

## Oceanic Temporalities and Terraqueous Work

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The emergence of Capitalism is seaborne. The global ocean as a trade route, geopolitical and strategic place, a frontier for marine resource extraction played a crucial role in the advent of capitalism. Still, the relationship between ocean and capitalism is not a simple one-way story.

It is also destruction that accompanies the reproduction of capitalism in its interaction with the sea as a historically transformative force on its own. Ocean currents, tides, weather patterns, or material characteristics such as salinity, as well as geographical features such as reefs produce risks, and obstacles for capitalist accumulation. Despite the power and logic of commodity exchange, capitalism regularly confronts geophysical barriers to its own self-expansion, which in the case of the sea are especially challenging.

Furthermore, not only on the spatial, but also on the temporal level we see mutual interaction. Capitalist time is confronted by seasonal cycles, temporalities of non-human oceanic species, while similarly being the basis for long-range extraction. By the same token, capitalism has found in the sea a vital conduit for long-distance trade, a route for labor migration, and the place from which to embark on imperial expansion. For capital, the sea thus presents both risks and opportunities. This contribution explores this complex relationship by focusing on terraqueous work and the territorialization of the ocean as one of the most crucial turning points in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

State sovereignty over the ocean as a strategic, geopolitical, and economic resource became increasingly important among imperial scramble over the oceans. It did not end after the establishment of nation states and the enactment of the international law of the sea in 1982, granting not least decolonizing states new or larger territories. By terraqueous work I mean labor that is conducted both on land and sea while using the oceans as an extraction frontier. By so doing I aim at overcoming a terrestrial bias in historiography without creating an oceanic one. We will see how the ocean and the sea, as well as the air space reinforced each other, when it comes to extraction regimes of both horizontal and vertical expansion.

The “maritime factor” of capitalism has been convincingly tied to the emergence of merchant and industrial capitalism, and surplus accumulation through ever improving oceanic extraction regimes. As another feature we can see how distance and time are overcome through technological innovation and logistics, while exploiting seafarers and workers on a global labor market is indispensable.

Concretely, we will explore three different forms of terraqueous work. In all three cases we will zoom in on the role of labor migration and imperialism. The guiding questions are: Does it make

sense to frame them as transimperial capitalism? Are there specific patterns of (migrant) labor and inequalities? In what way differ the ecological regimes in these cases? How do they evolve chronologically? Are there underlying (global) conditionalities?

First, we will look at the use of marine fertilizer for land agriculture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. This labor is embedded in an ecological cycle. Nitrates gained from fish, or guano, the shit of birds, basically digested fish, are collected and transformed into fertilizer that nurtures the soil of land-based agriculture. While today fish fertilizer stands for so called sustainable bio-chemical cycles, it has been closely tied to capitalist extraction regimes, imperial expansion and ecological devastation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Second, we will focus on seafood canneries and its commodification frontier in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The capitalization of the sea looks very different in this form of terraqueous work than in the first case. Instead of ecological cycles, we address how bio-geographies of marine species impact on extraction regimes and state-sovereignty. This type of work is deeply embedded in the process of what has been named the “great acceleration”. Finally, we look into aquaculture practices transcending ocean - land borders in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. We will see that this is a form of blue-green capitalism, a term coined by Helmut Helmreich. In the process of aquaculture a multispecies border-crossing is key. Fish get transplanted from waters over land or air to be domesticated by humans in different oceans. At the same time, aquaculture aims at overcoming the temporalities and obstacles caused by unpredictable or fluctuating migration of fish across various states’ oceanic territories. The migrating fish is domesticated and surplus accumulation much more calculable within coastal waters of a nation state. Risks are reduced, opportunities improved.

I will conclude, reflecting on how useful the framework of terraqueous work is for future studies.