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Speaking Food: A Discourse Analytic Study of Food Security

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Abstract

Since its first articulation in official discourse in 1974, 'food security' has become the primary cognitive lens through which the prevalence and complexity of global hunger are viewed. This study traces a genealogy of 'food security' through a series of inter-governmental texts and academic studies as a means to historicize and relativize contemporary understandings of the term. A discourse analytic approach serves to deconstruct prescribed definitions and interrogates the knowledge/power relations of 'food security' as a rationalising technology of global liberal governance. The authority of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to 'speak food' is examined in light of changing conceptions of what food security 'is' and how best it should be 'achieved'. The study embodies a critique of traditional positivist approaches to the study of food security, and to the study of social science more generally. It shows how changing discursive technocracies produce new regimes of truth which replace the need for political decision with the dictates of techno-scientific knowledge and the governmental rationality of risk management.

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List of Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FIVIMS	Food Insecurity Vulnerability Information Mapping System
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IUWFS	International Undertaking on World Food Security
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
UN	United Nations
WFC	World Food Council
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction to Discourse Analysis

> The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things (Wittgenstein, 1953: par. 122).

> When language invaded the universal problematic…everything became discourse – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely (Derrida, 1976: 280).

Taken together, the above quotes encapsulate the epistemological underpinning and central problematic of the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, the effect of which is radically transforming the object of study in all the so-called social sciences.[1] The quote from Wittgenstein establishes the central importance of representation to our understanding of the world around us; representations (linguistic, imagery) constitute the very reality we seek to understand, theorize and govern; they are not secondary mirror-images (or partially skewed reflections), but rather primary images-themselves. This is the central epistemological tenet which informs the second quote, in which Derrida points to the impossibility of the notion of a truly perspicuous representation of anything, given the intrinsically regressive signifier-signified relationship. The signified, according to Derrida, always already functions as a signifier, creating the endless 'play of signifying references that constitute language'

[1] Given its embedded critique of mainstream positivist approaches to social science and its denial that a scientific method can legitimately be employed to study and explain the social, the linguistic turn contests the propriety of the term 'social science' itself.

(1976: 7). So while Wittgenstein shows us how our understanding of the world is constructed through the meanings expressed by language, Derrida destabilises the assumption that language can convey a single meaning, prior to the process of interpretation.

This approach represents an inversion of the commonsensical worldview which has dominated the study of social science for centuries. That perspective draws on popular empiricist philosophies (such as those in Locke and Hobbes) and employs a strict epistemic realism, whereby material objects exist in the world independent of our ideas and beliefs about them. The goal of scientific enquiry is to enable access to the external world with increasing accuracy, while language is a neutral medium we use to name the objects which science discovers. Philosophy provides the battleground on which disputes over meanings of abstract terms, those which science cannot 'find' in the material world, are played out. Wittgenstein's later reflections on philosophy initiated an ongoing critique of this traditional worldview and shifted the focus of attention onto language itself. Language is no longer conceived as a naming-process, but rather as constitutive of the very world it speaks.

This paradigm shift has engendered a range of new approaches to the study of International Relations, all of which espouse a common interest in the role of discourse. In his seminal work on the concept and functionality of discourse, David Howarth describes the proliferating 'discourse about discourse' which has accompanied the growing prominence and widening scope of its deployment (2000: 2). Howarth recognises the diversity of meaning that the concept of discourse has been accorded by scholars who employ starkly contrasting epistemological

assumptions. Realist accounts of discourse, for example, stress the underlying 'material resources which make discourses possible' (Howarth, 2000: 3), an approach favoured by Marxist accounts of discourses as ideological systems of meaning which serve to naturalise and depoliticise uneven distributions of power and capital (see Althusser, 1969, 1971). Not dissimilarly, positivists and empiricists understand discourses as cognitive frames, deliberately employed by powerful groups to engender a specific world view which legitimates certain courses of action (Howarth, 2000: 3). While it is not the object of this chapter to elucidate the commonalities and discrepancies between nuanced conceptions of discourse functionality, the understanding of discourse employed throughout the forthcoming analysis must be distanced from any realist, positivist or empiricist view. The discourse analysis employed here follows post-structuralist currents of thought associated with the work of Derrida and Foucault, which view discourses as constitutive of social orders and symbolic systems; the task of the discourse analyst is to interrogate their historical and political constructions and functions (Howarth, 2000: 5).

Post-structuralist discourse analysis adopts a view of politics that is acutely sensitive to textuality (Shapiro, 1989). To regard the world of international relations textually 'is to inquire into the style of its scripting, to reveal the way it has been mediated by historically specific scripts governing the interpretations through which it has emerged'; a focus on texts draws attention to the space in global politics 'in which the boundaries for constituting meaning and value are constructed (Shapiro, 1989: 12). Naturally, to appreciate the functionalities of texts it is necessary to pay special attention to language – its grammars, metaphors and narratives - but the notion of discourse denotes a wider application than focus on language alone. The concept of

discourse encourages a more politicised mode of analysis, in which the text becomes the means of upholding relations of power and maintaining the authority to control the knowledge of which it speaks. The Foucauldian notion of 'governmentality' expresses the idea that any claim to knowledge or truth is necessarily a power claim; what is interesting about all 'true' representations is not their correspondence with something (or lack thereof), but rather the range of possible representations within which they are received (Foucault, 1972). Shapiro offers a concise articulation of this point:

> When something is recognised as a representational *practice* rather than an authoritative description, it can be treated as contentious. It is simply the case that most traditional forms of political analysis help to naturalize reigning interpretations rather than registering their meaning- and value-constituting effects (Shapiro, 1989: 20, emphasis in original).

Discourse theorizing is thus committed to politicising, historicising and deconstructing texts, broadly conceived to incorporate not just language in written documents, but any signs which produce meaning or value such as images, verbal reports, statistical data, artwork, buildings, and other artefacts (see Fairclough, 1995; Taylor et al., 1996). An ongoing debate resides amongst discourse theorists and their critics concerning the need for strict methodological criteria in discourse research (see Milliken, 1999). While some argue that the search for strict methodologies, theories and laws is antithetical to the post-positivist perspective adopted by discourse analysts (see Der Derian, 1989), others cite the lack of clear and consistent research designs as an insurmountable

weakness of discourse analyses (see Parker & Burman, 1993). It is my belief that this latter position misunderstands the nature of discourse analysis which, in Milliken's words, should be conceived as:

> A post-positivist project that is critically self-aware of the closures imposed by research programmes and the modes of analysis which scholars routinely use in their work and treat as unproblematic (Milliken, 1999: 227).

Furthermore, the criticism that discourse analyses lack clear methodologies is itself highly questionable, given the shared 'argumentation format' which unites scholars of the discourse community by means of certain theoretical commitments common to them all (Milliken, 1999: 228). Milliken's summation and analysis of three core commitments provides a useful framework for undertaking discourse analysis and is the clearest account I have found within the limited literature which focuses on appropriate methods and criteria for discourse study (for others, see Fairclough, 1989; Howarth, 2000; Wood & Kroger, 2000). These three theoretical commitments – to a constructivist understanding of meaning, to the productive (or reproductive) capacity of discourses, and to their inherent instability and historical contingency – underpin the methodological approach adopted in this analysis, which is described in more detail in a subsequent chapter.

The Food and Agriculture Organization and Food Security

Established in 1945, the FAO was the first specialised agency to be created by the United Nations at the end of the Second World War (Shaw, 2007: x). The primary function of the organization, as defined in its original constitution, is to 'collect, analyze, interpret, and disseminate information relating to nutrition, food and agriculture' (FAO, 1945). The current FAO website describes the organization as a 'knowledge network' which uses 'the expertise of our staff… to collect, analyse and disseminate data that aid development' (FAO, ca. 2009). While these two descriptions appear relatively consistent, the two aspects where they differ are informative of the organization's changing conception of its role. Firstly, the absence of the word 'interpret' in the current definition and the replacement of 'information' with 'data' serve to depoliticise the process of analysis which is carried out on the collected 'data'; data 'analysis' becomes an unproblematic, transparent venture which negates the need for any further interpretation of 'information'. This apparently simple shift hints at a technocratic discourse which replaces political interpretation with the certainty of expert knowledge acquisition. Secondly, the 'information' is no longer neutral in its relation to nutrition, food and agriculture; its purpose now is to 'aid development'. This suggests a paradigm shift in the global role of the FAO, which, contrary to its common contemporary conception (and indeed that of the entire United Nations system), has not always used the development discourse to legitimise its function. This serves as an important reminder that the emancipatory, humanitarian guise now assumed by the United Nations and its specialised agencies is not constitutive of their founding purpose. It also indicates that the knowledge of the 'development' expert will be privileged over that of others.

