Neo-liberal Discourse and the Food Crisis

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Masters at the Political Studies Department
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Dunedin, New Zealand

10 September 2009
Abstract

The world food crisis of 2008 presented the neo-liberal development model with one of its sharpest challenges since the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s. The impacts of agricultural market liberalization, the retrenchment of state supports in developing countries and the increasing presence of transnational corporations (TNCs) in the global food trade, appear largely negative in the face of increasing food insecurity for the world’s poor. Massive social unrest across much of the developing world forced world leaders, international institutions and the global media to take stock of the systemic crises. This thesis is concerned with, gauging the ability of neo-liberal discourse to respond to the challenge of the food crisis, and tracking the political formations that emerge from the media event of this disaster spectacle. In undertaking this task I will firstly lay out a brief sketch of the development of neo-liberalism across the developing world and its impact on agricultural production. Political Economy of the Media in combination with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are utilized as a means to identify discursive formations, the hierarchy of actors and the particular political trajectory to come out of the crisis. This research identifies a central casual structure of economism/urgency/new consensus, which manages to simulate radical self-reflexivity and openness, while securing the further expansion of neo-liberalism. While the financial crisis of neo-liberalism, that followed the food crisis, has lead some, such as Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd (Kelly 2009), to pronounce the death of neo-liberalism, this research demonstrates the supple re-configurations that sustain the project in the face of systemic collapse.
I would like to thank my wife Sarah for sending me back to school and supporting me in every way imaginable.

Geoff Craig’s supervision has been an invaluable asset both as a scholarly resource and for his expertise and experience in the field of journalism.

The assistance and knowledge of my parents Annemarie and Theirry Jutel is tremendous resource for which I am thankful.

Dedicated to Amasio and Naomi Jutel.
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<tr>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>American Enterprise Institute</td>
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<td>AoA</td>
<td>Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture</td>
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<td>CDA</td>
<td>Critical Discourse Analysis</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>OPEC</td>
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<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
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<td>TRIPS</td>
<td>Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights</td>
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<td>UN</td>
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<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<td>US</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
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Introduction

Early 2008 saw unprecedented worldwide price increases in staple food commodities during what was soon to be dubbed the ‘food crisis’. The impact of the crisis was felt around the globe with varying degrees of intensity, but for the developing countries of the global South, the impact was enormous. Stark United Nations (UN) calculations added 100 million people to the ranks of the already 800 million starving globally as a result of a 55% increase in food prices from June 2007 to June 2008 (World Food Program (WFP) 2008). The urban poor of the South, priced out of an already tenuous subsistence, could no longer be ignored by world leaders and the media. Food riots broke out across the globe, from the Middle East to West and North Africa, South East and continental Asia. While the unrest in the cities and slums drew immediate attention and concern, their eruption was only symptomatic of greater malaise in traditional agrarian societies as a result of displacement and social dislocation. The sharp price rises developed alongside turbulent global financial markets and increasing fears of an energy crisis, which drove intense speculation and record oil prices. This confluence of events would appear to draw into question the correlation between the centers of finance and investment, and the world’s poor. While the images of desperate starving people in far-off lands are familiar, the direct implication of the financial systems of the West calls into question the specific structure of North-South economic relations in the neo-liberal project political.

The events of the world food crisis forced the leaders of the world to come together in a moment of disaster management, through the Rome Food Summit of early June. The upsurge of Third World protest and the admission of failure in meeting millennium development goals of poverty reduction, would appear to be a critical moment or turning point for the neo-liberal world order of food production. The intimation that the food crisis was ‘man-made’ (Ki-Moon 2008c) and ultimately ‘not
'a global food shortage' (IMF, 2008c) seems to call into to sharp focus the systems of productive and social organization that could produce such an imbalance as the food crisis. This thesis is concerned with the question of how neo-liberalism and neo-liberal discourse managed to navigate the food crisis and whether the political project of neo-liberalism was dealt serious blows, dislodged, perpetuated or reinvigorated by the challenge. Despite poor social outcomes and a succession of financial crises, neo-liberalism has retained the privileged status of technocratic orthodoxy with the ability to mobilize political subjectivities around market aspirations.

