and the environment. Supermarkets also define the quality and kind of products they offer.[74] One example are supermarket own-brand products. Instead of depending on the brands of other stakeholders, supermarkets put what appears to be the same products on

Figure 7.12: Supermarket share of total food sales in per cent

Source: Reardon et al., 2003

the shelves but under their own brands. By doing this, supermarkets make suppliers dispensable, pitting them against each other. By means of this lever, supermarkets enforce conditions favourable to them. Moreover, they can interfere in the production process.[75]

Thirdly, the liberalisation of trade and investments, as well as the deregulation of agriculture markets, permits the food sector to enter new markets (Figure 7.12 and Table 7.1).[76] Foreign investments and the acquisition of smaller local super market chains often serve as a way in. Local chains usually already have an established position on the market and know local consumption habits. In many cases, the victims of harsh competition are local dealers and producers. Greater global market competition and price pressure on the global market means they cannot keep up with delivery, price and quality standards. New job creation can only partially offset the impacts. Hence, the large supermarket chains suck up regional value creation and, as a consequence, destroy the livelihoods of countless people.[77]

Supermarkets today hold crucial sway over our food system. They provide the basis for and promote the imperial food system. Consumers get to choose between products only once they are already on the supermarket shelf, i.e. long after the key decisions have been taken.[78] The imperial diet supermarkets offer is not built simply on consumer 'demand'. Corporations implement economic strategies and political actors often create the necessary framework conditions that secure advantages for food corporations. The increasingly powerful position of supermarkets is diametrically opposed to a just global food system.

How much soil do people need?

Soil is valuable. Without healthy soils, there can be no agriculture. Soil is therefore the basis of food production. Nonetheless, there are very different approaches to land and soil management. Andean culture, for example, traditionally considers land as a commons. Land is unsellable and should be responsibly used and maintained by the local people.[79] Land grabs, however, which turn land into private property, a commodity or object of speculation, are nonetheless a burgeoning global phenomenon. A diverse group of stakeholders aims to use the globally available arable land for their own interests. To make their claims irrevocable, they create an array of framework conditions and infrastructures, including the building of roads to remote areas (Mobility), creation of ownership regimes, or securing favourable conditions for investments in arable land (Money and finance).

As we have seen, due to the rising consumption of animal products, the imperial food system hinges on claiming ever greater swathes of agricultural land (Figure 7.13).[80] Vast cereal and oilseed monoculture fields are typical for many regions today, speckled by islands of intensive livestock operations. A sophisticated transport network provides the necessary infrastructure, for example, to import fodder from South America to Europe and then deliver packaged pork to China.[81] However, not only food and fodder production require land. Increasingly, energy crops (see infobox on "Agrofuels") and agricultural raw materials for industrial processing (such as cotton) are part of the mix.[82] Naturally, this involves claims to land all over the world. Just to

Table 7.1: Branches of transnational supermarket chains in developing and emerging countries

Source: Luig, 2014

	Walmart (US)	Carrefour (FR)	Auchcan (FR)	Metro (DE)	Tesco (GB)
World	10,739	10,376	3,500	1,240	7,384
Mexico	2,226				
Guatemala	213				
Costa Rica	216				
Chile	388				
Argentina		521			
Brazil	557	241			
Senegal			4		
Tunesia			82		
South Africa	352				
Pakistan				9	
India	20	5		16	
Thailand					1,737
Malaysia					49
Vietnam				19	
Taiwan		69	48		
South Korea					433
China	401	236	386*	78	134

Note: table limited to a selection of the most significant companies and destination countries.
*including joint venture

cover its demand for agricultural products, Europe alone 'imports' around 120 million hectares of land annually, an area greater than Scandinavia.[83] Whereas the increasing concentration of land was a slow process up to the early 2000s, this has since developed into a global race for agricultural land. Seeking 'secure' investments and investment opportunities, a range of non-agricultural sector stakeholders, such as states, transnational corporations and banks, have ventured into agriculture. Today investment funds and banks offer land and agrarian products in their portfolios, often purely for the purposes of speculation (Money and finance).[84]