The FAO is the largest of three surviving UN organizations whose mandates specifically concentrate on food issues (Shaw, 2007). Of the other two, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), established in 1977, serves 'to finance agricultural development projects primarily for food production in the developing countries' (IFAD, ca. 2009), while the World Food Programme (WFP), established in 1960, is responsible for 'responding to emergencies' (WFP, ca. 2009); it is concerned with 'food aid for development and secondarily with combating hunger in famine situations' (Uvin, 1994: 74). The World Food Council (WFC) served as a non-operational discussion forum for food and agricultural policy issues until it was officially suspended in 1993, when its functions were absorbed by the FAO (FAO, ca. 2009). As such, the FAO is the only organization whose primary mandate includes the mapping and eradication of world hunger (Uvin, 1994: 74).

As a 'knowledge organization', the FAO accords central importance to its publications, producing more than 300 titles per year (FAO, ca. 2009). These publications 'present comprehensive and objective information and analysis on the current global state of food and agriculture' (FAO, ca. 2009). As the sheer volume of publications suggests, the 'global state of food and agriculture' is a complex and multifaceted signifier. The FAO's flagship annual publication, *The State of Food and Agriculture*, is the main location where the referents of this signifier are articulated, described and (temporarily) fixed. Given the theoretical commitments employed in this analysis (as discussed in the previous chapter), the 'global state' should not be thought to signify something which actually exists independent of our conception of it; instead, how the 'global state' is described by the most powerful knowledge-

brokers (in this case the FAO) is constitutive of its actual existence. The FAO, therefore, does not describe *the* 'global state', but rather constructs an official version of it. The title 'The State of Food and Agriculture' is itself a power-claim of considerable reach. Recalling the quote from Shapiro in the previous chapter, when we understand 'global state' as a representational practice rather than an authoritative description, it becomes contentious and contestable. The FAO's claim to comprehensiveness and objectivity belies the representational nature of its work.

There is by now a broad consensus that discourse analysis has proven 'a useful theoretical framework for understanding the social production of organizational and interorganizational phenomena' (Phillips et al., 2004: 636; see also Grant et al., 1998). In their study 'Discourse and Institutions', Phillips et al. develop a discursive model of institutionalisation based on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach (see Fairclough, 1992; 1995). According to Fairclough, discourse constructs specific conventions by ruling in or disallowing certain ways of thinking and acting:

> A social institution is an apparatus of verbal interaction or an 'order of discourse'. . . It is, I suggest, necessary to see the institution as simultaneously facilitating and constraining the social action of its members: it provides them with a frame for action, without which they could not act, but it thereby constrains them to act within that frame (Fairclough, 1995: 38, quoted in Phillips et al, 2004: 638).

From this perspective the FAO can be conceived as being primarily constructed through the production and dissemination of its texts, rather than directly through its

'actions'. The annual publication of *The State of Food and Agriculture* (SOFA) and the more recent annually published *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* (SOFI) are the primary texts where social categories and norms relating to what has been called the 'global food regime' are produced (on the concept of food regimes see Friedmann, 1987; McMichael, 2009). Using an analytic process which politicises, historicises and deconstructs the categories and norms found in contemporary editions of these texts it becomes possible to contest and destabilise their 'factual' content.

Since the 1970s, the concept of 'food security' has been the primary lens through which the ongoing prevalence and inherent complexity of global hunger has been viewed. The adoption of the term at the FAO-sanctioned World Food Conference in 1974 has led to a burgeoning literature on the subject, most of which takes 'food security' as an unproblematic starting point from which to address the persistence of so-called 'food insecurity' (see Gilmore & Huddleston, 1983; Maxwell, 1990; 1991; Devereux & Maxwell, 2001). A common activity pursued by academics specialising in food security is to debate the appropriate definition of the term; a study undertaken by the Institute of Development Studies cites over 200 competing definitions (Smith et al., 1992). This pervasive predilection for empirical clarity is symptomatic of traditional positivist epistemologies and constrains a more far-sighted understanding of the power functions of 'food security' itself, a conceptual construct now accorded considerable institutional depth.[2] Bradley Klein contends that to understand the political force of organizing principles like food security, a shift of analytical focus is

[2] For example, in 1985 the UN approved the establishment of a World Food Security Compact; in 1999 the FAO published its first annual edition of The State of Food Insecurity in the World; in 2008 the UN convened its High Level Conference on World Food Security; in 2009 the G8 group released a joint statement on Global Food Security (UN, ca. 2009).

required: 'Instead of presuming their existence and meaning, we ought to historicize and relativize them as sets of practices with distinct genealogical trajectories' (1994: 10). The forthcoming analysis traces the emergence and evolution of food security discourse in official publications and interrogates the intertextual relations which pertain between these publications and other key sites of discursive change and/or continuity.

Absent from much (if not all) of the academic literature on food security is any reflection on the governmental content of the concept of 'security' itself. The notion of food security is received and regurgitated in numerous studies which seek to establish a better, more comprehensive food security paradigm. Simon Maxwell has produced more work of this type than anyone else in the field and his studies are commonly referenced as foundational to food security studies (Shaw, 2005; see Maxwell, 1990; 1991; 1992; 1996; Devereux & Maxwell, 2001). Maxwell has traced the evolution in thinking on food security since the 1970s and distinguishes three paradigm shifts in its meaning: from the global/national to the household/individual, from a food first perspective to a livelihood perspective and from objective indicators to subjective perception (Maxell, 1996; Devereux & Maxwell, 2001). There is something of value in the kind of analysis Maxwell employs and these three paradigm shifts provide a partial framework with which to compare the results of my own analysis of food security discourse. I suggest, however, that the conclusions Maxwell arrives at are severely restricted by his unwillingness to reflect on food security as a governmental mechanism of global liberal governance. As a 'development expert' he employs an epistemology infused with concepts borrowed from the modern development discourse; as such, his conclusions reflect a concern

with the micro-politics of food security and a failure to reflect on the macro-politics of 'food security' as a specific rationality of government.

In his article 'Food Security: A Post-Modern Perspective' (1996) Maxwell provides a meta-narrative which explains the discursive shifts he distinguishes. He argues that the emerging emphasis on 'flexibility, diversity and the perceptions of the people concerned' (1996: 160) in food security discourse is consistent with currents of thought in other spheres which he vaguely labels 'post-modern'. In line with 'one of the most popular words in the lexicon of post-modernism', Maxwell claims to have 'deconstructed' the term 'food security'; in so doing, 'a new construction has been proposed, a distinctively post-modern view of food security' (1996: 161-162). This, according to Maxwell, should help to sharpen programmatic policy and bring theory and knowledge closer to what he calls 'real food insecurity' (1996: 156). My own research in the forthcoming analysis contains within it an explicit critique of Maxwell's thesis, based on three main observations. First, Maxwell's 'reconstruction' of food security and re-articulation of its normative criteria reproduce precisely the kind of technical, managerial set of solutions which characterise the positivistic need for definitional certainty that he initially seeks to avoid. Maxwell himself acknowledges 'the risk of falling into the trap of the meta-narrative' and that 'the ice is admittedly very thin' (1996: 162-163), but finally prefers to ignore these misgivings when faced with the frightening (and more accurately 'post-modern') alternative. Second, I suggest that the third shift which Maxwell distinguishes, from objective indicators to subjective perceptions, is a fabrication which stems more from his own normative beliefs than evidence from official literature. To support this part of his argument Maxwell quotes earlier publications of his own work in which his

definition incorporates the 'subjective dimension' of food security (cf. Maxwell, 1988). As my own analysis reveals, while lip-service is occasionally paid to the lives and faces of hungry people, food security analysis is constituted by increasingly extensive, technological and professedly 'objective' methods of identifying and stratifying the 'food insecure'. This comprises another distinctly positivistic endeavour. Finally, Maxwell's emphasis on 'shifts' in thinking suggests the replacement of old with new – the global/national concern with food supply and production, for example, is replaced by a new and more enlightened concern for the household/individual level of food demand and entitlements. Discursive change, however, defies such linear boundary drawing; the trace of the old is always already present in the form of the new. I suggest that Maxwell's 'shifts' should rather be conceived as 'additions'; the implication for food security is an increasingly complex agenda, increasingly amorphous definitions and the establishment of new divisions of labour between 'experts' in diverse fields. This results in a *technocratic* discourse which 'presents policy as if it were directly dictated by matters of fact (thematic patterns) and deflects consideration of *values* choices and the social, moral and political responsibility for such choices' (Lemke, 1995: 58, emphasis in original). The dynamics of technocratic discourse are examined further in the forthcoming analysis.

These observations inform the explicit critique of contemporary understandings of food security which runs conterminously with the findings of my analysis. I adopt a broad perspective from which to interrogate food security as a discursive technology of global liberal governance. Food security is not conceived as an isolated paradigm, but as a component of overlapping discourses of human security and sustainable

development which emerged concurrently in the 1970s. The securitisation process can be regarded in some cases as an extreme form of politicisation, while in others it can lead to a depoliticisation of the issue at hand and a replacement of the political with technological or scientific remedies. I show how the militaristic component of traditional security discourse is reproduced in the wider agenda of food security, through the notions of risk, threat and permanent emergency that constitute its governmental rationale.