In undertaking the task of critically analyzing the performance of neo-liberal discourse and its ability to meet the challenges of the food crisis, I have selected a wide body of texts from international institutions, aid agencies and media including The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Washington Post, all from between March and September of 2008. The methodological approaches of Critical Political Economy of the Media (Mosco 1996, Herman & Chomsky 1988) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1995) allow for the identification of the media and institutions as co-constituents of discursive construction. The global agenda setting media and the institutions of the World order are co-dependent and share mutual interests of projection. The media are crucially dependent on authoritative institutions as sources, while institutions rely upon the media for discursive articulation. This process is not insular or static as the media is open to contestation, while at the institutional level, internal struggles, crises of legitimacy and the necessity of mobilizing aspirational values, preserves a level of openness. It is in this dialectical engagement and interchange that one can track the emergent order of discourse (Foucault 1971) that entails a particular political trajectory and hierarchy of actors for neo-liberalism.
This thesis begins by examining the process of neo-liberalization across the developing world and the impact on agriculture. The neo-liberal era of the last 30 years has had a tremendous impact on agricultural producers particularly in the South as state support systems have been gutted. This has unfolded alongside an increased dependence upon Trans-National Corporations (TNC) for key inputs, the prices of which have skyrocketed through intellectual property rights (IPRs) which allow for lucrative rents to be extracted from Southern producers. The rising costs of production have forced many small holders off the land and into teeming urban centers and slums. This process of neo-liberalization has been built upon a fundamental imbalance of power within the supra-national financial institutions. The enforcement of trade rules by the World Trade Organization (WTO) have been disparate as regards North-South interests. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), acting largely in the interests of New York investment banks (Harvey 2005), has executed macro-economic reforms which force open southern markets to investment and financial flows, while the World Bank has made loans conditional on the proper implementation of neo-liberal reform.

In approaching the media and institutional texts selected I outline the method of Critical Political Economy of the Media (Mosco 1996, Herman & Chomsky 1988) to explicate the symmetry of values between news media production and the organs of neo-liberal political economy. The media are fundamental in forming public consciousness around finance, as a consensus priority, and in servicing markets with both information and hardware. As the news media are primarily engaged in commodity production, source strategies are intrinsically shaped by questions of economic efficiency. The effect of this is to elevate official, institutional sources as objective authorities. This dictates a specific structure of North/South political
engagement around the moral questions of global civil society and a ‘politics of pity’ (Boltanski 1999).

In undertaking a close analysis of media texts, the approach of Critical Political Economy of the Media is complemented by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1995). CDA allows the mapping of political and ideological formations through the identification of a discursive assemblage of actors, nodal points and critical signifiers within a hegemonic logic. A discourse can be seen as attempt to expound a genealogy of the present with the purpose of securing consent for a said political project. A re-ordering or re-articulation of neo-liberal discourse and its constituents in the face of an event such as the food crisis represents an opening to critical analysis and a test of the ideological supremacy and vigor of neo-liberalism.

The critical analysis of media texts generated by the global food crisis as a media event, reveals a clear discursive structure of causality that helps secure the further mobilization of neo-liberal agricultural policies. The ability to contain the events of the food crisis within neo-liberal discourse rests upon a framework of economism, urgency and the need for a new consensus. The primary economistic framing establishes food price inflation, supply and demand, as the definitive factors of the crisis and social unrest. This enables a discourse of market essentialism that elevates price indicators as abstract universal measures, naturalizing market function and depoliticizing investment and investors as forces for the end of history (the ultimate achievement in human historical, political development). Having established the empirical basis of the crisis, the discourse moves to the anti-theoretical call for urgent action. The appeal to humanitarian sensibilities is critical in both incorporating a perceived radical critique of neo-liberalism and limiting the responsibility of neo-liberalism for the current crisis. The moralization of politics, as distinct from direct
material responsibilities, offers a measure of political action which is potentially redemptive for the developed countries if they embrace their moral obligations to charity. The ability of neo-liberalism to emerge from the immediate reality of the food crisis is predicated upon the mobilization of aspirational values and desires to achieve greater equity between North and South. This humanitarian appeal is crucial in marshalling the new consensus and creating a forward momentum for neo-liberal policies. Supplementing this humanitarian discourse within the nodal construction of the consensus are depoliticized discourses of technology, development and the Green Revolution. What is crucial to this new assemblage in maintaining the authority of neo-liberalism is the unquestioned position of the international market and its actors, such as TNCs and hedge fund investors, to enact the new consensus.
**Chapter One: Neo-liberalism and Agriculture**

In order to properly consider the features of neo-liberal discourse it is necessary to first outline some of the core theoretical and political developments of neo-liberalism, specifically with regards to agro-food production. The primary principle of neo-liberal reformation has been establishing monetary stability and the marketization of state services. The supply-side belief in markets as a means to measure social need and deliver essential services has been paired with extensive financialization. These basic parameters for accumulation are supported by a broader regime of free trade and liberalized investment, through the WTO, which is held to usher in an efficient international division of labor. Agriculture in the neo-liberal period has been characterized by intensive capitalization both in the developed and developing world, with the expansive reach of a small number of agro-food corporations (Buckland 2004). The neo-liberal transformation of agriculture in the global South is inextricably linked to the Third World debt crisis (Patel 2007).

