

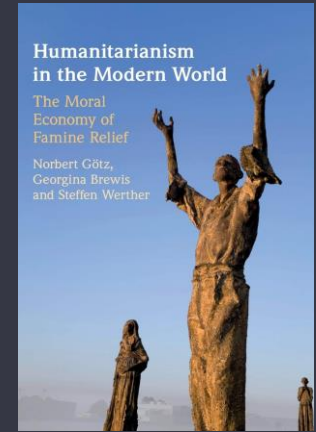
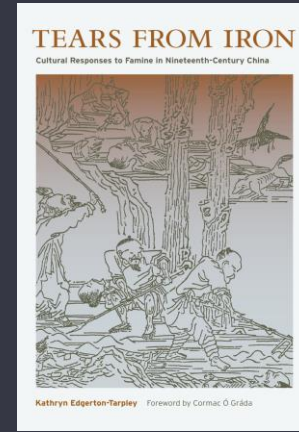
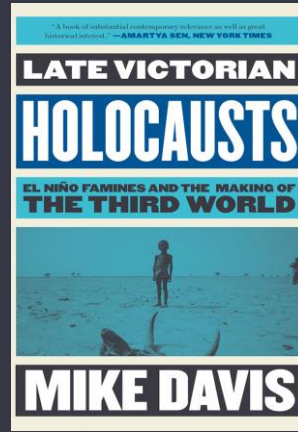
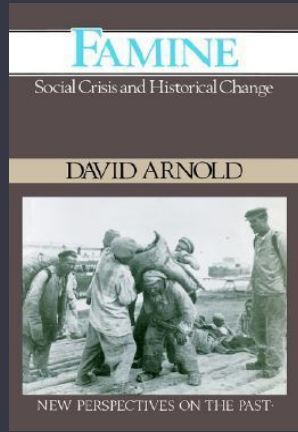
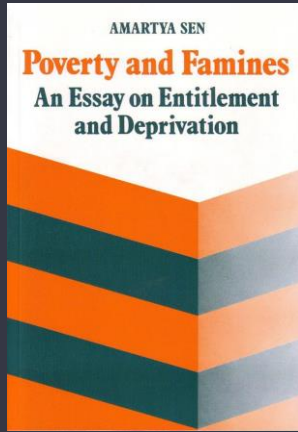
# Learning from the past?

*British international famine relief in comparative perspective, 1873-1879*

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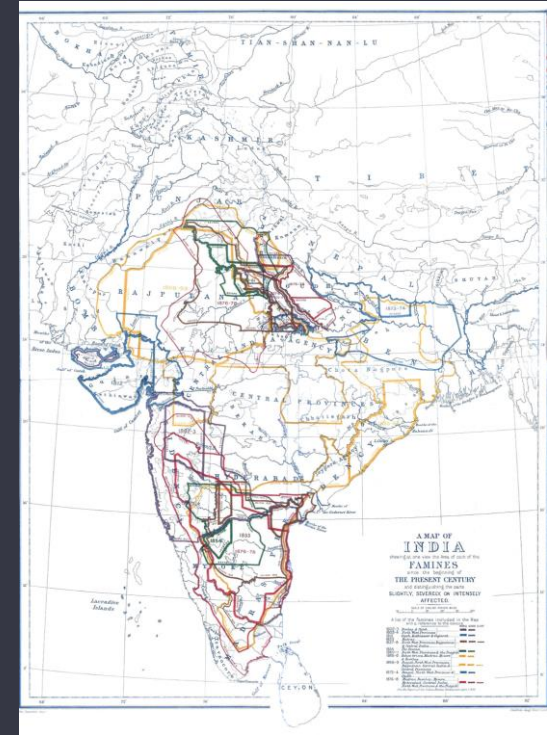
# What can a historical perspective bring to understandings of global food security?



1. **Contextualising** the current global food crisis
2. **Holistic analysis** of humans' relationships to different elements of food systems
  - a. Understanding complex problems in ecological, economic, social, cultural, nutritional, psychological, racial, gendered, and scientific terms, etc.

# Aim + Argument

- Aim: Using a **comparative** approach to emphasise the **role of contingency** in approaching humanitarianism and food security
  - CLUSTER I, 1873-1875:
    - Bengal (1873-1874)
    - Asia Minor (1873-1875)
  - CLUSTER II, 1876-79 (El-Niño Southern Oscillation [ENSO]):
    - Madras (1876-1878)
    - Shanxi ('The Incredible Famine') (1876-1879)
- Perceptions of famine **causation** influence famine relief methods

