Famine and Undernutrition as Security Issues

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Compare and Contrast Famine and Undernutrition as Security Issues

'The important point here is that if people are starving when this is objectively avoidable, then violence is committed.' (Galtung, 1969, p. 171)

'Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food' (Sen, 1981 p.1). This planet produces enough food to feed the 7,082,197,646 individuals who inhabit it, yet more people than the combined total of the United States, Canada and the European Union starve each day (WFP, 2012). By using an inverted conception of the Copenhagen School's five sectors to structure this argument, it will be highlighted that famine and undernutrition are perpetuated by structural violence, which is inflicted systematically and indirectly by prevailing social orders (Farmer, 2004, p. 306). Throughout, South Sudan will be used as a case study as this will allow an assessment of what type of world it is into which the youngest state has been born.

Inspired by the 'fallen realist' Ken Booth (1994, p.10), this argument will use a critical security approach by 'rethinking the common sense orthodoxy' (Booth, 2005, p. 2). The policies and practices of the state do not operate in a vacuum; rather they act in, around and upon the lives of individuals, and a critical approach to security recognises that 'in the modern world [hunger] is neither a natural phenomenon nor the product of an unbalanced Malthusian equation. It is a structural problem' (Shepherd, 2012, p. 195-196). This approach will demonstrate that whilst both famine and undernutrition can be understood within the context of state security, a focus on the similarities and differences alone serves to marginalise the underlying structural causes from the debate. Therefore, this argument readjusts the question, believing it not to address seriously the issue of food insecurity. Galtung argues that 'structural violence is silent, it does not show, it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters' (Galtung, 1969, p. 173). It is the aim of this argument to throw a few rocks.

This argument progresses in three key stages; firstly, the theoretical framework will be identified; secondly, the concepts of famine and undernutrition addressed; finally, the Copenhagen School's five sectors will be used to structure the argument: *while food insecurity can threaten the prevailing sovereignty of the territorial state, the state and the structure it works within equally perpetuates, exacerbates and maintains hunger.*

For the Copenhagen school, 'the standard unity of security is the sovereign territorial state' and the nation state must be the perspective through which all security concerns are filtered (Buzan, 2011 [1991], p22 & Wæver 1995, p.49). The five sectors which the School argues can be used to read security are: political, military, economic, societal and environmental. Reading security through these lenses allows the state to securitize a wider range of issues, a process which presents an issue as an 'urgent and existential threat' (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 29). A key component of the Copenhagen School is that it allows securitization through a process known as speech acts. Wæver explains, the speech act 'is the utterance itself, by uttering security a state-representative … claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary' (Wæver, Securitization , 2011 [1995], p. 95). Thus, the Copenhagen School presents an analytical tool with which to examine the practices of security. However, it still grounds its understanding of the international system heavily within the state, which as a concept can survive food insecurity, whilst the individuals within cannot (Shiva, 2002). Hence, this approach uses the Copenhagen School's five sectors

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in an attempt to systematically undermine its state centric approach by highlighting that its widened security agenda has not effectively, or even tried to, challenge the structural violence of hunger.

An alternative approach would be to utilise a human security perspective, which demonstrates an understanding that state security does not equate to individual security (Bilgin, 2003, p.213). However, this approach is limited in its ability to prioritise concerns and simply describes bad things (Floyd, 2007, p.39). From a critical perspective, human security has aided the marginalisation of debates concerning structural violence. It has been locked in a dichotomous relationship with traditional state security; thus debates concerning security have been trapped in this structure. For example, a critical theorist would argued that 'regimes of truth' appeal to dichotomous relationships (Campbell, 2007, p. 216), and thus, to recognise that the current 'truths' which define security are locked in a dichotomous relation, between state security and human security, is the first step towards emancipation. Human security can be seen to isolate human insecurities from each other; it can, for example, recognise the insecurities stemming from HIV/AIDs, patriarchy or food insecurity, however, by engaging with these alone does not go deep enough, despite penetrating state centricity, rather it only engages with the surface symptoms of the structure. These symptoms are not radically different from each other and can be tackled through similar means, for example, education could help teach about safe sex, help in the emancipation of women and also teach the value of a balanced nutritious diet. Therefore, if the insecurities faced by individuals require a similar 'solution' it is indicative that the root cause stems from a single origin, the structure of the international system.