Under the direction of the World Bank and IMF, a dramatic period of structural adjustment ensued which led to the collapse of developmentalist state structures and supports for agricultural producers. The social impacts have been devastating with the wide-spread disappearance of small holder farms and increased urban migration. Remaining farmers have had to navigate a new framework marked by inequitable relations, between North and South, enshrined in the WTO. In order to understand the imbalances of power that are manifest in the neo-liberal internationalist regime, it is important to consider the geopolitical role of agriculture in ensuring an expanding terrain for capitalist accumulation. The current crisis of agricultural production, which has centered around oil, biofuels and inputs, rather than an external anomaly, represents the culmination of the neo-liberal pattern of development.
Neo-liberal Theory

The neo-liberal prescription that emerged from the 1970s stagflation crisis of capitalism consisted of a macro-economic framework of monetarism in combination with increased marketization. The theoretical tenets of monetarism hold that establishing stable and appropriate currency values, through the tight control of the money supply via interest rates, is the ultimate economic objective. From this, stable export-led growth ensues and ‘all other economic problems will quickly and automatically be solved’ with, ‘no need to worry about an incomes policy, exchange rates policy, unemployment policy etc.’ (Thompson 1981, p. 29). The principle stipulation that the proper price of money, through the rate of interest, and a floating currency set the appropriate framework for accumulation, is premised on a ‘belief in markets’ (Thompson 1981, p. 31) and in the private sector to distribute social goods.

In considering the mechanics of supply and demand, the demand side is seen to be stable while the supply of money is subject to many disturbances and distortions. Unnecessary government spending in the market ‘disturbs the natural rhythm of the private sector’ (Thompson 1981, p. 31) and sets government upon a course of stabilizations and interventions that perpetuate a cycle of distortions and inflation.

The market faith of monetarist macro-economics leads to the coupling of ‘supply-side’ economics at the micro level of neo-liberal policy. As government spending and interventions are seen as upsetting the market relationship of supply and demand, the principles of supply-side economics dictate the elimination of government activity deemed distortionary. It is worth further elaborating at this point the conceptualization of government premised by neo-liberalism. Where markets do not exist the state ‘must use its power to impose or invent market systems’ (Harvey 2005, p. 65), revealing a tension around the degree of political intervention and coercion.
required to create a free market. The services of the state, wherever possible, are to be thrust into the market for open and transparent competition, thus ensuring efficiency and cost effectiveness for consumers of services. The juridical values of the state concern the protection of property rights, individual freedom of action, the ‘sanctity of contracts’ and the facilitation of freely functioning markets and free trade (Harvey 2005, p. 64). These values are seen as the framework that realize individual freedom and potential with rational subjects best able to determine their social needs through the market. Neo-liberalism’s social values, aside from the technical prescriptions, mandate the abolishment of progressive taxation and the retrenchment of social welfare policy with the possibility of the outright elimination of social provision. Furthermore the elimination of supply-side distortions dictate that the protection of national industries be eliminated in compliance with the internationalism of monetarism and the opening up to foreign investment and capital flows.

The neo-liberal policy prescription exalts the inherent virtues of the market, both in terms of economic and social values, thus requiring its extension into all realms of social organization and environmental management. The elimination of environmental and industrial regulation, as distortionary compliance costs, is held as a priority of supply-side principles, however it is further seen in social terms as a means to protect against any potential ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Harvey 2005, p. 65). Market rationality and exchange are held as ‘natural’ and for the ‘greater good’, while a lack of property rights is seen as a disincentive to environmental custodianship (Mansfield 2004, p. 314). Furthermore the profit motive is held to create ‘more innovative and efficient environmental solutions than those devised, implemented and enforced by the state’ (Mansfield 2004, p. 313). The market can be
used to assign value to environmental damage, through tradable pollution rights, or schemes such as carbon emissions trading (McCarthy & Prudham 2003, p. 277-279).