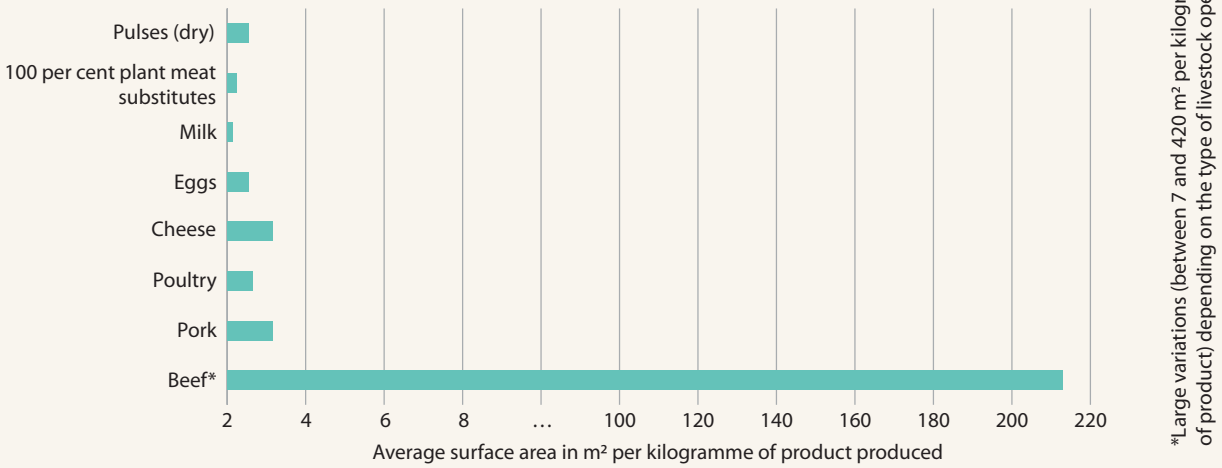
The Land Matrix[ii] project alone registers 323 cases in which 182 companies based in the EU are involved in land grabbing (Glossary) in 52 countries outside of Europe.[85] This affects 5.8 million hectares (Figure 7.14).[86] Contrary to common assumptions, land grabbing is also a phenomenon in Europe. Moreover, in this part of the world, the extreme concentration of land in a very small number of hands is a problem.[87] It has led to 3 per cent of the largest farms controlling 52 per cent of total farmland, whilst the smallest 75 per cent of farms work 11 per cent of the land.[88]

Land deals are often based on intransparent and unequal negotiations between investors, agribusinesses,

ii An independent initiative to monitor developments in the fields of land and investment, see: www.landmatrix.org/en/.

Figure 7.13: Land footprints for different foods

Source: Nijdam et al., 2012, p. 763



governments and their local representatives, as well as with those who have been using the land to date. Investors make residents attractive offers such as a fixed salary as land workers, or promise to build schools and health centres. However, the lack of information or protection that investors and governments provide to those affected is problematic. In many cases, violence paves the way to land grabs.[89]

The unlimited acquisition of land by diverse stakeholders often implies turning commons into *private property*. Mostly, this occurs in the Global South. The establishment of a land market, new property regimes and corresponding forms of usage require surveying and the registration of land titles (EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE).[90] Even discourse on development policy sometimes portrays the private acquisition of land in a positive light. For example, when the state provides the poor with official land titles, a process which boosts the value of what had previously been 'unused' land by opening it up for private investment. Usually such measures completely ignore the consequences that arise at different levels for those individuals, communities and environments affected.[91] In this vein, the nations of the G8 established the *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition*. Over 100 private stakeholders are invited to sit at the table where they can actively shape international aid according to their concepts and to their own benefit — a current development policy trend.[92] The alliance receives billions in development aid, including from the EU, to fight rural poverty and hunger in Africa. Public-private partnerships

INFOBOX

Agrofuels – food for tummies or for tanks?

Agrofuels promise a new, climate-friendly alternative to fossil fuels based on renewable resources. Moreover, investments in the sector offer profitable and apparently stable investment opportunities. According to estimates, European companies have already secured around 5 million hectares in the Global South to plant agrofuels — an area greater than Slovakia.[95]