Having identified what can been seen as inadequacies with both the widened Copenhagen School's approach and the deeper human security approach, it should hopefully be clear why this assessment seeks to situate itself outside of this dichotomous paring and address the phenomenon of hunger from a more critical perspective.

Both famine and undernutrition are indicative of food insecurity, and the term is not one without complication as there is an abundance of definitions, with estimates claiming that there exist over 200 alongside 450 indicators of food security (Mechlem, 2004, p.633). Nevertheless, most food security definitions have been drawn from the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) 1996 Rome Declaration on World Food Security, which states that

'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).

Famine, is 'traditionally seen as a food or subsistence crisis, resulting from an absolute shortage of food, or an inability by some groups to gain access' (Swift, 2006, p.41), and arguably since the 1990s, has largely been confined to areas of the world where poverty and conflict constitute existence (Dupont & Thirlwell, 2009, p. 73). A famine is when: 'at least 20 per cent of households face extreme food shortages … acute malnutrition rates exceed 30 per cent; and the death rate exceeds two persons per day per 10,000 persons' (UN News Centre, 2011, WFP, 2012). Whilst famine can be identified, the causes of famine were often assigned to acts of God, such as floods or bad harvest; however, Amartya Sen's entitlement theory reassessed these claims. Sen's seminal claim, and the opening line of this essay, recognises that famine is not simply the result of an act of God, rather responsibility lies with man.

Undernutrition, on the other hand, is the product of 'inadequate food intake either in quantity or quality' (WFP, 2012c, p. 7), showing an initial difference to famine which deals directly with the *lack of* food rather that more broadly its *inadequacies*. This difference is further illustrated with the idea that 'malnutrition does not always go hand in hand with food insecurity or poor food consumption (WFP, 2012c, p. 30). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has highlighted that food security is built on three pillars: availability, access and use (WHO, 2012) and therefore,

'food quality and nutritional value [matter] as, even if food is consumed in quantities sufficient to meet caloric and protein needs, micro-nutrient deficits … heavily impact on mental functions and vulnerability to disease' (Mechlem, 2004, p.636).

For example, malnutrition 'accelerate[s] [the] progression from HIV to AIDS' as the disease demands individuals need a greater intake of valuable nutrients (de Waal & Whiteside, 2003, p. 1236). In a recent report concerning South Sudan, the WFP concluded that 'undernourishment is the main driving force of hunger' (WFP, 2012c, p. 9), not

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famine, and thus for South Sudan the use and quality of food is to some extent a greater issue.

One summary that can be used is Devereux's, who highlights that,

'chronic malnutrition describes … a poorly balanced diet … undernutrition is the physical syndrome associated with prolonged food deprivation [yet] neither constitutes sufficient evidence for famine …it is a wide-ranging crisis [and] not simply a biological syndrome' (1993, p.13).

Deverux's explanation places a great emphasis on the impact of famine, yet, 'just because a situation is officially a famine does not mean it was not a crisis beforehand' (BBC, 2011).

Having highlighted a theoretical approach and identified the need for a critical and emancipatory approach; the Copenhagen's five sectors will now be used to structure an exploration of the structural perpetuation of famine and undernutrition

Looking at the military sector allows a gradual departure away from traditional security studies. Buzan claims 'military security concerns the two level interplay of the armed offensive and defensive capabilities of states' (Buzan, 1991). The most effective way in which the military sector be used to understand food insecurity is demonstrated with the recent uprisings during the Arab spring. Last year the Institute for International Security Studies (IISS) linked the Arab Spring to the need for food, 'record food prices have been just one ingredient in the unrest in the Arab world' (IISS, 2011). When there is hunger, there is conflict, and it is with conflict the military must directly get involved.