The neo-liberal prescription of financialization follows the creation of robust property rights, privatization of public goods and the extension of markets and market relations to a wide variety of previously closed economies. The impetus for the expansion of financial markets lies in the belief that markets can properly assess value leading to enhanced information and thus the virtuous cycle of supply and demand functions undisturbed. Larger volumes of trade improve the quality and accuracy of market signals and information. Milton Friedman, the pre-eminent neo-liberal economist, dismissed the potential problem of speculation, arguing rather that it serves to stabilize any imbalances in the fundamentals of an economy, with short term profit seeking sending signals to commodity producers and/or investors (Palley 2007, p. 5). Financialization also represents a distinct shift in the dynamics of capitalist class power (Harvey 2005, p. 33) as CEOs and corporate management diminish the power of the owners of capital. Such an internal capitalist class power struggle can be seen between farmers and large hedge fund investment. Financialization also entails a bio-political transformation of the neo-liberal subject as market actor. In America, the creation of an investor identity has been established through 401(k) retirement plans and the individual leveraging of home equity for personal debt (Palley 2007).

Neo-liberalism has also been marked by a specific relationship to, and value placed in, technology that is of particular significance in considering the question of agriculture. Neo-liberalism espouses Promethean views of technology where the potential for growth through technology is virtually boundless with little conceptualization of natural limits (McCarthy & Prudham 2004, p. 277). The
exaltation of technology is derived from specific technological developments necessitated by neo-liberalism. Financial expansion and liberalization has been accompanied by a remarkable development of information and communication technologies which dramatically accelerate the speed of finance capital circulation in what Harvey has called ‘time-space compression’ (2005, p. 4). The resulting immense concentration and accumulation of financial capital has also necessitated expanding realms of investment with the revolutionizing and over-capitalization of production. This process has been accelerated by the removal of protections, thus enforcing the ‘coercive law’ of competition and intensifying the quest for relative surplus value (or profit) through technological innovation (Marx 1906, p. 350). This dynamic of technological development has had the effect of driving up production costs leading to larger economies of scale and high concentration of ownership in agricultural production and distribution. Furthermore, the creation of highly capitalized systems of production has created tremendous barriers to entry for Third World agricultural producers.

The neo-liberal reforms of capital and financial liberation at the domestic level are subsets of a broader internationalist agenda to expand capitalist labor and production to all reaches of the globe through ‘free trade’. This goal has been pursued through the creation of the WTO and bi-lateral trade agreements such as North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). Enshrined in such agreements are vigorous investor protections that elevate ‘capitalist firms to a near equal footing with sovereign states’ (McCarthy 2004, p. 330). Despite the fact that the WTO frames trade as occurring between nations, increasingly it has taken place through ‘transnational corporate controlled production networks’ (Hart-Landsberg 2006, p. 4). The virtues of free trade are derived from the extension of market relations between nations and peoples of the world. In addition, free trade is held by neo-
liberal theory to have tremendous humanitarian and developmentalist qualities for the poor countries of the world. This belief lies in the neo-classical Ricardian theory of comparative advantage and an international division of labor where ‘competition between countries . . . fortify the weak and enervate the strong’ (Shaikh 2004, p. 46). Stated simply; ‘a country’s best economic policy is to allow unregulated international market activity to determine its comparative advantage and natural pattern of production’ (Hart-Landsberg 2006, p. 2). The comparative cost advantage theory holds that any trade balance deficit or surplus will affect the value of imports vis-a-vis exports leading to an adjustment of currency value that restores a balance of payments (Shaikh 2004). From this, comparative factor advantage theory maintains that the industries that possess a cheap local input will emerge as the foreign currency earner for a nation (Shaikh 2004). It follows that nations look to the international market for their economic security as degrees of self-sufficiency are discouraged as inefficient and distortionary.

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of altruism and empowerment, it is worth considering the historical origins of the Ricardian neo-classical notion of comparative advantage, which elucidate inherent asymmetries of economic power. Karl Polanyi (2001) noted that England sacrificed its agriculture in the belief that if grain flowed freely to Britian its ‘factories would be able to undersell all the world’ (p. 144). This pattern of exchange ‘made safe for Great Britian by the power of the Navy’ (p. 144), ensured that its markets were served fuelling rapid industrialization while laying waste to its colonies as ‘Londoners were in effect eating India’s bread’ (Davis 2001, p. 285).