Methodology Part 1: Selecting Texts

The methodology I employ in selecting key texts for analysis borrows from Lene Hansen's textual selection matrix, which she bases on two sets of considerations:

> First, the majority of texts should be taken from the time under study, but historical material that traces the genealogy of the dominant representations should also be included. Second, the body of texts should include key texts that are frequently quoted and function as nodes within the intertextual web of debate (Hansen, 2006: 82).

Hansen also stresses that 'poststructuralist discourse analysis gives epistemological and methodological priority to the study of primary texts' (2006: 82). On this point, I suggest that a hierarchical order of authority can be seen to exist between official intergovernmental texts, academic studies, the texts of non-governmental organizations and media reports. While all these actors have the capacity to collect, collate and publicise information on a global scale, international organizations like the FAO and the World Bank are in a unique position of authority:

> International organizations do more than just manipulate information; they analyze and interpret it, investing information with meaning that orients and prompts action, thereby transforming information into knowledge… transforming information into knowledge by giving it meaning, value and purpose is one of the major activities of authorities in social life (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004: 7).

Hansen's first consideration thus informs the selection for primary focus of the recent High-Level Conference on World Food Security, convened by the FAO in 2008. The Final Report of this Conference and some key preparatory texts provide the material for analysis of contemporary food security discourse. The periods following the 'world food crisis' of 1972 to 1974, the African famine in 1983/4 and the World Food Summit in 1996 are key historical junctures in the genealogy of food security. As such, the final report of the 1974 World Food Conference and the subsequent International Undertaking on World Food Security, the World Bank's 1986 publication 'Poverty and Hunger' and the 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security and Plan of Action provide the historical material most relevant to a food security genealogy. Following Hansen's second consideration, by far the most frequently quoted and thus most significant node within the intertextual web is Amartya Sen's *Poverty and Famines* (1981). This text is commonly regarded to have fundamentally changed the terms of debate on food security and is still directly or indirectly referenced in most current literature (see for example FAO, 2006; World Bank, 2006). In the forthcoming analysis particular attention is paid to the intertextual status of this work and the ways in which its arguments have been (re)produced in subsequent texts, particularly the World Bank's 1986 publication 'Poverty and Hunger'.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the work of Simon Maxwell is commonly referenced as foundational to the study of discursive change in food security. As part of an ongoing critique, elements of his thesis will be referenced throughout the analysis to provide a comparative framework for my own findings.

Methodology Part 2: Analysing Texts

> It is a very familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationships with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or experience, but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships (Foucault, 1984: 103).

Foucault's insight directs our analytic attention to the organisation and interpretive detail contained within given texts. While the interpretive method resists formal and standardised frameworks of application, it is possible to isolate certain core techniques that produce good discourse analyses. Fran Tonkiss identifies three basic techniques which I use in the forthcoming analysis: identifying key themes and arguments, looking for variation in the text, and paying attention to silences (Tonkiss, 1998: 378). Identifying key themes involves comparing and contrasting how these themes emerge in different ways in different texts, while focusing on semantic features like repetition, emphasis, the use of metaphor and (dis)continuous predicates. The use of images, figures and data also function to promote certain themes and disallow others. Locating patterns of variation within a text exposes any uncertainties or inconsistencies that the prevailing discourse attempts to reconcile; the existence of ambiguity may imply an alternative account which the 'smooth' appearance serves to subvert (Tonkiss, 1998: 379). Finally, which key themes are absent from a given text are as significant as those which are present; paying attention to what is left unsaid allows us to consider alternative narratives and the possible reasons for their exclusion.

In light of these techniques it is useful to recall the three theoretical commitments which underpin the methodological approach of this analysis - to a constructivist understanding of meaning, to the productive (or reproductive) capacity of discourses, and to their inherent instability and historical contingency (Milliken, 1999). Applying these commitments to my analytic technique and selection of texts it is possible to deconstruct food security discourse in a manner less superficial and more methodologically robust than the 'deconstruction' which Simon Maxwell claims to have achieved (1996). The process of deconstruction, in Derrida's own words,

> insists on the heterogeneity, the difference, the disassociation which is absolutely necessary for the relation to the other… The privilege granted to unity, to totality, to organic ensembles, to community as a homogenized whole – this is a danger for responsibility, for decision, for ethics, for politics (Derrida, 1997: 13).

Following Derrida's insights, therefore, I do not share Maxwell's impulse to 'reconstruct' food security in the immediate wake of its 'deconstruction'; to do so is to incur the very danger of which Derrida speaks. Instead, it is hoped that a deconstructed food security will expose the discourse as a techno-disciplinary mechanism of governance and thereby pave the way for a more responsible application of ethico-political decision and responsibility.

Analysis Part 1: 1974 International Undertaking on World Food Security

The International Undertaking on World Food Security (IUWFS) was endorsed at the end of the World Food Conference in 1974, the first major inter-governmental conference to focus solely on the question of food. The first clause of the IUWFS defines world food security as

> the availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic foodstuffs, primarily cereals, so as to avoid acute food shortages in the event of widespread crop failures or natural disasters, to sustain a steady expansion of production and reduce fluctuations in production and prices (FAO, 1974: par. 1).

The reference to crop failures and natural disasters as the main causes of food shortages, coupled with a concern in the following clause for the 'increasing consumption requirements' of the developing countries, underpins the strictly Malthusian rhetoric which runs throughout the final report of the World Food Conference and the subsequent IUWFS. To blame for the 'world food crisis' of the previous two years, in this account, is not the policy of stock-reduction adopted by the US some years before, or the sudden and massive grain imports by the USSR, or the crippling impact of the rocketing price of petroleum following the embargos and supply cuts by OPEC in 1973; instead, 'nature' is to blame. The world food problem is thus constructed as a natural phenomenon, a natural disaster, devoid of a political component; achieving global food security requires an 'international' effort (primarily by the developed countries) to insure the world against the risks posed by

the uncertainty and malevolence of nature. Two main courses of action are recommended: boosting agricultural production in the developing countries and establishing international grain reserves. The specific knowledge required to achieve these goals resides primarily with agricultural experts, particularly those who have advanced technological means of agricultural production at their disposal.

That the global 'food problem' is essentially conceived as a supply problem represents a continuity with the prevailing discourse of the previous two decades; the main difference is that while the supply debate in the 1950s and 1960s focused primarily on the transfer of food, by means of trade and aid between countries (Geier, 1995; 9), the emphasis in the IUWFS is now placed on 'strengthening the food production base of developing countries', or in other words, promoting their self-sufficiency (FAO, 1974: par. 2). This represents a break with the growth-oriented modernisation ideology which had dominated development discourse for the previous two decades. The absence of an explicit food security agenda during this period is explained by the popular faith in classical trade theories, in which each country should specialise production based on its comparative advantage for certain commodities; this would result in balanced industrial growth and an adequate supply of all goods to all people. Industrialised countries provided the markets for cash crops grown in the temperate regions while food 'aid' provided a convenient vehicle for countries with surplus production of foodstuffs (primarily the US) to dispose of their surpluses and maintain the protectionist policies which had enabled their production (Uvin, 1994: 130-135). Food 'aid' to favoured countries in the Cold War context also provided an unconventional weapon to promote the superior status of the western, capitalist market system (Geier, 1995: 10).

While attaining the goal of food security was agreed to be 'a common responsibility of the entire international community', the emphasis throughout the IUWFS is on the 'national supplies', 'national reserves' and 'national stock policies' of the developed countries, given the 'special difficulties' faced by 'a number of developing countries' (FAO, 1974: par. 2-9). Despite the rhetoric of an international grain reserve system, the emphasis on 'national control' of 'national stocks' and the lengthy set of guidelines designed to 'safeguard… the accumulation and disposal' of these stocks imply a continued reluctance to endorse an internationally controlled food supply scheme. This reluctance mirrors the rejection of a proposal for a World Food Board in 1946, a scheme designed and promoted by the FAO's first Director-General Sir John Boyd Orr. Orr's proposal was rejected 'on political and ideological grounds', with the major powers not willing to give funds or authority to an international organization which they could not fully control (Shaw, 2007: 27). In place of a World Food Board the World Food Council of the FAO was established and remains in operation today; since this Council was responsible for augmenting and directing the IUWFS, it was able to block any truly 'international' initiative that would cede authority from the powerful national governments which comprised it.

Given this emphasis on 'national control' of 'national stock policies' and the absence of an internationally controlled system, the role of the grain reserves, which lies at the heart of this new conception of food security, is difficult to discern from the role played by agricultural surpluses in the previous two decades. The language has clearly changed, with surpluses distinguished from stocks in name, but their functions

overlap and the dangers associated with surplus 'dumping' (otherwise known as food 'aid'), equally apply to the accumulation and dissemination of reserves:

> Bearing in mind the serious problems which have arisen in the past owing to the accumulation and disposal of large agricultural surpluses, full consideration should be given by governments to the possible repercussions on the structure of production and trade which might arise from implementing the world food security policy (FAO, 1974: par. 7).