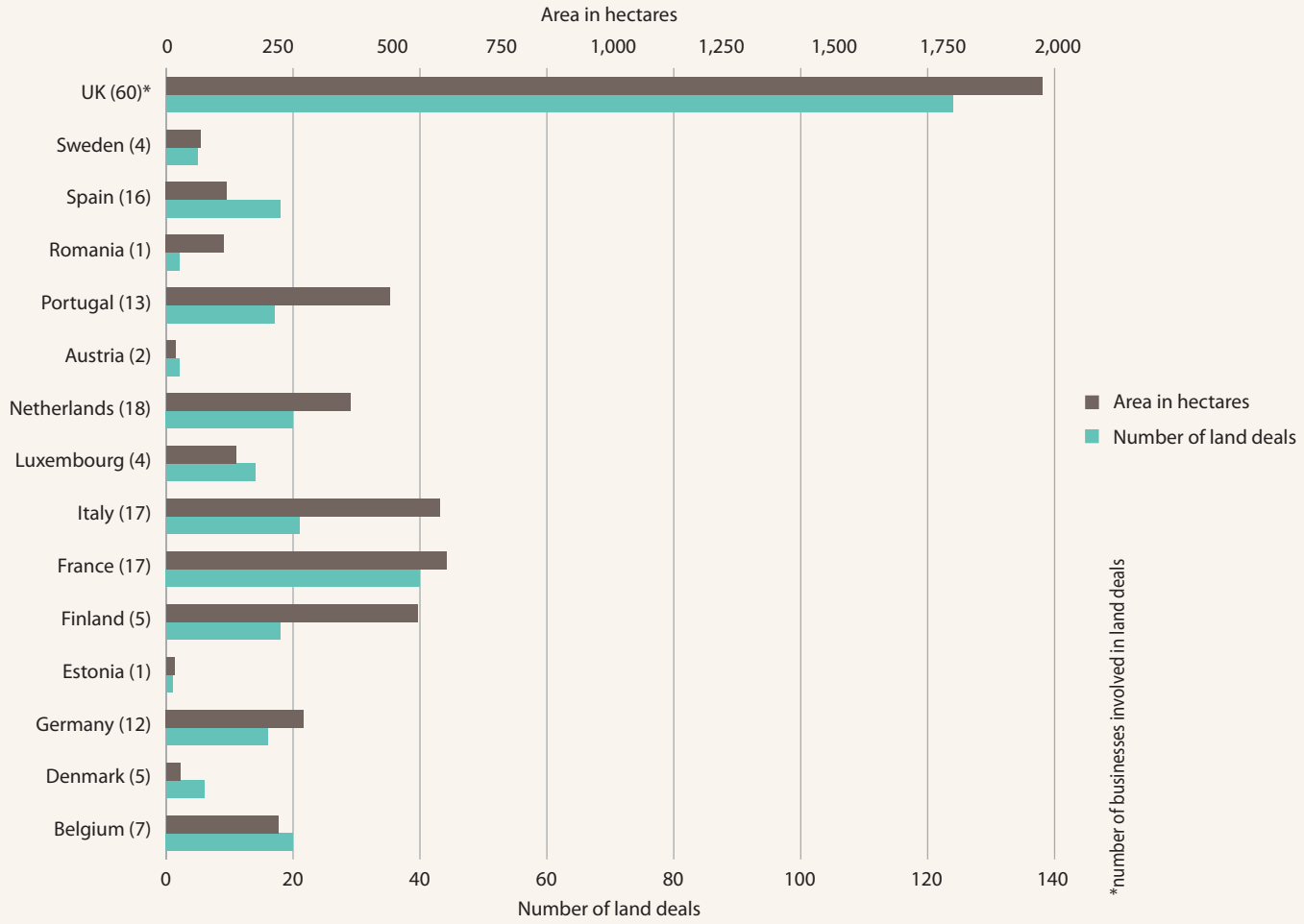
Most recently, this has been met with growing criticism.[96] The agrofuel boom since the 2000s (Figure 7.15)[97] has led to a further spread of industrial agriculture, driving deforestation, destruction of biodiversity and partially resulting in the expulsion of subsistence and smallholder farming.[98] Moreover, studies indicate that the impact of agrofuels on the climate is greater than initially estimated. This is because agrofuel production requires fertilisers and agrochemicals, the production of which requires a great deal of energy. Frequently, this pushes the climate footprint of such fuels into the red.[99] Secondly, forests or savannahs are turned into cropland to cultivate energy crops, thereby releasing gigantic amounts of carbon into the atmosphere.[100]

Published in 2008 and based on the state of policy at the time, the Gallagher Review calculated that EU and US agrofuel funding policies would depend on the availability of an additional 500 million hectares for agrofuel production by 2020. This is around one third of the farmland currently available.[101] In African countries, India, Brazil, Malaysia and Indonesia new plantations are thus springing up every day to grow soy, rapeseed, oil palms, sunflowers, jatropha, maize, wheat and sugar — not to fill empty stomachs but to produce fuel.