*Neo-liberal Developments and Agriculture*

In tracing the political development of neo-liberal reformation, and its effect on agriculture, it is useful to turn to Harvey’s analysis of political economic forces at the
fore of capitalism in the late 70s. The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil price shock and the arrangement to recycle all petrodollars through New York investment banks created the necessity for a whole new terrain for investment (Harvey 2005, p. 27). It is in this emerging neo-liberal context that farmers in the North were ushered into a new era of capitalization of production with heavy financing, perpetuating a cycle of increased productivity and debt (Patel 2007, p. 64), along with the global expansion of agribusiness (Murray 2001, p. 136). A significant area for investment also lay in lending to governments in the global south, with US dollars, many of whom were aggressively pursuing state-led developmentalism. With the ‘Volcker Shock’ driving the US Federal Reserve’s nominal rate of interest to near 20% (Harvey 2005, p. 23), debtor nations with a shortfall in dollars were forced to submit before the Washington-based and led global institutions. What ensued in the South were a series of structural adjustment programs (SAP) and neo-liberal reformation led by the IMF and World Bank. At this point it is worth noting the specific national, class and imperial nature of finance and investment which is commonly ascribed no character other than that as a neutral force of production.

The main objectives of SAPs were twofold. Firstly stabilization required the servicing of international debt in order to restore investor confidence through austerity measures combating inflation, the balancing of trade payments, and liberalizing the national currency (Laurell 2000, p. 309). Secondly structural change was deemed necessary to set the proper macroeconomic framework for accumulation. This involved the liberalization of trade and capital flows, tax reform, deregulation, welfare reform, and marketization of wages (Laurell 2000). Developmentalist import substitution regimes were now forced to look externally for their security and development as these aims were now dependent on foreign investment and export led growth to secure US dollars. The liberalization of capital has been particularly
devastating to developing countries and has undermined the tenets of the comparative cost advantage theory. Laurell (2000) notes that in Latin America capital that was freed through wage cuts expatriated rather than reinvest in a market with a low currency and export advantage. Furthermore, as the developing economies grew and currencies strengthened they were exposed to rafts of speculation and currency raids, compounding the debt problem and leading countries back onto the ‘borrowing treadmill’ (Weis 2004, p. 466), bringing more loans with more stringent conditions.

The need for fiscal austerity and structural reform, dictated by the neo-liberal Washington financial complex, led to massive reductions in agricultural support structures across the debtor nations which drastically reconfigured local industry and agriculture. Spending cuts were justified as means to achieve efficiency and markets ‘would either revive agriculture or release the excess capital and labor it contained to more competitive economic sectors’ (Weis 2004 p. 466). In Mexico, agriculture was seen as a sector of the economy that would perform before better once freed from distortionary government practices. This belief in liberalization held that import substitution penalizes agriculture for ambitious industrialization plans, overvalued currencies hurt exports and that the state intervened to keep agricultural prices artificially low (Kelly 2001, p. 85). The result of liberalization was an 85% decline in state-led agricultural investment, a decline in the volume of agricultural credit by two thirds, public infrastructure and irrigation projects falling to waste, all resulting in a decrease in agricultural earnings between 1984-94 of 32% (Kelly 2001). Another significant policy generally eliminated in the adjustment process was the fixing of a guaranteed price for sale to government ensuring incomes for farmers and a cheap food supply for the urban working class. In a manner typical of neo-liberal state reform, Peru’s agricultural ministry was gutted in ‘ad hoc fashion’, under the
direction of the multinational financial organizations, with the number employed reduced from 23,000 in 1990 to 5,000 in 1996 (Crabtree 2002, p. 141). With the departure of such state functions, the private sector was to play an increasingly important role in credit and agricultural services, however their replacement was inconsistent, while farmers faced extremely volatile prices and the decimation of whole markets by poor servicing (Bryceson 2000).