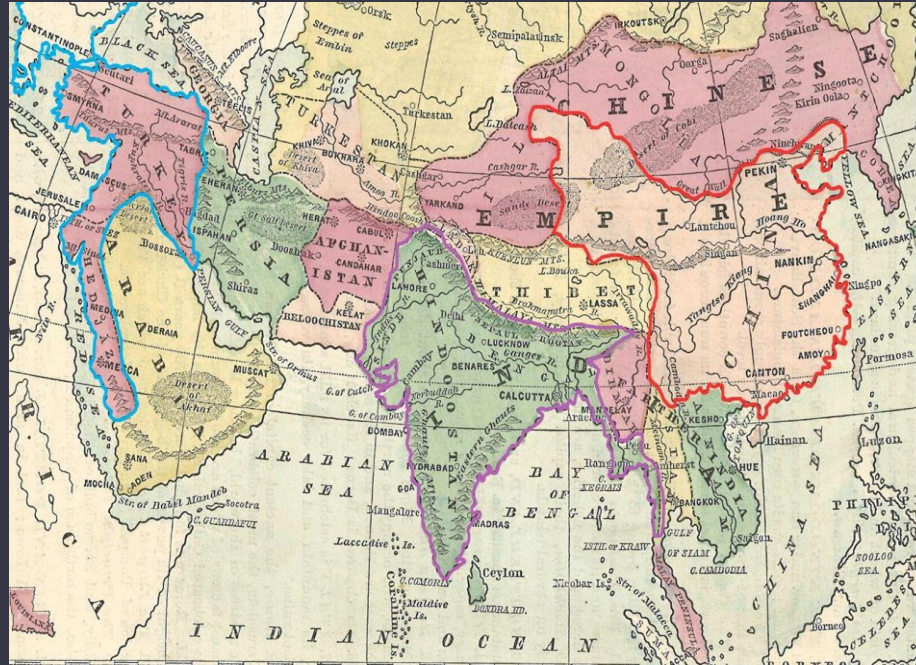
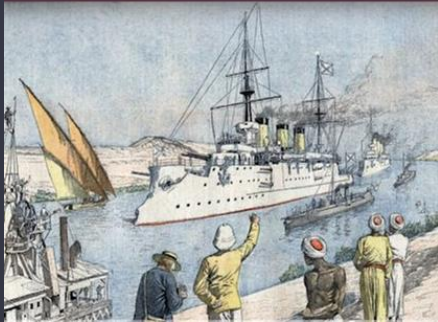


# 1. Context of the 1870s famines

## THE FIRST AGE OF INDUSTRIAL GLOBALIZATION

An International History  
1815-1918

Maartje Abbenhuis  
& Gordon Morrell



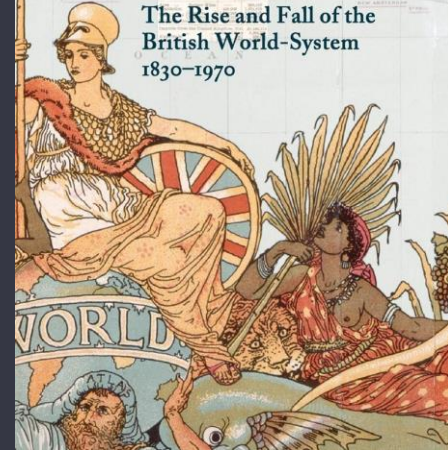
Map key, circa 1870s:

- Ottoman Empire
- India
- Qing China

JOHN DARWIN

## The EMPIRE PROJECT

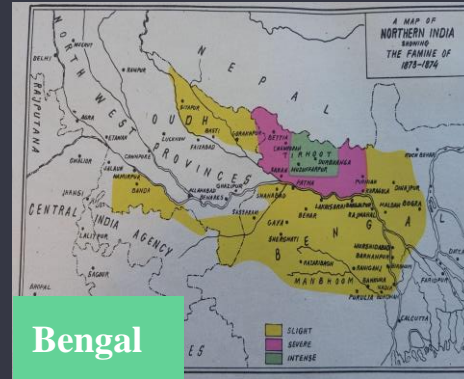
The Rise and Fall of the  
British World-System  
1830-1970



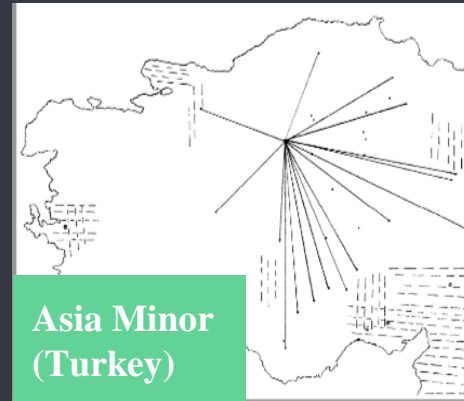
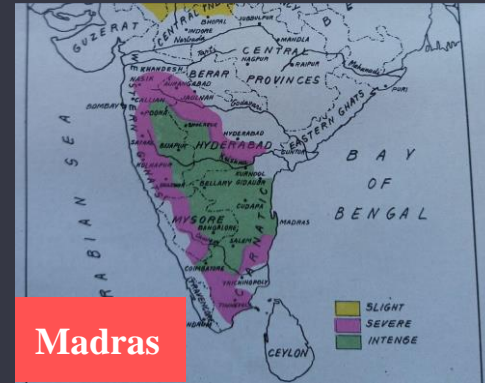
# Major causes of peasant immiseration in India, China, and the Ottoman Empire:

- Aggressive Anglo-European imperial expansion
- Oppressive land taxes
- Exploitation of natural resources (e.g. deforestation, mining, canal building)
- Deficient transport and communications
- Coercive market integration
- Forced shift from subsistence farming to cash crop agriculture
- Agricultural debt spirals
- Dissolution of communal aid structures in favour of centralised state relief

1873-1875



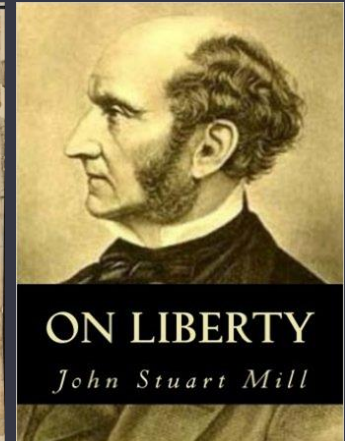
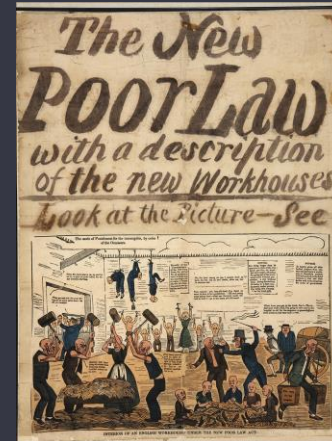
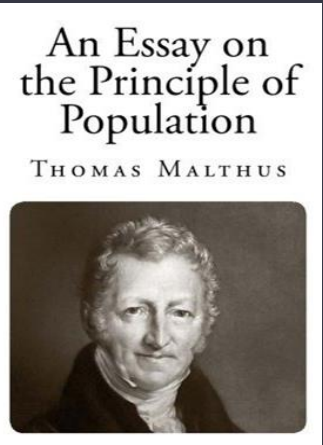
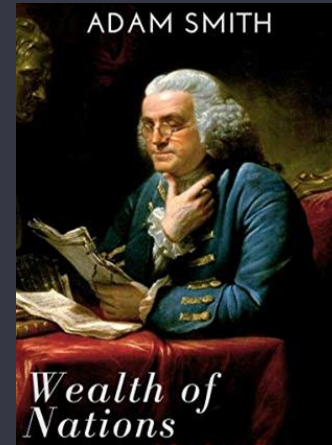
1876-1879



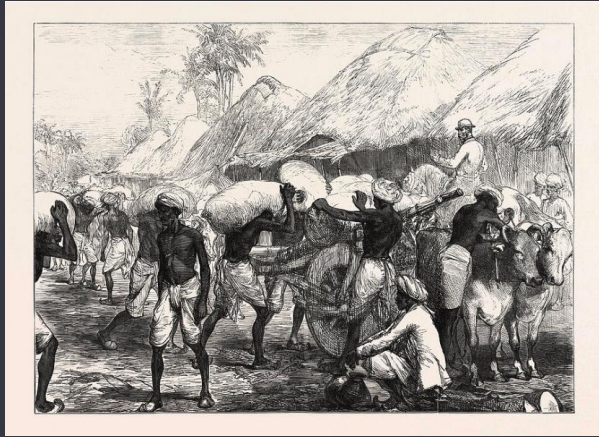
## 1. Context of the 1870s famines (2)

# 2. Understandings of Famine's Causes

- 1870s: **no single way of thinking about famine**
  - Culturally specific and inflected by particular world views and expertise
- **BUT, in broad terms, famine was understood as in terms of a lack of 'civilisation'**  
= **racist + paternalistic**
  - So-called 'cultural backwardness'
  - Hunger as **discipline**
  - **Lack of 'material progress'**, e.g. market integration and infrastructure



# 3. Prescribing Famine Relief: India



- Famine relief responded to famines in terms of remedying ‘a lack of civilisation’
  - Technological and market **infrastructure**
  - Social reform and **discipline**
  - **Missionary relief** encouraging religious conversion
- **BENGAL = exceptional: large-scale state intervention**
  - State-run famine relief works on public utilities; gratuitous grain dole; **state importation of grain**; agricultural loans
- **MADRAS = mass mortality due to state non-intervention and emphasis on maximum economy**
  - **Temple Ration**: reduction of daily relief ration from 2500 calories to 1627 calories (both on hard manual labour)

# 4. Prescribing Famine Relief: Ottoman + Qing Empires

- Famine relief responded to famines in terms of remedying ‘a lack of civilisation’
- Protestant missionaries (and expatriates) distributed relief, due to Britain’s lack of jurisdiction
  - Could not set up famine relief works
  - Relied on cash/grain doles + social services
  - Criticism of Ottoman + Qing state famine relief





# Conclusions

- ☑ Our subjective **understandings of famine's causes directly influence our responses** to it
- ☑ Famine relief, no matter how well-intended, always occurs in a historical context of **unequal power relations**
- ☑ Food insecurity cannot be confined within disciplinary boundaries
  - ☑ Complex problems require similarly **complex and interdisciplinary responses**

**THANK  
YOU!**

*Questions  
welcome*