The IUWFS goes on to state that

> Governments should recognize the need to…consider measures designed to afford producers adequate protection against the effects on world prices of accumulation, retention and release of stocks held as a result of this Undertaking (FAO, 1974: par. 8).

Absent from this statement is the suggestion of which producers require protecting – those in the developed or developing countries. This ambiguity is particularly relevant at a time when governments of many developed countries were intent on de-linking their national agricultural markets from the world market through interventionary measures like import tariffs and variable levies (Geier, 1995: 12). These protectionist policies were directly harming the interests of developing countries heavily dependent on food exports - the very interests that the IUWFS was professedly trying to protect. While other clauses of the IUWFS very clearly delimit the developed/developing countries, I suggest that its silence on this point is

particularly salient. According to a later paragraph, achieving an accelerated rate of growth of agricultural production in the developing countries 'requires a constant review *by the developing countries* of their overall agricultural production policies' (emphasis added); the responsibility of the developed countries is to provide 'the required financial, technical and material assistance' for this increased rate of production (FAO, 1974: par. 9). Absent from consideration throughout the IUWFS are the overall agricultural policies of the developed countries, many of which contained (and still contain) protectionist elements which ensure that many developing countries remain mass importers of food (McMichael, 2009). So the prevailing emphasis on food trade, which had dominated the global food debate during the previous two decades, has ceased; partly subsumed by a discourse of stocks and reserves, partly replaced by new trading prospects in technology, capital and expertise, the dynamics of an illiberal food trade regime are no longer deemed significant for achieving world food security.

A final statement of key significance in the IUWFS is the assertion that

> The effective functioning of the world food security system will depend greatly on the availability of timely and adequate information (FAO, 1974: par. 13).

For this purpose Resolution XVI of the World Food Conference calls for the establishment of a Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture (GIEWS). Recalling its role as a 'knowledge organization', the GIEWS

would play a key role for the FAO in the acquisition and dissemination of this knowledge. Today, the FAO goes as far as to claim that

> the main priority for effective response to food crises remains the strengthening of national institutions for food security monitoring (FAO, 2009b: 6).

Constructing the world food security agenda as primarily an informational endeavour is illustrative of the authority of the FAO to shape the agenda to fit its own constitutional mandate. According to its current website, the FAO 'leads international efforts to defeat hunger' by providing a 'neutral forum' and a 'source of knowledge and information' (FAO, ca. 2009). It pursues four main areas of activity: 'putting information within reach; sharing policy expertise; providing a meeting place for nations; bringing knowledge to the field' (FAO, ca. 2009). By its own description, then, the international leader in defeating hunger has no operational capacity beyond defining the problem of hunger and making this 'knowledge' globally accessible. The authority of the FAO to informationalize hunger has had far-reaching implications for the development of food security discourse over the last three decades. The role of information as a legitimising authority is discussed in the concluding section of this study. At this stage it is sufficient to recognise the centrality accorded to information at the World Food Conference and to appreciate the relationship this engenders between food 'security' and food 'information'.

Analysis Part 2: Amartya Sen, 1981: *Poverty and Famines*

World Bank Policy Study, 1986: *Poverty and Hunger*

Published twelve years after the World Food Conference and the endorsement of the IUWFS, the World Bank's policy study *Poverty and Hunger* fossilised a discursive addition to the food security debate, articulating a new definition of the term which is still widely used today (see FAO, 2009). The opening lines of text create a stark contrast with what had come before:

> The world has ample food. The growth of global food production has been faster than the unprecedented population growth of the past forty years…Yet many poor countries and hundreds of millions of poor people do not share in this abundance. They suffer from a lack of food security, caused mainly by a lack of purchasing power. 'Food security'…is defined here as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life (World Bank, 1986: 1).

It is in this new definition of food security that Simon Maxwell locates a shift in the terms of debate from the global/national to the household/individual (1996). Food security is now apparently conceived from the perspective of the food insecure; the focus has shifted from the aggregate supply of food at the global/national level to the localised demand for food at the household/individual level. We are now concerned with *access to* food rather than *availability of* food. While Maxwell is correct on a simple level to deduce a community → individual or supply → demand shift of emphasis, I will show how a deconstructive approach reveals much more of interest

than Maxwell is able to provide. To do this it is necessary to analyse the new discourse in relation to the text commonly cited as its primary source, namely Sen's (1981) *Poverty and Famines*. The World Bank's *Poverty and Hunger* was published in the context of a resurgence of international interest in food security following the 1983/84 African famines; the dissolution within the text between discourses of hunger, food insecurity and famine is indicative of the degree of misapplication of Sen's theory it represents. While Sen's entitlements approach represents a partially successful challenge to the prevailing concern with food availability, a deconstructive analysis of his theory reveals parallels with the same Malthusian discourse which Sen was concerned to avoid. Before focusing directly on Sen's work, I first consider its application in the World Bank study. I choose this anachronistic approach because I believe the shortcomings of Sen's approach can be most clearly understood once its misapplication in official discourse has been duly recognised.

That the World Bank should concern itself specifically with food security policy is a significant consideration in itself, particularly given the context in 1986 of a return to prominence of growth and efficiency-focused development initiatives, embodied by structural adjustment programmes (Geier, 1995: 18). I suggest two related observations regarding the World Bank's publication of *Poverty and Hunger* and the discursive authority it has since been accorded. First, it serves to diminish the authority of the FAO to speak unilaterally about food security by implementing a partial separation between the question of food and the question of agriculture. As Sen himself wrote in 1997:

> In asking an organization that is responsible for international public policies on agricultural production to take charge *also* of official leadership in removing hunger and deprivation, the founders came close to taking a particularly narrow view of the nature and causes of hunger in the world (Sen, 1997: 8, emphasis in original).

Since food security is now not simply a question of production and supply, the FAO has been forced to modify its approach to incorporate broader policies of poverty alleviation, a goal which falls beyond the scope of its traditional mandate (see FAO, 1992; 2006). The new definition of food security as the ability of people to *access* food and the equation of food insecurity with poverty extends discursive access to a wide range of international actors; the privileged knowledge of agricultural experts is replaced by the 'expert' knowledge of social scientists, particularly those with the authority to dictate discourses of development and poverty alleviation. This relates to a second observation, that the economic language used by Sen in *Poverty and Famines* renders his entitlement theory particularly applicable to the economic discourse of the World Bank. It has been suggested that part of Sen's success in influencing contemporary food security discourse should be attributed to the way *Poverty and Famines* is presented as a formal economic theory that is also accessible to nonspecialists (Edkins, 2000: 47). As we shall see, however, while the influence of entitlement theory is evident in the World Bank study and *Poverty and Famines* is directly referenced, its subjects have significantly altered.

Poverty and Hunger produces a reductionist discourse which equates an individual's capacity to access food with the level of their income. While income is an important

component of Sen's theory, he is at pains to make clear that the concept of entitlements should not be equated with income alone:

> The income-centred view will be relevant in most circumstances in which famines have occurred. But the inadequacy of the income-centred view arises from the fact that, even in those circumstances in which income does provide command, it offers only a partial picture of the entitlement pattern, and starting the story with the shortage of income is to leave the tale half-told (Sen, 1981: 155-6).

Besides begging the question of what might have caused a fall in income, an income-centred view takes no account of non-monetary food transfers, the consumption of subsistence food which does not appear on the market, or the existence of an informal market sector, all of which have most significance in precisely those regions most affected by hunger. The World Bank study modifies the essence of Sen's argument in order to integrate the new access-to-food discourse into its own growth-oriented development ideology:

> Problems in food security do not necessarily result from inadequate food supplies, as is widely believed, but from a lack of purchasing power on the part of nations and of households. Economic growth will ultimately provide most households with enough income to acquire enough food (World Bank, 1986: v).

The World Bank's position appears uncomfortably contradictory; on the one hand, following the now fashionable access-to-food discourse, the problem is no longer inadequate food supply, but on the other hand, the purchasing power of 'nations' is still significant. What is signified by 'nations' is left open to interpretation – this could mean national governments, the aggregate of private national food importers, both or neither – but in any case this can only be conceived as a supply-side factor, dressed up in terms of demand and access to fit with the newly popular discourse. To maintain the distinction between national supply and household demand, essential for the World Bank's continued emphasis on economic growth as the solution, the study constructs a 'sharp distinction' between two types of food insecurity, each with their own set of causes and consequences for policy. As a testament to the authority of this World Bank study, these categories remain prominent in current food security discourse twenty years later (see FAO, 2006):

> Chronic food insecurity is a continuously inadequate diet caused by the inability to acquire food. It affects households that persistently lack the ability either to buy enough food or to produce their own. Transitory food insecurity is a temporary decline in a household's access to enough food. It results from instability in food prices, food production, or household incomes - and in its worst form it produces famine (World Bank, 1986: 1).