We are still in the very early stages of research into less damaging and less land-intensive agrofuels, but so far no real alternatives have emerged.[102] In spite of the potential for greater efficiency, the negative impacts of this protracted boom are likely to increase.

Figure 7.14: Land deals involving European corporations outside of Europe

Source: Borras et al., 2016, p. 14; The Land Matrix Global Observatory, 2017



(PPPs) with agribusiness corporations such as Bayer, Monsanto, Syngenta and Yara, aim to create 'growth corridors' to modernise agriculture. These partnerships qualify smallholder farmer agriculture as backward and promote the industrialisation of agriculture as the way forward. PPPs are to provide 1.3 million hectares in Tanzania, Malawi, Burkina Faso, Mozambique and Ghana alone.[93] Contract farming incorporates a few 'marketable' farmers into the project. The majority, however, faces expulsion and the loss of access to land and water. This approach increases poverty and hunger instead of fighting to overcome them.[94]

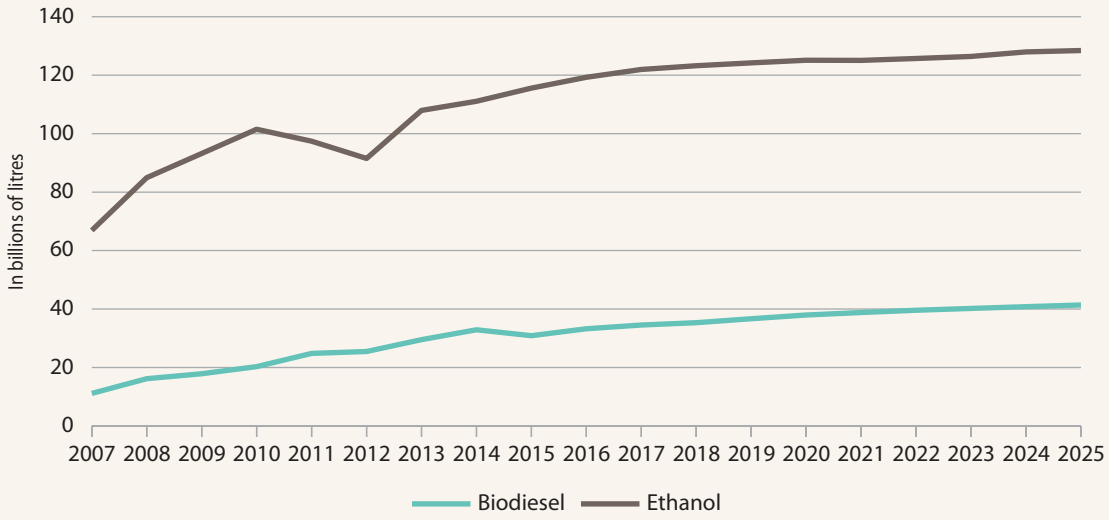
The imperial mode of living is thus affecting property regimes and land use. The appropriation of land exacerbates inequalities: governments and international organisations create attractive framework conditions and an infrastructure that will have long-term effects and thereby pave the way for financially powerful actors. However, this robs millions of people of their livelihoods and forces them to offer their services to others for a pittance. Land grabbing also promotes the expansion of industrial agriculture. The conditions that could give rise to alternative modes of production and living are thus weakened.

Ways out of the food crisis

Just because we are producing an adequate volume of calories globally does not mean that our food security is guaranteed. As we have highlighted, the spread of industrial agriculture is pushing out the very people

Figure 7.15: Global expansion of biofuels: production in billions of litres

Source: OECD and FAO, 2016



who are vital to securing our global food supply: smallholder farmers and peasants. The imperial food system destroys alternative forms of production and robs millions of people of an opportunity to enjoy a decent and self-determined life. What this effectively means is that the true underlying causes of hunger are influenced by the *means by which* food is produced, distributed and consumed, the actors involved in each stage of this process, and any subsequent damage caused to people or the environment.

Neither fish nor flesh!