Further principles of neo-liberal structural adjustment which have been implemented are land reform, privatization and the creation of rural land markets. This marketization was premised on the belief that local agricultural producers would be forced to capitalize by mortgaging their land to produce more efficiently and effectively or join the urban laboring classes. In Latin America in particular, this had the effect of eroding previous more equitable attempts at campesino land reform led by developmentalist states. The Sandinista Agricultural Reforms of Nicaragua were undone by the redefinition of property rights leading to ‘exclusionary growth with negative distributional consequences’ as land was re-concentrated prompting ‘declines in social indicators for much of the population’ (Jonakin 1996, p. 1179). In Brazil, the Market-Led Agrarian Reform policy had the effect of privileging the wealthy agrarian elite and legitimizing a tradition of property rights based on thievery and domination (Wolford 2005). Compounding these conditions, small farmers and peasants have faced extreme difficulty in securing credit and highly unfavorable rates when they do gain access (Jonakin 1996; Crabtree 2002; Weiss 2004). In this setting of rising inequality, small land holders face tremendous hardship social and cultural dislocation with the collapse of traditional economies and livelihoods. One notable example pertains to Mexican maize production, the traditional indigenous crop, 90% of which prior to NAFTA was produced by farmers with less than 5 hectares of land (Kelly 2001, p. 95).
The neo-liberal reformation of state practices, in conformity with market principles, cleared the way for foreign investment and the new internationalist regime of trade liberalization enshrined in the WTO Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), and other multi and bi-lateral trade agreements such as NAFTA and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). The proponents of agricultural trade liberalization have sought to replicate the reformation of the trade in manufactured commodities where over the last 60 years average rates of protection have been reduced from 30% to 3% (Anderson & Martin 2005, p. 4) whereas tariffs for agriculture remain around 40-50% (Buckland 2004, p. 109). Agricultural protection levels have remained comparatively high, particularly in the North, as the dissolution of national sensibilities around food security has proved challenging. And while sophisticated global transport technologies have developed rapidly, hard-manufactured goods are better disposed to global transport. Presently only 10% of food is produced for the global market (Buckland 2004, p. 97), while agriculture makes up just 4% of global GDP (Anderson & Martin 2005, p. 16). Despite this reasonably minor role in the global economy, agricultural liberalization has been vigorously pursued and expounded as the panacea for developing countries. Agriculture is seen to present the best chance for market access and export growth for poor nations (Anderson & Martin 2005), while World Bank trade liberalization models are held to benefit developing countries in far greater proportion than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Anderson & Martin 2004; Ingco, Brandao & Martin 1997). Crucial to these upside projections is the extent of liberalization with the most drastic reform leading to greater gains. In some scenarios ‘price shocks’ from the AoA reform, not too dissimilar to the food crisis, are held to spark a virtuous cycle whereby price incentives boost production,
increase tax revenues, reduce subsidy spending and turn least developed net food importers into to exporters (Ingco et al 1997, p. 19).

The neo-liberal drive to make developing economies efficient and open to foreign direct investment has meant the proletarianization of the rural populations, mass human migration and the collapse of many peasant societies. In tracking the historical development of the self-regulating market, Polanyi (2001) identified the re-creation of humanity in the market in which ‘all organic forms of existence’ are annihilated, replaced by atomistic organization (p.171). Accordingly, all ‘noncontractual organizations of kinship, neighbourhood, profession and creed were to be liquidated’ (p.171). It is in this sense that subsistence peasant agriculture has been decimated as it depends on extended family and community support for welfare, risk spreading and seasonal labor (Buckland 2004, p.35). In sub-Saharan Africa the stress on communal social organization is represented in the fact that between 1990-2000, external income dependence, through non-farm labor, rose from 40% to between 55-80% depending on the country (Buckland 2004, p.35). This has created tension in peasant societies as the relations between the individual and the marketplace undermine traditional household solidarity with particularly egregious effects on women (Bryceson 2000). The land, that has served as the pillar of peasant life offering subsistence and means of inheritance through the generations, has effectively been usurped through urban migration in a neo-liberal process dubbed by Harvey as ‘accumulation by dispossession’ (2005 p. 159).

What has been characteristic of the neo-liberal international trade regime and its global jurisdiction, is the intensification of global asymmetries of power and the subsequent disparity of rule enforcement. Firstly, while WTO regulations deal with nations and their role in trade with strict enforcement mechanisms, there is little
ability or attempt to monitor the activities of transnational corporations (TNCs). This despite the fact that 60% of agricultural trade is executed by TNCs with much of this international trade internal to corporations across borders (Buckland 2004, p. 98). What has remained within the capacity of the nation state through the legislative framework of the WTO has been marked by imbalances of power between the North and South. In 1995 the US government acted on behalf of national corporate interests, Dole and Chiquita, to protest Jamaica’s preferential trade status to the UK, as a former colonizer, through the Lome Agreement of 1975 (Weis 2004). The WTO ruled in favor of the US and the Jamaican banana industry was decimated. In contrast, cotton producing countries in West Africa have been unable to secure favorable concessions for their cotton farmers who produce without subsides, while cotton production is subsidized worldwide at $5 billion per annum (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) 2007). The sense of inequality between the developed and developing nations was heightened by the US’s proposal at WTO negotiations that it help the West African unsubsidized cotton producers diversify out of the crop (Thompson 2005, p. 4). The implementation of WTO mandates have been imbalanced with tariffs in developed countries for raw food commodities dropped while those for processed foods made higher thus reinforcing inequalities and preventing industrial growth in the south (Buckland 2004, p. 116).