This exercise in boundary drawing constructs two visions of hunger on the basis of the technical measures the World Bank has at its disposal to monitor and adjust the structure of national economies. It is a pertinent case of backward causation, where the policy mechanism produces the problem it is intended to solve. As such, chronic

food insecurity is produced as the object of interventions which include 'increasing the food supply (through production or imports), subsidizing consumer prices, and targeting income transfers', while transitory food insecurity is constructed through policies that 'promote stability in the domestic supply and price of staple foods… through international trade' (World Bank, 1986: 6, 9). Policies designed to promote the neoliberal agenda of liberalised trade and trade-based economic growth thus construct two visions of hunger which have no empirical basis or relevance to people living in conditions of deprivation. Hunger and famine are decontextualised and depoliticised by a growth-oriented discourse which posits a simple solution of poverty alleviation through macroeconomic reform: 'the loss of real income explains why famines occur and who is hurt by them' (World Bank, 1986: 5). While the Malthusian discourse of inadequate food supply is explicitly rejected in the study, its trace is in fact implicit throughout. Production, trade and supply remain the primary mechanisms to solve world hunger, the only difference being the new articulation of their role in terms of income growth and poverty alleviation.

Poverty and Hunger represents a clear and pertinent example of the instability and productivity of discourse. Sen's entitlement theory of famine echoes throughout the text but in a modified form, its terms adapted to fit the hegemonic growth discourse of the World Bank – 'entitlement' has become 'income', 'access' has become 'purchasing power', 'famine' has become 'hunger'. Sen lost ownership of his words as soon as they were written and despite considerable effort since to restate the terms of his argument (in Sen, 1986; 1987; 1993; 1997), they now reach their audience primarily through the cognitive lens of more authoritative knowledge-brokers like the World Bank. The capacity of Sen's economic theory to overlap with the monetarist

ideology of the World Bank rendered it particularly amenable to the adapted application we find in *Poverty and Hunger*. Herein lies the productive power of discourse; expressing his theory in formal economic terms, Sen unwittingly authorized a new powerful actor to speak and act on food security. A new discursive technocracy is produced in the text of *Poverty and Hunger* which critically enables a new assemblage of economic experts to determine global food security policy. The agricultural technocracy of the FAO finds its authority diminished and is forced to adapt its discourse accordingly or give up on the debate entirely.

Given the frequency with which Sen's *Poverty and Famines* is referenced or alluded to in the intertextual web of debate on food security, an analysis of that text reveals the spaces left open by its discourse and enables analysis of its subsequent (mis)applications and modifications. While Sen expresses his theory in terms of famine rather than food insecurity, the instability of such signifiers is apparent from the level of overlap found in their application in subsequent literature. Owing to this, I suggest that a theory of famine is at once a theory of food insecurity; indeed, the boundary-drawing involved in distinguishing these terms is precisely what my analysis is concerned to reveal and problematise. The following section owes particular reference to Jenny Edkin's enlightened appraisal of Sen's theory in her book *Whose Hunger?* (2000).[3]

Sen's approach represents a powerful denouncement of the Malthusian assumption that famine is caused by food shortage or inadequate food availability, a thesis Sen

[3] While my analysis of *Poverty and Famines* remains original, having read Edkins' work it proved difficult not to incorporate some of her insights. Moreover, I feel that to have done so would have been to the detriment of my analysis.

signifies with the disparaging acronym FAD (Food Availability Decline). The opening lines of *Poverty and Famines* provide the basic premise:

> Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many *possible* causes (Sen, 1981: 1, emphasis in original).

Incredibly, this seemingly obvious assertion represented a major new way of thinking about world hunger. A flicker of politicisation had finally entered the debate; something else, besides a simple lack of food, could be causing the deprivation of hundreds of millions in a world co-inhabited by substantial numbers of the wealthy and over-fed. Unfortunately, this politicisation was short-lived; to see why requires analysis of what Sen both includes and excludes from his notions of entitlement, starvation and famine. In the following statements Sen delineates the territory on which his theory can, and cannot, be applied. These are worth quoting at some length:

> The history of famines as well as of regular hunger is full of blood-boiling tales of *callousness and malevolence*… but the distinction between starvation and famine used in this work *does not relate to this*. Starvation is used here in the wider sense of people going without adequate food, while famine is a particularly virulent manifestation of its causing widespread death; that is, I intend to use the two words in their most common English sense (Sen, 1981; 40, emphasis added).

> The entitlement approach to starvation and famines concentrates on the ability of people to command food through the legal means available in the society, including the use of production possibilities, trade opportunities, entitlements *vis-à-vis* the state, and other modes of acquiring food. A person starves *either* because he does not have the ability to command food *or* because he does not use this ability to avoid starvation. The entitlement approach concentrates on the former, **ignoring the latter possibility**. Furthermore, it concentrates on **those means of commanding food that are legitimised by the legal system** in operation in that society. While it is an approach of some generality, **it makes no attempt to include all possible influences that can in principle cause starvation**, for example illegal transfers (e.g. looting), and choice failures (e.g. owing to inflexible food habits) (Sen, 1981: 45, italics in original; bold added).
>
> While entitlement relations concentrate on rights within the given legal structure in that society, some transfers involve violation of these rights, such as looting or brigandage. *When such extra-entitlement transfers are important, the entitlement approach to famines will be defective* (Sen, 1981: 49, emphasis added).

In these statements it is possible to discern three important exclusions required for the effective application of Sen's theory. I will examine each of these in turn and consider the conception of famine/food insecurity made possible by their combination. First, Sen excludes the possibility that human intentionality can play

any role in famine situations; cases of 'deliberate harming' are explicitly set aside from the theory, despite Sen's admission that 'the history of famines as well as of regular hunger is full of blood-boiling tales of callousness and malevolence' (1981: 40). This exclusion makes it possible to regard famines as purely 'economic disasters' (1981: 162), a narrative with clear allusions to the Malthusian conception of famines as natural disasters. In both cases famine is depoliticised as a technical, structural or natural *failure*, devoid of violence and agency, requiring a programme of technical and managerial *solutions*. Neither view can account for the complex dynamics of socio-political conflict in which some groups have much to gain from the starvation and deprivation of others. The Ethiopian government's use of food aid as a means to cleanse and redistribute parts of the population during the mid-1980s famine is a well-documented example of this type of political dynamic (Duffield, 2007: 73-75). Exclusion of such complexities is essential for Sen's approach to work as a formal theory with practical implications for policy; admitting such complexities, as Sen himself acknowledges, renders the entitlement approach defective. Alex de Waal (1989; 1990) has fiercely contested this aspect of Sen's theory in relation to famines in the Sudan in the mid-1980s, according central significance to the violence and agency which Sen wishes to exclude. Mark Duffield's (1993; 1994; 1996) and David Keen's (1994) work on complex political emergencies also provide implicit criticisms of Sen's depoliticised, economistic approach.

The second exclusion required by Sen's theory is the role played by extra-legal entitlement transfers, such as looting or raiding. An exclusive focus on legal entitlements belies the extent to which extra-legal activity can come to dominate social behaviour in contexts of violence, desperation and duress. This exclusion

contributes to a portrayal of famine in which the victims are presented as passive, assetless wage labourers, vulnerable to a failing market and, constrained by an omniscient legal system, unable (or perhaps unwilling) to adapt their behaviour to ensure survival. While this image may fit neatly with Sen's prescriptive approach, it is clearly at odds with the experience of real people facing acute deprivation. It also fails to apply most drastically in contexts of conflict, where the legal structure and its enforceability have partially or entirely broken down. Again, de Waal's (1989) study of people's coping strategies during the Sudanese famines demonstrates the illegitimacy of this exclusion.

The third exclusion relates to the second, namely that Sen's notion of legal entitlements disregards the role played by force and violence in the maintenance and enforcement of state law:

> In guarding ownership rights against the demands of the hungry, the legal forces uphold entitlements; for example, in the Bengal famine of 1943 the people who died in front of well-stocked food shops protected by the state were denied food because of *lack* of legal entitlement, and not because their entitlements were violated (Sen, 1981: 49, emphasis in original).

Sen treats this observation as unproblematic and undeserving of further consideration; as such, his theory legitimises and naturalises what Edkins asserts are 'precisely those conditions that obtain *whenever there is a famine* – the denial of access to food *by force* employed on behalf of those who possess food' (2000: 59, emphasis in original). Famine victims are constructed as passive recipients of benign laws whose

violence is denied even when people are seen starving to death before piles of food; law is construed as somehow transcendent, removed from the power of certain groups to control and enforce it. Sen offers no further appraisal of this legalistic aspect of his theory, but hints at his own dissatisfaction in the final lines of the book: 'The law stands between food availability and food entitlement. Starvation deaths can reflect legality with a vengeance' (1981: 166). Ending the book with this assertion exposes the inadequacy of a theory which fails to consider not only extra-legal violence, but also the violence inherent in law itself.