Many stakeholders are trying to find solutions to the current problems in our agricultural and food system. 'Climate smart' agriculture is the self-proclaimed goal of the *Global Alliance for Climate Smart Agriculture* (GACSA). The *New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition* claims it can eliminate hunger in Africa. However, these alliances between transnational agribusinesses, governments and international organisations such as the FAO, the IMF and the World Bank do not aim to tackle the causes of today's problems and effectively offer pseudo-solutions, for example, by promoting industrial agriculture supposedly in order to prevent starvation and to feed the growing global population. By doing so, they are actually exacerbating the world's social and environmental problems and, as a direct result, hunger. Ultimately, these new alliances against environmental and food crises are thus simply promoting a 'greenwashed' 'business as usual' approach (see infobox on "Green economy").[103]

There are also a number of solutions being discussed with regard to consumers. Supermarkets are increasingly turning to sustainability labels, supporting initiatives against food waste and offering a wide range of organic, regional and seasonal produce. Eco-friendly products are, however, by no means the norm and only a small fraction of the population can actually afford them. Yet, as the power of supermarkets continues to grow, their decisions are becoming ever more influential. We also mustn't forget the destructive consequences of harsh competition, the development of new markets and price pressure, which continue to spread.

Back at home, eating less meat is also becoming a 'must' among small groups of trendy, environmentally conscious consumers. This trend is spreading; new restaurants and special products help facilitate the transition to a (partially) vegan or vegetarian diet. Consuming less meat and eating a diet that is as eco-friendly and as fair as possible is undoubtedly key. But simply changing one's own patterns of consumption is not enough to overcome the structural issues of our imperial food system. These approaches fall short of the mark because:

1. they do not question the underlying structures of power. The undemocratic control and make-up of the agricultural and food system remains unchanged.

2. they maintain the logic of unlimited, resource-intensive and competition-driven growth (Conclusion and outlook). The food system continues to be market- and profit-oriented, instead of focused on actual needs, for example, the fight against hunger. Alternatives appear unrealistic.

3. they do not overcome the exclusive nature of the imperial food system. The excessive and non-sustainable appropriation of labour and our natural world remains the privilege of the few.

Against the current backdrop of multiple crises (Glossary) it is absolutely essential to find an alternative to the imperial food system, especially when we consider the fact that industrial agriculture is itself destroying the very basis for future forms of sustainable food production. The imperial diet is, however, deeply ingrained in our everyday lives and appears normal to us. Framework conditions and infrastructures enable it; institutions and influential stakeholders secure it. So, how can we overcome it?

Good food for all!

Clearly, the specific developments in the agricultural and food systems are an obstacle to creating a *good life for all*. We cannot tackle problems and crises using means that do not fundamentally question their underlying causes but actually tighten their grip. If we wish to find our way out of this dead end, we will need to consider truly transformative approaches. There is no simple 'master plan'.

A transformation that aims to deliver a *good life for all* should focus on creating a 'world without hunger'. The demand is clear: we need good food for all! There are now numerous initiatives, alliances and movements happening throughout the globe that are fighting for a different, sustainable and just food and agricultural system. Central to these efforts is the struggle for food sovereignty (Glossary). Here the *La Via Campesina* movement plays a key role. It brings around 200 million farmers, landless people, shepherds, farm labourers and fishers from all corners of the globe together and its goal is to create, strengthen and develop democratic models of control over food production, distribution and consumption that do not function at the expense of others.

Good food for all depends on our resistance!

Countless people across the world feel the negative effects of the imperial mode of living. These people are not simply passive victims. Many resist and have created their own alternatives. They organise protests, develop alternative projects and stand as a countervailing force. The livelihoods of millions of peasants are already at risk and are in urgent need of support. This requires providing political and legal framework conditions that benefit these stakeholders. In many cases, this includes resistance against the impacts of European Union policies or the (infrastructure) projects of corporations and governments from countries of the Global North.[104] Approaches to stop global land grabbing built on voluntary commitments, for example, are not enough.[105] The situation requires legally binding commitments and agreements that bolster and implement human rights and environmental justice globally.[106] We will also need to debate (public) investment policies that are environmentally sustainable, comply with human rights standards and actually combat poverty and hunger.[107] Our focus must be the defence or reclaiming of democratic control over land, water and seed. These struggles are already underway. One important example is the Brazilian landless movement (MST), which is fighting for socially and environmentally just land reform.[108]

Live alternatives! Towards a democratic, solidarity-based and sustainable food system!

We cannot leave the socio-ecological transformation of our food system to others. Rather, we need to aim for a profound politicisation of our food system. Whether and how much meat we eat is a socially relevant issue with global repercussions. But the means of food production and the origin of our food are also crucial.