A further discriminatory mechanism is embodied in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures that are meant to impose the standardization of hygienic and animal welfare production practices. In practice, this has meant the forced conversion of Third World agricultural export production into highly capitalized infrastructure, with large operational costs, in order to meet the requirement of market entry to the European Union (EU), US and Japan. The AoA has allowed the EU and US to justify its continued subsidization of farmers within the ‘Green Box’ that allows issues of
national priority to be excluded from certain market disciplines. The EU has used the concept of Multifunctionality to expound the social and environmental value of the Common Agricultural Policy (Hollander 2004). It is deeply ironic that such an industrialized and input-intensive system of agriculture can be appealed to in terms of innate social values, while traditional indigenous forms of agriculture and social organization in developing countries are not afforded such protection.

A further consolidation of TNC power has been advanced through the WTO with the creation of the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The TRIPS agreement has propelled the centralized control of agricultural inputs such as seed and pesticide (Kuyek 2002, p. 4), as TNCs supplant state agricultural support systems. The expansion of property rights to biotechnology has seen the massive extraction of rents flowing from South to North. In 1995, the US gained $5.7 billion while Brazil and Mexico saw outflows of $1.7 billion and $500 million (Buckland 2004, p. 125). In addition to rents, IPRs have been used to usurp indigenous knowledge such as the successful patenting and monopolizing of Basmati rice in the US by RiceTec Inc (Buckland 2004, p. 126).

The neo-liberal advance towards freer trade in agriculture has meant for farmers in the South greater mechanization and emphasis on exports, as comparative advantage theory dictates. The facet in which comparative advantage is deemed to lie is in counter-seasonal, exotic and niche produce. One ‘success story’ of this neo-liberal model is said to be Chile, where their grapes have become staples in Northern markets, however Warwick Murray has shown this success to be illusory. Other examples show that outcomes have been horrendous. Exporting Mangos or counter-seasonal apples to middle-class markets in the North has proved volatile as expectations of quality increase, consumption patterns change or a fruit becomes de-
exoticised (Murray 1998, p. 214). Furthermore, access to affluent markets is primarily controlled by transnational fruit companies. These companies, in turn, exacerbate power imbalances within rural society by dealing primarily with large farmers, forcing small farmers to meet enormous entry costs of capitalized production through huge debt to the fruit companies, as credit is nearly unattainable by other means (Murray 1998, p. 212). Increasingly, energy-intensive monocultures have come to replace low-input traditional agriculture with insidious environmental consequences, including water pollution, soil degradation and increased chemical usage. Developing nations have also found themselves less food secure as valuable arable land is reserved for export production and monocultures which undermine the farmer’s traditional safety net of eating or feeding to animals what produce is not sold. Furthermore, as smaller nations have little means to influence markets, and TNCs are afforded tremendous liberty to seek investment returns wherever they may be, a vicious cycle ensues where TNCs demand greater productivity, whatever the social and environmental damage, while vulnerable farmers are forced to oblige (Murray 2001, p. 141).

The TNC control of supply chains and market access, in combination with greater financial power through the ability to extract rents for seeds and inputs, has led to both the exportation of the capital-intensive model and its further technologization. While the Northern model and its proliferation through the ‘Green Revolution’ obviously predate neo-liberalism, a neo-liberal regime is discernible through the rapid increase of technological development such as genetic modification. The imbalance of power embedded in IPRs has passed on costs to farmers who can then only remain profitable by exponentially increasing yields. This creates what is called the ‘technology treadmill’ (Buckland 2004) as intensification is required to increase
yields while the overall effect is to depress prices, further displacing farmers, consolidating larger farms and TNC control.

The character and nature of technologies in neo-liberal agriculture are also worthy of specific consideration in light of the food/fuel production crisis that reveals an internal contradiction. The development of labor saving technologies through mechanization and the application of inputs maximizing output both invite Marx’s fundamental criticism of industrial agriculture whereby:

all progress in capitalistic agriculture in the art, not only of robbing the laborer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility...sapping the original sources of all wealth- the soil and the laborer.