These exclusions produce a vision of famine/food insecurity as a 'disastrous phenomenon', a failure in the economic system which can be discerned by 'factual investigation' and remedied by intervention by the state or the international community (Sen, 1981: 39, 1). It is centred on a scientific – and specifically economic – discourse which produces passive victims and excludes active perpetrators. As a technical failure of the economic system, the solution resides in the technologies and management programmes of the aid and development industries; as such, this vision of famine reproduces and re-legitimises the existing technologies of global liberal governance, most notably the structural adjustment programmes which would follow at the end of the decade. The exclusive focus on legal entitlements naturalises the violence inherent in law and its enforcement and defers the significance of extra-legal activity, positing such behaviour as abnormal and beyond the scope of the theory. As a 'descriptive rather than prescriptive' mode of interpretation, the prevailing focus is on finding causal explanations through 'factual investigation' – a particularly modernist endeavour shared by the Malthusian approach which Sen wishes to denounce (1981: 2, 1). Attempts to discern why one

group of people might have allowed another group to starve or be killed – in other words, finding *reasons* for actions - are replaced by positing technical causes in aggregated economic terms (Edkins, 2000: 64). Questions of context and agency are silenced and a new technocratic regime of truth takes hold.

This analysis illustrates the superficiality of the discursive shifts in the meaning of food security which Simon Maxwell distinguishes and eagerly labels 'post-modern'. While Maxwell (1996) cites Sen's work as instigating a shift from the use of objective indicators to subjective perceptions, embodied by the concern for access over supply, I have shown the opposite to be the case. Sen's approach constitutes a total objectification of food security which ignores the human capacity to perpetrate violence or resort to adaptive measures which fall beyond the scope of 'normal' legality. The analytical shift from the global/national level to the household/individual level is discernible in Sen's work, but its (mis)application in subsequent official texts weakens its discursive significance;questions of global/national supply are replaced by aggregates of global/national demands, articulated in terms of population groups and their structural roles as (un)equal economic blocks. The household/individual level of complexity and contingency remains beyond the reach of Sen's meta-theory and its sterile, descriptive definitions. Achieving global food security still requires an 'international' effort, primarily by the developed countries, but this time to insure the world against the risks posed by the uncertainty and malevolence of global and national economies.

Analysis Part 3: 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security

The Rome Declaration and Plan of Action were finalised after eighteen months of negotiations between Member State representatives and adopted unanimously at the beginning of the World Food Summit (Shaw, 2007: 350). These texts continue to embody the current benchmark for international food security discourse and have been reinforced and reiterated at all subsequent global food conferences (see FAO, 2002; FAO 2008a). The new definition of food security reads as follows:

> Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 1996: par. 1).

This definition contains a trace of each historically conflicting discourse I have sampled in this analysis. 'Physical access' is a new articulation of the old concern with food availability, production and supply, representing the persistence of a Malthusian rhetoric. 'Economic access' owes its heritage to Sen's work but reduces his notion of entitlement to a purely monetary relation; the diverse means by which people are able to acquire and consume food in different cultures are excluded from consideration and reduced to a market relation between consumer and commodity. Absent from the definition is the notion of *social* access, inclusion of which would invite consideration of the legal and political constraints faced by some groups in their attempts to acquire food. The reference to 'safe and nutritious' implies the inadequacy of food produced in some parts of the world, creating space for the development of improved seeds and breeds by bio-technological agri-business and

their transfer to regions still plighted by underdeveloped and inefficient methods of farming. That people's 'food preferences' are considered relevant beyond their 'dietary needs' implies a degree of cultural sensitivity, but begs the question of how the food preferences prevalent in many parts of the developed world impact on the availability and price of food in less developed regions.

The scope of this definition is reflected in the widely conflated agenda set forth in the Rome Plan of Action. Achieving world food security now requires international action with regard to, amongst other things,

> poverty eradication… conflict prevention… environmental protection… expanding production… population policies… family planning… international trade… promotion of all human rights… democracy promotion… gender equality… empowerment of women… protection of children… education… health care… land reform… use of genetic resources… conservation of biodiversity… combating plant pests and animal diseases… transfer of technology… (FAO, 1996)

The Rome Plan of Action essentially incorporates every developmental agenda of the United Nations into the food security paradigm. The result is a utopian vision, the realisation of which is a responsibility shared by every disparate actor in the aid and development industry. More than thirty distinct bodies within the UN system alone are now either directly or indirectly involved in food security objectives; added to this are the three regional development banks, the WTO and its array of sub-agencies, the fifteen international centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural

Research (CGIAR), and every NGO whose mandate covers one or more of the above objectives (Shaw, 2007: 349). Given the 'immediate view to reducing the number of undernourished people to half their present level no later than 2015', these actors can claim success if half a billion people remain morbidly underfed. The prevalence of hunger has become naturalised in a system of organised non-liability.

Given the new complexity of food security it is not surprising that one of the most frequently recurring themes in the Plan of Action is the expressed need for a new and more comprehensive system of information and data collection (FAO, 1996: pars. 54-60). The development of the Food Insecurity Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) and its launch in 1999 represents one of the few proposals adopted at the Summit which has come to fruition. Just as the World Food Conference in 1974 led to the establishment of the Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), one of the main practical outcomes of the Rome Summit was the creation of a more extensive and technologically advanced system of data collection and analysis. Established in the context of the strictly Malthusian food security discourse prevalent in the 1970s, GIEWS monitors global food security in terms of 'food production, trade, food aid, stocks, consumption and sub-national food security' (FAO, 2009b: 10). In light of the more holistic discourse regarding food security twenty years later, the GIEWS approach has become redundant. Its current brochure reveals the extent to which GIEWS has been modified to adapt to the new access- and demand-oriented discourse, but its treatment of what it calls 'food security at the sub-national level' is clearly a weakness of the system's methodological approach (FAO, 2009b: 16). Sections which relate to global, national and regional monitoring of supplies and stocks are replete with maps, graphs and

charts which imply certainty regarding scientifically-grounded facts revealed by the monitoring process. The section on sub-national demand and access, on the other hand, presents a photograph of a man and child dressed in traditional salwar kameez, shovelling corn. Tagged on to the end of the brochure, this section reveals the redundancy of an old monitoring system in the context of new conceptions of what food insecurity is and how it should be measured.

The GIEWS database is now subsumed by FIVIMS, which constructs an entirely different vision of food insecurity in terms of poverty, risk and vulnerability. As the world is accordingly re-mapped, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf asserts that 'we must focus not only on abstract global numbers but on the faces and places that make up those numbers' (FAO, 1999: 4). Diouf goes on to say that

> New technologies allow us to link national information systems and establish global networks, to examine an entire ocean or one drop of water, to punch buttons and create graphs and flow charts that show us instantly and clearly the kind of progress being made. Knowledge not only gives us power, it gives us insight and direction (FAO, 1999: 4).

The first publication of *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* in 1999 presents early projections of FIVIMS by means of five pages of abstract global numbers, fourteen global and regional maps and no fewer than twenty-three statistical graphs, charts and diagrams (FAO, 1999). The thirty-four page document contains one close-up photograph of an African woman's face bearing the stereotyped, gendered frown of despair. The photograph is reproduced six times throughout the document and

appears on front and back covers, but no explanation is provided of who she is, where she is from, or why she is looking at us. She represents the face of food insecurity, decontextualised and depersonalised, prior to her translation into manageable pie-charts and the 'abstract global numbers' Diouf warns against relying on.

The codification of food security engendered by FIVIMS and the conflation of agendas in the Rome Plan of Action serve to deflect attention from long-standing issues of key significance and entangle them in increasingly complex webs of technical causes and risks. International trade is the most significant of these issues, but its role is excluded by poverty mapping systems like FIVIMS. The Plan of Action contains a short section on the benefits of trade liberalisation and the 'opportunities arising from the international trade framework', which serves to deflect attention away from the dangers posed by this framework for local farmers unable to compete with large multinationals in an open, global market (FAO, 1996: par. 39). It is instructive to compare the treatment of trade in the Plan of Action with its portrayal in the declaration produced at the large NGO forum on food security, held concurrently with the Rome Summit. The Plan of Action states that

> Trade allows food consumption to exceed food production, helps to reduce production and consumption fluctuations and relieves part of the burden of stock holding. It has a major bearing on access to food through its positive effect on economic growth, income and employment (FAO, 1996: par.37).

While the NGO declaration shares much of the gender and environmental rhetoric of the Plan of Action, it is on the issue of trade that its account most explicitly differs:

> Subsidized exports, artificially low prices, constant dumping, and even some food aid programmes are increasing food insecurity and making people dependent on food they are unable to produce. The depletion of global grain stocks has increased market instability, to the detriment of small producers (FAO, 1996: Annex III).