Cooperative and solidarity-based economic approaches based on ecological principles that encompass the entire value chain already exist. They highlight some of the elements a democratic system of food, one rooted in the needs and interests of *all* stakeholders, would have to include.[109]

One good example are *food councils*, where people from civil society, academia, business and politics decide on key questions concerning agricultural and food policy at the city and municipal levels. Then there are *food cooperatives* which bring members and producers together. Jointly they decide where to order which products, negotiate conditions and jointly purchase and distribute food items. *Community supported agriculture projects* go one step further. Farmers and consumers jointly decide what farmers produce. The financial means, risks and some areas of production are organised based on a concept of shared responsibility. Together with farmers that actively promote a different kind of agriculture, consumers are able to be a part of alternative modes of production and consumption. Such initiatives share the will to drive back the power of corporations, while awarding greater influence to new stakeholders and allowing farmers to regain their self-determination. This creates a countervailing force. The transformation of everyday living conditions and the democratisation of the agricultural and food system requires such processes of learning. We need spaces, time and a lot of energy to develop concrete and liveable alternatives and actively shape the future we hope for.

We want good food! Towards an agro-ecological transformation

A reorientation of our food system must be built on the recognition that we live on a finite planet. It also has to provide answers to today's social and environmental concerns. Here agroecology[110] (Glossary) plays a key role. The concept is based on closed regional cycles and networks, and, by ensuring peasants and land workers higher incomes, strengthens their collective self-determination and aims to maintain and make sustainable use of land, water and seed. Agroecology therefore counters the exploitation of nature and workers in the agricultural sector by providing an alternative based on

smallholder farming. This approach is increasingly gaining recognition as an answer to today's manifold crises.[111]

If we do not take action to reduce the pressure on smallholder farmers and to democratise the food system, our struggle against hunger and poverty will not bear fruit. We will never be able to ensure *good food for all* without peasants and without breaking up the current structures of power. Individually, the possible solutions presented here will not suffice to achieve the necessary transformation. But together their diversity and creativity could develop into a deep transformative power.

Do you agree?
Then get involved! More information is available on our website *www.attheexpenseofothers.org.*

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GLOSSARY

This glossary provides short explanations of some of the terms used in the text. However, the list is by no means exhaustive.

Agroecology describes a social movement, academic discipline and agricultural practice. They all share the notion of adapting agriculture to prevailing natural conditions, cycles and local needs. As an approach, agroecology combines traditional and local knowledge with modern scientific methods.

Biodiversity: biological diversity, diversity of species.

Biosphere: the earth's 'life zone', i.e. the totality of all organisms, living creatures and ecosystems on the planet. Often we consider terms such as 'nature' to be a realm entirely separated from humans, and words such as 'resources' implicitly view nature merely with regard to the benefits it provides to people. The term biosphere attempts to avoid these shortcomings.

Capitalism: under capitalism, the market principle largely defines the social fabric. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of a few, thus forcing the majority of people to work. Competition and profit orientation lead to an intensification of the global exploitation of people and nature.

Carbon Capture and Storage: the process of capturing and storing CO_2. The aim is to capture, liquefy and store underground the CO_2 from industrial processes — in spite of considerable risks and the fact that the technology still needs to be further developed.

Climate justice: a political concept that serves to highlight that the climate crisis does not affect all people equally. While the global upper and middle classes, in particular, contribute towards climate change, those who suffer its consequences most acutely tend to contribute the least to global warming.

CO_2: carbon dioxide.

Colonialism: the violent subjugation of foreign territories (in particular in the Americas, South and South East Asia as well as Africa) by European countries. The structures and relations of power that developed during this era persist until today (see also 'neocolonialism').

Commons: goods such as water, seed or software that are used by a community. It describes forms of property, organisation and production that are not based primarily on private or state ownership and competition, but on community ownership, co-operation and participation.

Data mining: the systematic statistical analysis of large amounts of data or 'big data'. The method aims to produce (economically exploitable) knowledge or predict future developments.

Ecological footprint: the space that would be required to maintain the lifestyle and living standard of one person (under the current conditions of production) for all of humanity permanently.

Externalisation: the process of outsourcing social and environmental impacts to other places, or leaving them for future generations to solve. For the imperial mode of living and production, this constitutes a fundamental process.

Food sovereignty: the right of all people to decide over the processes of food production, distribution and consumption. Key to this concept is the development of a socially just and sustainable form of agriculture.

