Dr. Jason W. Moore
Fernand Braudel Center and
Department of Sociology
Binghamton University, NY
www.jasonwmoore.com

About the Talk
It is now widely understood that the “end of cheap food” has arrived. But just what does this mean for the ongoing crisis of neoliberalism, and for the future of capitalism? Cheap food has been a recurrent condition necessary for the revival of accumulation in successive eras of capitalism. Neoliberalism has been no exception. The cheapest food in world history was realized after the crises of the 1970s. Cheap food, in concert with strategies that re-stabilized cheap energy, raw materials, and labor, was decisive to the restoration of profitability in the early 1980s. The “endless” commodity boom that commenced in 2003, initially peaking in 2008 with new highs in food prices reached during 2011-12, signals the serious erosion of these “Four Cheaps.” Any sustained recovery of world accumulation will need to find a way to restore cheap food, an increasingly difficult proposition given biophysical and biospheric shifts (climate change, herbicide resistance), proliferating challenges to “industrial agriculture” (food sovereignty), and the movement of finance capital into “soft” commodity markets such food. The history of capitalism is replete with instances when seemingly insuperable obstacles to accumulation have been transcended. Have conditions changed today? What remains to be seen is whether the present era of global turbulence is exclusively a tipping point of neoliberalism, or if the exhaustion of the cheap food – and the rest of the Four Cheaps (labor, energy, raw materials) – also signals the exhaustion of capitalism’s longue durée regime of “cheap ecology.”

About the Speaker