The NGO declaration regards hunger as 'fundamentally a question of justice' and advocates formalising the 'basic human Right to Food' affirmed in the opening lines of the Plan of Action (FAO, 1996: Annex III). While the notion of a 'right to food' is accorded frequent mention in the text of the Rome Declaration, an interpretive statement issued by the United States at the close of the Summit leaves no doubt regarding the priorities of its government:

> The United States does not recognize any change in the current state of conventional or customary international law regarding rights related to food. The United States believes that the attainment of any 'right to food' or 'fundamental right to be free from hunger' is a goal or aspiration to be realized progressively that does not give rise to any international obligations nor diminish the responsibilities of national governments toward their citizens (FAO, 1996: Annex II).

This qualification, restated at the follow-up World Food Summit in 2002, represents a guarded admission by the US that a genuine right to food cannot be realised without significant distortion of the free trade paradigm it so forcibly advocates. Fearful of

legal demands by poor nations for special aid and trade provisions made possible by an operative, legal right to food, the US is careful to deny the right to food the same status as other civil and political human rights. The contradiction is clear in a subsequent statement from the US:

> Various religious and ethical values, cultural backgrounds and philosophical convictions do not diminish the need for full respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms (FAO, 1996: Annex II).

Clearly exempt from consideration, therefore, are the neoliberal convictions of the United States and its unwillingness to respect a fundamental right to food, for fear of what legal repercussions may ensue.

Having traced the genealogy of food security from its early incorporation in official discourse to the conflated agenda adopted at the Rome Summit, the next section focuses on the two most prevalent dimensions of the current discourse, namely climate change and bioenergy. The global economic downturn and rising food prices over the last two years have renewed international interest in food security; in this context in June 2008 the FAO convened the High-Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy. The declaration produced at this conference provides the primary text for analysis of these contemporarily pertinent issues.

Analysis Part 4: 2008 High-Level Conference on World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy

With its specific focus on 'climate change' and 'bioenergy' in the context of 'achieving world food security', the 2008 Conference forces these issues into the discursive foreground, regardless of what outcomes or policies may result from the meeting. Absent from the title of the conference is the issue of 'soaring food prices', to which the text of the resulting declaration accords central importance. The problem, cause and solution of 'the global food situation' are thus produced by the very agenda adopted at the Conference; alternative narratives are excluded and access is denied to discourses which de-link the trinity of high prices, climate change and bioenergy.

The declaration reduces the complexity of food insecurity to the dynamics of the 'current crisis', which is in turn reduced to the problem of 'soaring food prices' (FAO, 2008a: par. 2). Explicitly, the declaration offers no explanation of what has caused food prices to rise; the fact of high prices constitutes an unproblematic starting point from which to consider possible means to alleviate the problem. Implicitly, however, the declaration constructs a strong linkage between high food prices and climate change:

> The current crisis has highlighted the fragility of the world's food systems and their vulnerability to shock. It is essential to address the fundamental question of how to increase the resilience of present food production systems to challenges posed by climate change (FAO, 2008a: par. 7b).

The implication is that climate change is the 'shock' that caused food prices to rise. No reference is made to the collapse of the global banking system or the complex relationships which pertain between this collapse, the ensuing global recession and high prices of food and other commodities. Instead, climate change is the culprit. Moreover, 'because the indications are that food prices will remain high in the years to come', climate change will continue to be the culprit, and mitigation of climate change has suddenly become the primary means to achieve world food security.

Blaming the climate for people's hunger serves many political functions. The most powerful of these is the displacement of responsibility away from politics onto the uncertainty and malevolence of nature. Parallels with the traditional Malthusian narrative are easily discerned; hunger, famine and deprivation are reproduced as natural phenomena, the symptoms of an over-populated planet and the consequences of overly-intensive extraction from a scarce and over-subscribed resource base. While the notion of anthropomorphic climate change does incorporate questions of agency and blameworthiness, its repeated articulation as a 'global problem' with 'global consequences' requiring 'global solutions' has served to successfully diminish the significance of accountability. The discourse constructs a sharp distinction within the nature/society binary and produces various relationships, to be (dis)proven by science, which may pertain between the two. The destructive and predatory tendencies of mass-consumer capitalist society are naturalised within the framework of climate change; consideration of their role in directly perpetuating poverty is deferred one level, now discernable only via its translation in a changing climate. This produces a new discursive technocracy in which only climate scientists and

environmental experts possess the requisite authority to translate a complex, chaotic climate into terms accessible to politicians and other nonspecialists. The conflation of nature/culture with science produces climate change as the ultimate embodiment of objectivity; the conflation of climate change with food insecurity thus legitimises the replacement of political decision and responsibility with the dictates of scientific 'facts'.

Another powerful function served by linking food insecurity with climate change becomes evident when we consider the extent of the 'financial mechanisms and investment flows to support climate change adaptation, mitigation and technology development, transfer and dissemination' (FAO, 2008a: par. 7b). The mitigation method which currently receives the lion's share of these investment flows, along with the highest degree of controversy, is the production of biofuels as an energy alternative to fossil fuels (FAO, 2008b). The Declaration of the 2008 Conference refers to biofuels rather surreptitiously as 'bioenergy', a word normally used to signify the whole range of less controversial methods of energy production, including solar power and fuelwood. Despite the use of this term in the title of the Conference, the Declaration is solely concerned with 'biofuels' – liquid fuels used predominantly for transport and energy generation. The following statement is made in the declaration:

> We are convinced that in-depth studies are necessary to ensure that production and use of biofuels is sustainable in accordance with the three pillars of sustainable development and takes into account the need to achieve and maintain global food security (FAO, 2008a: par. 7f).

That production of biofuels can be sustainable and can contribute to achieving global food security is therefore not open to debate; what is required is academic/scientific proof to legitimise the ongoing and rampant production. The 'in-depth studies' that will engender this proof will have biofuel sustainability as their guiding mandate; dissenting voices which contest the very possibility of biofuel sustainability will thus be silenced by the dominating research agenda. One such dissenting voice is audible in a document prepared for the 2008 Conference by representatives of civil society:

> In view of the concerns over increased production of biofuel, the majority of participants considered it urgent to establish a moratorium on extending the use of land for biofuel production in developing countries. Putting land to this use threatens food security and will not, even with second generation technologies, address the needs of food security, rural people and the poor (FAO, 2008c: 4).

The final declaration of the Conference makes no reference to the possibility of a 'moratorium', instead reemphasising the need to continue 'to monitor and analyse world food security in all its dimensions – including those addressed by this Conference' (FAO, 2008b: par. 8). So while the FAO continues to monitor and analyse and the academics/scientists compile their 'in-depth studies', the rural poor in many developing countries continue to see their land, previously used to grow food, turned into intensive biofuel production units to meet the increasing demands of a fuel-hungry and climate-conscious global market.

The biofuel debate hinges on the dual construction of climate change as both threat and opportunity. Linking high food prices and food insecurity with climate change serves to construct climate change as a threat to people's livelihoods, particularly those of the poor and vulnerable. Global action is required, with particular focus on the adaptive capacities of the rural poor in developing countries. At the same time, however, the mitigation of climate change presents lucrative opportunities via the business of ecological modernisation – the commercialisation of low-carbon technologies, for example, or the expanding global market for biofuels. While potential for profit provides the incentive to develop and invest in these markets, their potential to mitigate climate change provides the political justification for what may otherwise be deemed as predatory behaviour which threatens the food security of local people whose land no longer provides them with food. Paterson & Stripple have argued that the construction of climate change as both threat and opportunity is implicated in the conflicting discourses of territoriality which govern environmental politics (Paterson & Stripple, 2007). By blurring distinctions between global/national spaces and global/national threats, the climate change issue has been constructed both to reconfigure and de-territorialize traditional political spaces. Production of liquid biofuels, for example, has been a key driver of the recent surge in land acquisitions, or 'land grabs' (FAO, IFAD & IIED, 2009). In what has been described as a new form of colonialism, wealthy governments and international corporations have bought up huge swathes of agricultural land in developing countries to produce biofuels and food for export. While climate change mitigation is often presented as a key goal of these initiatives, purchasing countries' national food security strategies and the commodity returns expectations of private agribusiness provide more instructive explanations (FAO, IFAD & IIED, 2009: 52-59). Nevertheless, the de-territorial

framing of climate change provides an important rhetorical justification for this de-bounding and commodification of political space.

The incorporation of climatic uncertainty within food security discourse finally exposes the death of the security ideal and the onset of perennial, climate-induced insecurity. In an ironic twist of Malthusian gloom, nature has once again returned to torment us. Recalling the 1970s and the birth of 'food security', nature was blamed for failing to provide a soaring world population with sufficient food.[4] The antidote was modernisation, better technology and increasingly intensive agricultural production in all parts of the world. Forty years later and nature is exacting her revenge, making our climate unpredictable and our food consequently too expensive (for some) to afford.