Genetic engineering: the transfer of isolated DNA sequences across different species. Genetically modified seed has drawn criticism because of the way it affects biodiversity, the unknown impacts it has on health and the environment, its emphasis on monoculture production without reducing the need for pesticides and seed patenting instead of promoting free seed exchange.

Global North/Global South are not geographic terms and describe the distinct position of countries in the global political and economic order. The terms also highlight the different experiences with colonialism and exploitation that underpin today's order.

Globalisation: the age of globalisation describes the recent great increase in mobility of information, goods and people. While this mobility has existed for thousands of years, its intensity has increased sharply since the middle of the 20th century.

Good life for all: the realistic utopia of a peaceful and solidary society that includes all people living in harmony with the biosphere. Today, pessimism and fear rule, making the concept seem utopian. From the standpoint of civilization and technology, however, it is a realistic vision.

Indigenous peoples: the descendants of a region's original inhabitants. The term stresses the self-identification of culturally, socially and economically distinct groups in society that may even have their own language. Human rights specifically for indigenous peoples guarantee their right to self-determination and to land.

Industrial agriculture: aims for efficiency in production instead of caring for animals, the environment and people. Monoculture fields and mass production as well as the use of chemical fertilisers characterise the system. It promotes large agricultural corporations instead of smallholder farming. Often, instead of catering to regional demand, this form of agriculture is strongly export-oriented.

Industry 4.0: the Fourth Industrial Revolution after mechanisation, mass production and automation. It aims to 'intelligently connect' digital technology and the physical systems of production. The German government, industry associations, unions and researchers drive this process forward.

Institutions: long-term established organisations that shape society such as parties, unions, churches, international organisations or education establishments. Some definitions will also include institutions with unique characteristics, for example, companies, the (mass) media, as well as parliaments, courts and ministries.

Land grabbing: a colloquial term for the heightened economic interest in agricultural land and the global increase in large-scale land buy-ups. Frequently, while legal, they lack democratic control over land access.

Market-based: according to economic logic or the fundamental principles of the market, i.e. driven by prices, supply and demand, etc.

Modern slavery: all forms of forced labour, human trafficking and debt bondage that (illegally) continue even over 150 years after the abolition of slavery. Globally, an estimated 30 to 50 million people work in slave-like conditions, in particular in agriculture, households and care, as well as forced prostitution.

Neoclassical economics: mainstream economic school of thought taught at universities since the middle of the 20th century. The concept is based on assumptions such as profit and utility maximisation, perfect competition and complete information. It omits or only insufficiently considers aspects such as questions of distribution, differing degrees of power, ethical concerns and environmental issues.

Neocolonialism highlights the economic and politico-structural dependencies that persist in spite of the formal independence of former colonies. Certain trade agreements, for example, force countries of the Global South into the role of suppliers of cheap raw material.

Neoliberalism: an ideology and economic policy model that purportedly promotes a 'free market' and insists that it is best for society to limit political interference in business and the economy as far as possible. Examples of neoliberal policies include demands for liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation. Originally, the term described ordoliberalism, the theoretical basis of the social market economy.

Network effects: an effect particularly prominent on internet platforms and in digital services whereby the attractiveness of a particular site increases with the number of its users (as seen with Facebook, Airbnb, Wikipedia and others).

Precarious employment: a job is considered precarious when the worker earns below a certain threshold, is not sufficiently protected and their salary does not allow them to participate fully in society. Gainful employment is also deemed precarious when it stops being meaningful, lacks social recognition and offers people no security to plan for their futures.[1]

Privatisation: the transfer of community property (owned, for example, by the state, communities or indigenous peoples) into private hands (owned, for example, by individuals, companies or corporations).

Racism: a balance of power that exists within society globally that sees people differentiated and hierarchized based on physical and/or cultural attributes and/or their origin or nationality. Being 'white' and 'Western' is judged to be superior to being 'black/non-white' and 'non-Western'.[2]

Re-feudalisation: the global trend towards the unequal distribution of money and power that resembles feudal medieval societies in which only a tiny elite enjoyed a comparatively high standard of living.

Rebound effect: the phenomenon of absolute energy and resource consumption not dropping in spite of efficiency gains in production, management and logistics. When productive efficiency increases, this leads to goods becoming cheaper, potentially causing consumption of that good to increase.

Sharing economy: a broad term for a growing economic sector that emphasises the shared use of goods or services (either on or offline). For successful companies in this sector, profits and not sharing are the main goal.

Sinks: parts of ecosystems that people use as deposits, for example, the atmosphere, seas or the soil under landfills.