However, the existence of an extensive military results in a preoccupation with realism. War is one of the greatest disruptions to food access (Devereux, 1993, p.162) and when conflict sets a state into a state of confusion, hunger rises (WFP 2012a). A realist psyche makes it necessary to increase military power, and South Sudan's recent independence from Sudan has led to conflict over the disputed borders in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan states, consequentially creating an influx of refugees with over 170,000 escaping the conflict and food insecurity. As a direct consequence the refugee camp in Yida has become an extreme humanitarian crisis, and in the Batil camp one in three face malnourishment (MSF, 2012). As a result, the UN has declared that the mortality rates in South Sudan remain above the emergency threshold (Heaton, 2012). Buzan claims 'the industrial genie, with its military progeny, is permanently out of the bottle' (Buzan, 1991, p. 445) and studies which have addressed the relationship between military power and food security conclude that military spending contributes to hunger (Scanlan & Jenkins, 2001). A simple example from South Sudan illustrates this point further. The Government of South Sudan army is the country's largest employer with around 40% and rising proportion of the budget (IRIN, 2012). Due to the instability of the country and the realist's security dilemma, the government of South Sudan is unable to resolve the food insecurity faced by the hundreds of thousands affected by displacement. In terms of determining differences between famine and undernutrition through this sector, the most obvious difference is how military conflict can lead to much greater displacement of individuals and thus lead to a greater chance of famine. However, a fundamental preoccupation with traditional military security seeks to exacerbate both famine and undernutrition by perpetuating and ignoring food insecurity more broadly.

Reorienting towards societal insecurity which 'exists when communities of whatever kind define a development as a threat to their survival as a community' (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 119). Famine can lead to death, and 'depopulation threatens identity by threatening its character' (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 121). Similarly, undernutrition effects South Sudan, 44% of children under the age of two are malnourished, with 18% of them 'reportedly in the most severe, potentially life-threatening stage of their disease' (Umn, 2012). Within Africa the main associations are that of 'the pre modern state, the extended family, village clans and tribes' (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 126) and therefore such a loss of population through death or forced displacement serves to make both famine and undernutrition damaging insecurities.

However, societal structuring and divisions of societies, along ethnic or tribal lines for example, can lead to the perpetuation of hunger. Richard Ashley's argument that, the international system 'involves little more than an endless parlaying of representation of danger' (Ashley, 1989, p. 311) demonstrates that when seeing the other as a danger,

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competition for food resources will be relative. In South Sudan this is most apparent in the competition between ethnic groups in the form of deadly cattle raids, and thousands have died as a result of clashes between the Lou neur and Murel tribes (MRG, 2011, BBC, 2012). In this context, the probability of becoming exposed to the 'long term hunger' of undernutrition is apparent. However, long term conflict can lead to displacement and the complete dismantling of society, which can make famine far more likely. A recent report from Minority Rights Group (MRG) claims over 120,000 people have been affected by this highly organised inter-communal violence and tens of thousands of refugees have also have to flee from Sudan to South Sudan (MRG, 2012). In turn, this has led to increasing fears of an impending famine, with 80% of those in the North of South Sudan surviving on one meal a day (The Daily Star Lebanon, 2012).

Thus, on a domestic level, the violent structuring of society can lead to both undernutrition and famine. A conclusion could be drawn that on a small scale societal violence can maintain undernutrition due to the competition for food on a relative bases. However, when this conflict become highly organised and divided along ethnic lines, and in the case of South Sudan a potential genocide, according to Genocide Watch (2012) rather than the need for food in a crisis its impact becomes far greater and risks displacing whole communities and thus famine becomes more likely as it would be indicative of a 'wide ranging crisis'. The differences between famine and undernutrition are not necessarily vast in character; rather the scale of societal violence will determine the chances of famine rather than prolonged hunger.

Moving on, for the Copenhagen School, the political sector 'is about the organisational stability of societal order' (Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998, p. 141) and concerns the 'organisational stability of states, systems of government and the ideologies that give them legitimacy' (Buzan, 1991, p. 433). Celebrating the anniversary of South Sudan's independence in a speech earlier this year President Salva Kiir Mayardit, announced 'if there is one thing we should strive for, it is food security' (Mayardit, 2012), highlighting how the food security of individuals is the distinct responsibility of the state. Shepherd (2012) argues 'by allowing this physical harm to continue, elites are failing in their self-assigned role as protectors … [it is] an undermining of political legitimacy' (p.199). If individuals starve then the political elite is also starved of support, and without this support loses the legitimacy that allows them to remain in power, thus food insecurity can impact state security.