Contemporary climatic concerns have established a new language of risk and uncertainty in official food security discourse; in the final chapter I interrogate this semantics of risk and consider its applicability to the evolving discourse of food security as discerned in the foregoing analysis. I argue that shifts in thinking about food security since 1974 are best understood in terms of the different modes of calculation of risk which they engender. Contrary to the positivist approach of Simon Maxwell, who believes that 'the multiple uses of the term 'food security' reflect the nature of the food problem as it is experienced by poor people themselves' (1996: 155), I argue that shifts in thinking about 'food security' better reflect the changing parameters of global liberal governance and the expansion of interventionary/developmental techniques for the management and regulation of

[4] At this time, incidentally, the FAO was warning of falling global temperatures and an impending ice age (FAO, 1975).

developing state populations. These techniques are best understood by abandoning the traditional security/insecurity framework and replacing it with the predominating governmental rationality of risk.

Conclusions: Speaking Security/Governing Risk

> Risk is a way – or rather, a set of different ways – of ordering reality, of rendering it into a calculable form. It is a way of representing events in a certain form so that they might be made governable in particular ways, with particular techniques and for particular goals… The significance of risk lies not with risk *itself* but with what risk gets attached to (Dean, 1999: 177).

This notion of risk embodies the hegemonic form of rationality which characterises the modern liberal mode of governance. In so far as a government is legitimated by its capacity to provide its citizens with security and insure them against whatever may threaten it, the calculation and articulation of risk has become its primary occupation. In what Michael Dillon has called the practice of 'underwriting security', risk management has become the central concern of the biopoliticisation of security: 'Underwriting… captures the essence of how risk operates as an assemblage of mechanisms for measuring and commodifying exposure to contingency' (2008: 310). In modern industrial societies, risk insurance is provided by a range of public and private assemblages and covers every aspect of social life; we are literally insured against life and death. Many populations in the developing world, however, lack these social safety nets; Duffield argues that the non-insured status of what he calls 'surplus life' in the developing countries provides a more instructive criteria to distinguish global populations than the traditional developed/underdeveloped binary (Duffield, 2007: 22-24). In the last half century it has been the professed aim of the aid and development industries and intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations

to fill this insurance gap, or, in other words, to locate, measure and manage the risks faced by those people exposed to contingency.

Food security is the constructed categorization of one set of such risks. As a technology of global liberal governance, food security represents one aspect of the biopoliticisation of security. The notion of biopolitics derives from Foucault's investigations of the new technologies of political power which he sees emerge at the end of the eighteenth century. While sovereign power had previously been concerned with 'the contracting individual' and the right of the sovereign 'to take life or let live', biopolitics is concerned with the administration of life itself at the level of population and applies regulatory mechanisms to control and manage aggregate life processes (Foucault, 2003: 245). While biopolitics and liberalism are interconnected, they are not equivalent; liberalism is a form of government which necessarily incorporates biopolitical imperatives but attempts to constrain their unlimited operation (Dean, 1999: 113). Global liberal governance is thus described by Dillon and Reid as 'substantially comprised of techniques that examine the detailed properties and dynamics of populations so that they can be better managed with respect to their many needs and life chances' (Dillon & Reid, 2001: 41). The notion of 'human security' comprises the contemporary articulation of the totality of life dynamics rendered amenable to global biopolitical management, of which 'food security' is one sub-component. Human security, as a rationalising framework of global governance, complements an erosion of the legitimacy of the developing state and a challenge to its right to political sovereignty (Pupavac, 2005: 178). As the current modus operandi of the development community, human security represents the mutual conditioning of development and security and begs the question of which humans it is concerned to

secure. The destabilising effects of underdevelopment are now conceived to directly threaten the security of the industrialised countries, in the guise of such issues as international terrorism, environmental degradation and global health crises. The function of human security – and food security by analogy - is thus to contain the instability wrought by 'Third World' underdevelopment and enable increasingly extensive surveillance of those regions deemed threatening to the functions of mass-consumer society. Conterminously promoting self-reliance and basic needs, these governmental technologies also provide the means for emotional adjustment, hope and the moderation of desire in societies where the prospect of material development has been abandoned and re-problematised as destabilising (Pupavac, 2005).

The establishment of world food security as an international and developmental concern at the World Food Conference in 1974 represents the emergence of biopolitical techniques which monitor and manage how food is produced and consumed at the level of global populations. At this embryonic stage the monitoring techniques available were relatively crude; as my analysis of the International Undertaking (IUWFS) has shown, indicators of world food security were limited to national levels of food supply. The resolution adopted at the Conference to establish a system of 'international' grain reserves represents a rudimentary attempt to manage the risks of an unpredictable global market, devoid of American surpluses, by means of an insurance level of buffer stocks. The other main emphasis was on the need for more data and information, to enable more comprehensive monitoring of the 'world food situation'. This resulted in the establishment of the Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), which marks the first stage of a

process of techno-scientific informationalization regarding food and the patterns of its global production.

'Biopolitics', writes Michael Dillon, 'change according to changes in the technologies through which 'life processes' are made transparent to knowledge' (2008: 310). The biopolitical securitisation of people's food *consumption* thus becomes possible as new technologies enable more comprehensive global monitoring of these 'life processes'. From its early focus on national production aggregates, the GIEWS now incorporates a view from space using satellite technology to analyse the very constitution of the earth's crust. The juxtaposition of the poor Indian farmer working his land with plough and ox while surveyed from beyond the ionosphere by the latest in satellite technology – as a means to ensure his food security – exposes the absurdity that characterises what Baudrillard conceives as 'the precession of simulacra':

> Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory (Baudrillard, 1994: 1, emphasis in original).

Just as new technologies enable new models of the hyperreal, I suggest that new forms of 'knowledge' simultaneously enable the development of new technologies of monitoring and surveillance. The food security discourse which emerged in the 1980s regarding access to food, adapting Sen's work on entitlements and famine, led to the establishment of more complex mapping systems which construct the risk of hunger

via an economic grid of intelligibility. Critically enabled by what Duffield calls the zenith of the non-governmental trajectory of the NGO movement in the 1980s (Duffield, 2007: 25), in which the economic dynamics of non-insured and 'food insecure' peoples became increasingly exposed to international surveillance, the world was accordingly remapped to incorporate the new conflation of risks articulated at the World Food Summit. The Food Insecurity Vulnerability Information and Mapping System (FIVIMS) is the culmination of this re-rendering of reality; just as GIEWS produced the poor and hungry as victims of risk inherent in nature, FIVIMS produces a new category of people as victims of risk inherent in a global economy and social (dis)order. As the logics of biopolitics evolve, so do its calculative techniques:

> One has to be classifiable to exist in species terms. One now has to be classifiable as informational code to be admitted to the category of contemporary biological species. One has to be in circulation as value to exist as economic species (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2009: 5).

The current political obsession with climate change represents the final liquidation of security and the full assimilation of risk management as governmental rationality. Current FAO publications are dominated by the language of risk, disaster and vulnerability:

> Disaster risk management and climate change adaptation are ultimately about reducing the risk posed by climate change to the lives and livelihoods of

> vulnerable people and therefore are key tools for protection of food security (FAO, 2008d: 21).

> Adapting to climate change involves managing risk by improving the quality of information and its use, providing insurance against climate change risk, adopting known good practices to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable livelihood systems, and finding new institutional and technological solutions (FAO, 2008e: 32).

In an age now characterised by existential and perennial risk, what we require is more information; ending world hunger now depends in no small part on monitoring and managing the chaos that constitutes a changing climate.[5] Yet another information system, the Food Security Information and Early Warning System (FSIEWS), is now under construction (FAO, 2008e). A similar trend is discernible in the construction and management of international terrorism; to mitigate the uncertainty posed by the terrorist 'threat', governments require a dramatic increase in surveillance technologies. The erosion of civil liberties by way of more intrusive modes of surveillance is presented as a legitimate means to secure citizens by reducing the risk of future attack. New techniques of biometric 'dataveillance' represent the biopoliticisation of security at perhaps its most acute:

> To misconceive risk is to misconceive the ontopolitics, the apparatuses of power/knowledge and techno-scientific devices by means of which Western societies are now governmentally secured: from the macrocalculations of

[5] Early formulations of chaos theory were derived from studying weather patterns in the 1960s (see Gleick, 1988).

> geopolitical analysis – no matter how scandalously they misconduct their risk assessments (Iraq) – to the biopolitical micro-management of individuals and populations (Dillon, 2008: 327).

This study has shown how these same apparatuses and devices have become the means by which the global population is governmentally food 'secured'. The biopoliticised, technocratic management of non-insured populations in the name of 'food security' has produced a melee of new risks and a bounty of information and data. Meanwhile, despite the professed goal to decrease by half the number of malnourished people by 2015, the hungry proportion of the world's population has actually increased, by the FAO's own statistics (FAO, ca. 2009).

In 1948 the first Director-General of the FAO, Sir John Boyd Orr, resigned from the organization, famously complaining that 'when people ask for bread, we give them pamphlets' (Shaw, 2007: 31). With pamphlets now replaced by satellite images and integrated information systems, the criticism remains hauntingly pertinent.

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