Socialisation institutions: the reciprocal and open process, which shapes people and turns them into members of a society that is, in turn, shaped by its people, is called *socialisation*. In many societies, this process begins in families and schools, which would in this case be *institutions of socialisation*.

Transformation, socio-ecological: a fundamental transformation of political and economic systems away from fossil fuels and the growth logic and towards an economy that ensures a decent life for all. This goes deeper than a reform, yet is less abrupt than a revolution.

Transnational consumer class: includes the global middle and upper classes that follow a consumption-oriented lifestyle. When considering this concept, it is important to remember that discriminating structures such as racism and sexism persist.

Transnational corporations: since the end of the 20th century, the largest and most profitable companies are no longer bound to a particular country. Rather, they act as a network and secure advantages in production (cheap labour and resources or lower taxes) on a global scale across numerous countries.

Virtual emissions: emissions produced in third countries that are 'imported' by importing goods from these countries for further processing or consumption. Whereas production-related emissions in the Global North have stagnated or even declined, the imported emissions from the Global South are rapidly increasing.

White and black do not describe the colour of a person's skin but political and social constructs that underpin both discrimination and privilege in our racist societies. The term 'white' is mentioned here explicitly to underline its dominant position, which otherwise often goes unmentioned.[3]

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THE PROJECT AND THE AUTHORS

The I.L.A. Werkstatt, a project organised by the non-profit association Common Future e.V., began on 1 April 2016 and ended on 31 May 2017 under the leadership of Dr. Thomas Kopp.
The I.L.A. Werkstatt is an interdisciplinary collective of 15 young researchers and activists. We jointly developed this text over the course of a year. As a group, we hold university degrees in economics, development and agricultural economics, political science, political economy, international relations, pedagogy, environmental sciences, sustainability studies, history and law. In addition to participating in the I.L.A. Kollektiv, we study and work at universities, in non-governmental organisations, social movements as well as in and alongside trade unions. We are part of a diverse set of emancipatory movements within the broader field of global justice. This text aims to make the concept of the imperial mode of living accessible to a wider public and contribute towards a community-oriented mode of production and living.

If you have questions regarding content, feedback on specific chapters or would like to request a speaker or arrange a workshop with us, any of the members listed below would be happy to help. Please direct your queries to ila_info@riseup.net.
Further information is available at: www.aufkostenanderer.org.

Introduction:
Samuel Decker, Hannah Engelmann, Magdalena Heuwieser, Thomas Kopp, Anne Siemons

Historical overview:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Ia Eradze, Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Digitalisation:
Anil Shah, Lukas Wolfinger

Care:
Carla Noever Castelos, Anne Siemons

Money and finance:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Christoph Podstawa

Education and knowledge:
Hannah Engelmann, Ia Eradze, Maja Hoffmann

Food and agriculture:
Franziskus Forster, Stella Haller, Therese Wenzel

Mobility:
Maximilian Becker, Magdalena Heuwieser

Summary and outlook:
Samuel Decker, Jannis Eicker, Franziskus Forster, Magdalena Heuwieser, Maja Hoffmann, Thomas Kopp, Carla Noever Castelos, Anil Shah, Anne Siemons

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Today it feels like everybody is talking about the problems and crises of our times: the climate and resource crisis, Greece's permanent socio-political crisis or the degrading exploitative practices of the textile industry. Many are aware of the issues, yet little seems to change. Why is this? The concept of the imperial mode of living explains why, in spite of increasing injustices, no long-term alternatives have managed to succeed and a socio-ecological transformation remains out of sight.

This text introduces the concept of an imperial mode of living and explains how our current mode of production and living is putting both people and the natural world under strain. We shine a spotlight on various areas of our daily lives, including food, mobility and digitalisation. We also look at socio-ecological alternatives and approaches to establish a good life for everyone – not just a few.

The non-profit association ***Common Future e. V.*** from Göttingen is active in a number of projects focussing on global justice and socio-ecological business approaches. From April 2016 to May 2017, the association organised the I.L.A. Werkstatt (Imperiale Lebensweisen – Ausbeutungsstrukturen im 21. Jahrhundert/ Imperial Modes of Living – Structures of Exploitation in the 21st Century). Out of this was borne the interdisciplinary I.L.A. Kollektiv, consisting of 17 young researchers and activists. Their goal: dedicating a whole year to the scientific study of the imperial mode of living and bringing their results to a wider audience.

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