Yet, the political sector maintains the perpetuation of food insecurity. There are claims within South Sudan that the government has fuelled undernutrition as 'resources have been diverted to more populous ethnic groups' (MRG, 2011), and the government is not reacting due to a reliance on the Lou Nuer tribes. For example Genocide Watch identified even though the Lou Nuer tribe systematically burn down huts, kill cattle and individuals of the Murle tribes,

'the South Sudanese government has been reluctant to interfere in the feuds between the two tribes due to the fact the Lou Nuer play a crucial role in supplying the South Sudanese army' (Genocide Watch , 2012).

While this maintenance of the uneven resource distribution by the political elite is worrying, the ways in which the political elite can threaten famine is worse. Famine as a tool of war has been described as 'a backdrop to the renewed threat of war between Sudan in the north and South Sudan' (Clooney & Prendergast, 2011). Those in the Blue Nile, Darfur and South Kordofan regions are suffering at the war crimes committed by the Sudan government; it is blocking international aid, and thus increasing the potential for an onset famine. Famine, unlike undernutrition, can be used as a tool of war.

As well as this, due to the current economic climate the South Sudanese government has had to announce austerity cuts. Kosti Manibe Ngai, Minister of Finance and Economic Planning announced this year the disaster management and humanitarian affairs budget will remain the same, but the South Sudan Reconstruction Fund is being cut by 85% (Ngai, 2012). From this it could be argued that South Sudan will be able to address the issue of famine far more successfully as it has maintained a commitment to disaster management, which ultimately includes famine. However, undernutrition is a far more enduring feature of society, not necessarily an emergency and thus intimately linked with development and reconstruction. Therefore, while South Sudan has a greater political will to solve famine, a more obvious threat to political stability, the cutting of the reconstruction fund is indicative the infrastructure necessary to ensure nutrition is being jeopardised.

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Environmental security, meanwhile, 'concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend' (Buzan, 1991, p. 233). Hunger, due its reliance on the ability to grow food, is heavily affected by the change in the climate, with over '71% of people who are affected with floods consuming less than 2100 calories daily' (WFP, 2012, p. 11). This year the WFP reported that 'drought is now the single most common cause of food shortages in the world' (WFP, 2012a) and this stems from the fact that 'the total global area of arable land is being threatened by pollution, salinization and soil degradation' (Dupont & Thirlwell, 2009, p. 84). Droughts can cause displacement, rapid changes in food prices and an escalation of ethnic tensions. Thus, as the environment impacts food security which also threatens the Copenhagen School's other sectors, food security can be securitized within the environmental sector

Due to food security's intimate relationship with the environment the differences between famine and undernutrition are limited, as the means in which the environment is engaged with undermines them both simultaneously. There is a phenomenon that the poor will starve so the rich can drive. The growing green priorities of European powers to reduce their carbon footprint there increased the demand for biofuels, which has resulted in land grabs the equivalent to the size of Denmark within Africa (Monbiot, 2012). This approach to the environment perpetuates the food insecurities by reducing the amount of land that is available to cultivate. Specifically in South Sudan, the area of land acquired by outside forces is bigger than the size of Rwanda, and some studies suggest up to 10% of South Sudan is owned by outsiders (Rhode, 2011). Environmental degradation also affects South Sudan as areas are facing desertification, thus making it harder to cultivate the land and grow food (Vidal, 2011). A difference between undernutrition and famine could arise from the fact that environmental disaster could bring famine to a previously stable community, whereas undernutrition does not necessarily happen instantaneously. However, unlike undernutrition famine can be 'abolished because it can be systematically anticipated, monitored and prevented' (Chen and Kates, 1994, p.202). This is shown through the very existence of USAID's Famine Early Warning System (FEWS). In the case of South Sudan the FEWS claims that food security will improve moderately due to an expected 'average' harvest, however, the real utility stems from the FEWS's ability to predict that

'during the second half of the scenario period [March 2013], own production is expected to decline and markets will start to serve as a major food source for poor households' (FEWS, 2012).

The existence of FEW makes it possible to identify where famine can occur and thus assistance targeted. Undernutrition on the other hand is a much more silent phenomenon, and thus not open to such obvious means of response. Therefore, both undernutrition and famine are affected by the engagement with the environment and South Sudan like other LDCs has little decisive impact of these engagements. However, although famine can be caused by environmental issues, the fact the environment can be measured more scientifically than the social, economic and political factors that allow undernutrition, it can be, in theory, negated.

