

## IEPS THESIS REVIEW

Name:	Sam Wilhelm-Ross				
Thesis title:	The WTO, Agribusiness, and The Third Food Regime				
Review:	(BA/MA) & (Opponent/Advisor)				
<b>Scale: 5 - excellent, 4 - good, 3 - satisfactory, 2 - poor, 1 - very poor</b>					
	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ARGUMENT:</b>					
Clearly defined research question	X				No clearly defined research question
Answers research question		X			Does not answer research question
Well structured		X			Badly structured
Shows theoretical awareness		X			Shows no theoretical awareness
Conceptual clarity		X			Conceptual confusion
Empirically appropriate & robust			X		Full of empirical errors
Logical and coherent		X			Illogical and incoherent
Analytical			X		Descriptive
Critical			X		Uncritical
Shows independent thought		X			Does not show independent thought
<b>SOURCES &amp; USAGE:</b>					
Evidence of reading/research	X				No evidence of reading/research
Effective use of sources/data		X			Ineffective use of sources/data
<b>WRITING STYLE:</b>					
Clear	X				Obscure
Good punctuation	X				Poor punctuation
Grammatically correct		X			Grammatically incorrect
<b>PRESENTATION:</b>					
Appropriate length	X				Too long/short
Good referencing	X				Poor/inconsistent referencing
Good spelling	X				Poor spelling
Good bibliography	X				Poor bibliography

This thesis explored the WTO's role in the third food regime and argues that the organization is at fault for agribusiness' hegemony in the current food system paradigm. Additionally, it asserts that this regime/agribusiness fosters great inequity and inefficiency in terms of food security and food sovereignty, both in the developed and developing world.

To support these claims, Ross utilizes food regime theory, historical perspectives and case studies. The introduction of the thesis brings the argument to the forefront and clearly explains how the author will develop his claims. The theoretical background and framework is presented in a concise and coherent way, showing the author's knowledge and familiarity with the topic and history. The clear problematic trends of agribusiness and hypocrisy between aim and reality for the WTO, AoA and other such policies are also well described and supported. Overall, Ross has written a very interesting paper that addresses the main actors at fault for the current food situation, which encourages food dumping and unfair trade practices, which are founded on profit-motives by the global North.

However, the subsequent contentions about the WTO sometimes lack the necessary connections to the problems explored in the work. For example, Ross cites the WTO as an enabler of subsidies in the global North and as a puppet organization pushing agribusiness agendas throughout the world. While in many ways this may be true, through out the thesis the evils of agribusiness are not tied tight enough to the WTO itself. Instead the organization is mentioned as an aside, as a "passive observer" allowing these things to happen or as the creator of a system that allows agribusiness to act in such ways. This is somewhat simplified when taking the political and economic complications, and globalization as a whole, into account. It seems more than WTO is responsible for allowing agribusiness to have such pull and power. All of the pieces are there in the work, but I would have liked to see them developed in more depth.

Additionally, I would have liked to see "The Subsidy Debate" and "How Agribusiness Influences Policy" sections expanded. Ross presents a good case as to why subsidies for the North only are problematic and as to how agribusiness is impacting policy, but not taking into account the real reasoning behind this and perhaps the problems with international organizations overall (which is something that also could help the point made previously). Not having proper faculties to enforce sanctions for non-compliance is a common problem with international organizations, and this is something - evaluating organizations such as the WTO as a whole - that could have strengthened the piece.

Ross argues that the WTO should stay away from food but could continue work with other commodities. This makes the reader want to know more about the WTO and any positive impacts it has had with other commodities and then this could be contrasted to food to show why, as said, "This paper falls somewhere in between the second and third critique of the WTO. There might be a role for the WTO to play in handling other commodities, but at this point they should have no further role in agriculture."

The main weakness of the thesis is that as a reader, I simply want to know more. Ross offers a good review of the current information out there and a strong analysis and opinion of it. His aims of the piece are reasonably specified, but, the scope that is needed to tackle such a big issue may have been a bit ambitious for such a study of this length.

The work attempts to deal with the entire food regime and therefore, the entire world. The arguments could be stronger if a more limited area was the central research point/focus and conclusions from direct evidence on a smaller scale could act as illustrative projections for what is happening in other parts of the world as well. As is, there are a lot of general claims and assertions made, but followed with very general examples.

The second part of the thesis presents case studies as evidence to the theory and analysis. This part could be longer. The work concentrates primarily on general trends (again I think this is linked to the great scope of the paper – the whole world), which could be expanded with concrete stories and evidence.

Likewise, some things are mentioned, but never developed (for example, the connection between oil/fuel and food, and the role of women in agriculture in the developing world, poor dietary habits being caused by GMOs and big agribusinesses).

Ross utilized secondary sources very well. However, I would like to see more introductions of the sources. Names are mentioned and attributions made without always explaining who the name is and why their findings are valid and important. What are the cutting edge academics, policy experts and activists saying?

The thesis has some weaknesses as indicated above. However, the work is well written and the author is clearly fluent in the dialogue on this topic. Because of its expansive coverage of issues, the thesis brings several valid findings regarding the role of the WTO and the shortcomings of the current corporate based food regime.

Ross does not shy away from showing his own opinions and thinking on the topic – by focusing on the WTO and its faults and culpability in the current regime, he provides a different angle in which to evaluate how things can change – something that is hard to do within this topic, which has a great amount of discourse already. Therefore the main question is how can it be changed, and this thesis does address this, although more alternatives could have been developed.

## QUESTIONS

1. Do you think there are any safeguards to stop profit-driven interest for food? Do you think it is possible for food to not be viewed as a commodity? Please explain.
2. You mention the second Green Revolution, which there is some optimism about. Do you think this is really different from the first? Why is the Gates Foundation

different? Does the second Green Revolution not risk the same problems? Do you think agro-ecology will take hold on the developed/developing world?

3. As shown through your extensive literature review throughout the thesis, it is clear that there are alternatives, and those involved in the food system are aware but there is no political will to change the system. What do you think would need to happen to change this? Do you think that the downfall of oil will be what is needed to cause a change? Please explain.

4. It is true that trade is a necessity in today's world, and as you mention, even helpful in terms of communities accessing food that they cannot produce in the local environment. However, it is also socially and environmentally more sustainable to develop a local community agriculture system. How do you see these two things being reconciled in the developing world?

5. If the WTO will not change, what are other options? Are the ideas of La Via Capesina the way forward? Are there other alternatives that are better?

FINAL GRADE

B+, Very good

Hrishabh Sandilya