Finally, the economic sector is defined in terms of 'access to the resources, finance and markets necessary to sustain acceptable levels of welfare and power' (Buzan, 1991, p. 433). The primary means in which food insecurity affects the state is demonstrated through findings by the DFID which reported that undernutrition specifically threatens the whole nation as it diminishes a child's ability at school and thus their 'capacity to earn in later life' (DFID, 2012). However, the economic sector is equally dramatically affected by the ways in which famine can promote conflict, lead to death of the work force and uproot whole communities, and thus both food insecurities impact on the state's economic capability, famine in the short term, and undernutrition in the long term.

Primarily, the economic structuring of the international system does more to maintain food insecurity. Whilst Sen's work can highlight that food insecurity is not merely a result of acts of God, but rather a wider range of social, economic and political factors, his work has been criticised for ignoring 'trade liberalization and globalisation as a cause for why people go hungry today' (Shiva, 2002). Demonstrated with the example that due to the profitability of export crops such as flowers individuals are undermining their food security as they become too reliant on crops that do not provide nutrition, 'when countries grow flowers … for export, they also sow the seeds of hunger' (Shiva, 2002). This process has been maintained by the neo-liberal policies of the state. When the macro-security of South Sudan is threatened, the country becomes unable to meet its 'immediate food needs through imports and in the long term [the ability to] develop the large potential in agricultural, livestock and fisheries' (WFP, 2012, p. 41). Escalating arguments

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over the revenue of the oil extracted from South Sudan, but then sub-sequentially exported from the North, has undermined the security of South Sudan, which relies on 98% of its income to come from oil (Holmes, 2012). Thus, many individuals as well as the state are being denied access to food due to an inability to participate in the global market successfully. The FAO clearly states that economic access to food is a pillar of food security. Yet, reporting that a potential famine could occur in South Sudan, Ngor Arol Garang demonstrated the volatile food prices that the individuals of South Sudan must face. In an interview with one woman it was shown the 'a bundle of ground okra that cost 1 South Sudanese Pound (SSP) two months ago now cost 2 SSP' (Garang, 2011). However, similar to the societal sector, the economic structure can lead to degrees of food insecurity ranging from undernutrition to famine, rather than demonstrating a clear difference between the two. As well as this, the economic sector impacts the others, it can cause societal conflict for relative food gains, or making it necessary for the government to restrict spending on reconstruction. Fundamentally, food security requires economic access to food. The global structuring of the economic has denied this to many. While the fact the hungry cannot work is an issue for the economy, the fact the economy does not work for the hungry is a bigger issue.

In way of a conclusion, by using the well-known Copenhagen School and engaging with it from a different perspective, the ways in which food insecurities, both famine and undernutrition, are maintained through the violent structural practices of the international system have been highlighted. This argument, due to its critical perspective, denied complete engagement with the limited debate between famine and undernutrition. Instead, rocks were thrown in the water to send ripples through the understanding of what it means to be secure and how current debates of security lack meaningful engagement. However, there are a few points to be stated and questions that must be asked.

Firstly, this assessment has looked at food insecurity as one manifestation of structural violence. This violence impacts all areas of life and food security has been used as a focus to highlight the dangers of accepting that the debate of security matters only between state and human security.

Human security was discredited for not going deep enough into the causes of hunger. However, this does not mean it is of no use. Structural reorientation may take the complete destruction of what we know in order to rebuild afresh. Thus, human security may be the best approach in order to work within the current structure. While it may only be dealing with the symptoms of the structure it can at least manage these symptoms and make them less harmful. The most important thing is that it has moved away from the state, whose security does not equate with the security of the individual.

Finally, has this critical approach added anything to the debate? In terms of providing a solution, or policy options to the condition of hunger the answer is no, and arguably this can make a critical perspective redundant, even unethical by ignoring the suffering of millions of individuals. Yet, recognising the critical debate situated outside of the dominate debates of security can be a step towards emancipation, and thus a new understanding of security and wellbeing. Recognising the structural forces within which we live is the first step to changing them.

As a concluding statement, Ken Booth highlights the key aim of this essay: that,

'we should not worry about the uncertainties, confusions and overload presently in the study of security. It is more justifiable at this time to be confused but receptive, and aware of one's lack of knowledge, rather than the opposite' (Booth, 1994, p. 19).

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