(Marx 1906, p. 555-6)

This contradiction perceived by Marx, that the drive towards profit and expansion in industrial agriculture would destroy fertility, has been overcome or temporarily displaced by the ‘application of chemistry to industry and agriculture’ (Marx & Engels 1970, p. 9) or the petrochemical age. The extensive and intensive use of nitrogen fertilizers that requires liquid gas combustion has been able to provide the fertility required for increased production. The environmental impacts of this may yet prove terminal as agriculture produces 13.5% of all global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, excluding transportation and refrigeration, (International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007, p. 5) on top of the degradation of soils and deforestation. Marx allows us to draw further insights about the temporary displacement of the contradictions of industrialized agriculture, through petrochemicals, by way of analogizing it with the emergence of coal as the primary fuel of the industrial revolution. In the account of Machinery and Modern Industry,
Marx (1906) underscores the immediate dependency on the land as a source of energy for industry as well as agricultural production. The utilization of coal to power steam engines permitted production to be concentrated in towns instead of, like the water wheels, being scattered up and down the country’ (p. 412). The use of a more mobile fossil fuel, in the case of coal, which overcomes the limitation of land dependence, was fundamental in allowing rural/urban division of labor and industrial accumulation to unfold. This transformation of population distribution destroys the ‘metabolism’ that developed between man and nature (Marx, in Perelman 1996, p. 69). What these two fundamental contradictions presage with regards to contemporary agricultural production, is that the displacement of limits to accumulation is contingent and not permanent. This understanding is crucial in contextualizing the contemporary neo-liberal food crisis as an internal capitalist dynamic with the food/fuel use of land remerging and an oil shock driving up the costs of production.

Finally, apart from the transformative effect of neo-liberal regulatory practices, it is important to consider the geo-political role that agriculture has played in imparting imbalances of power carried into the neo-liberal era. The current world vulnerability to grain price fluctuations, among other crops, is born of US New Deal commodity production programs which led to an agricultural strategy of surplus management and the use of food aid to encourage replication of US production practices (Friedmann 2002). This policy accelerated with the specific intent in the Third World to contain communism (Zahariadis et. al 2000), culminating in the international effort around the Green Revolution which has been described Vandana Shiva (1991) as a means to revolutionize agrarian production without the need for land re-distribution. The Green Revolution was buttressed by a network of research centres, such as the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which in turn,
relied heavily on philanthropic organizations such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. This international effort ‘under the guise of addressing national food security’ allowed the US to promote its corporate interests through the advancement of a development model such as South Korea or India, which depended upon US inputs and supply chains (McMichael 2006, p. 268). While this framework has largely been superseded by TNC control in the neo-liberal era, this development is not antithetical to the Green Revolution, which was principally about protecting a terrain for capitalist accumulation and US corporate interests. Despite the expiry of the Green Revolution, much of the US-led aid and development continues to encourage replication through the use of neo-liberal technologies such as bio-tech. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for instance, has been involved in creating a technocratic base for bio-technology as a means to create bridges for technology transfers between Monsanto and African scientists for projects such as BT cotton and genetically modified sweet potatoes (GRAIN 2005). The role of agriculture in geopolitics has transformed from initial Cold War support for Third World developmentalism, which protected US interests from the threat of full nationalization, to the neo-liberal era of TNC domination and cutting the modest developmentalist state loose. In considering the present food crisis, any reversion to a substantive internationalist regime of development would have to thoroughly reconcile the role of TNC control of agriculture with regards to national food sovereignty.

The impact of neo-liberalism upon global agricultural production has been profound. The proliferation of finance capital has had the two-fold effect of increasing the technologization of production as well as prizing open developing economies for investment. The increasing application of petrochemical inputs and the capitalization of production, combined with the intensification of neo-liberal
investment flows, are inextricably linked to the present crisis of food and fuel. The effect of neo-liberal reformation upon farmers in the South has been devastating as state support structures have been dismantled upon the insistence of creditors; rural populations have been displaced; and remaining farmers are faced with the rising costs of production. The supranational institutions of neo-liberalism have further accelerated the inherent imbalances of power between North and South relations though disparities in the application of trade rules. The TRIPS agreement has facilitated the massive extraction of rents and the usurpation of local knowledge and technologies. The disingenuous insistence upon neo-liberal reformation from the World Bank and IMF, while Northern markets and producers remain protected, seems to render neo-liberalism useless as a practical principle. Harvey has suggested that neo-liberalism not be thought of as a real theoretical project but rather as a rhetorical deployment to mask the re-establishment of a particular form of class power (Harvey 2005, p.19). While this approximation has great utility in terms of political economic analysis, neo-liberalism nevertheless retains a transformative essence through the creation of new political subjectivities, bio-political disciplines and the means of measuring its own success.
Chapter Two: Critical Political Economy of the Media

A critical political economy approach to the media provides the necessary tools of analysis to explore the prevalence of neo-liberal discourse in media reporting of the food crisis. Critical political economy holds that the media, at an internal level of operation, are principally engaged in commodity production which crucially affects news reporting. This primary constraint dictates specific journalistic values that privilege elite institutions, reinforce conceptions of national or international consensus and marginalize critical opposition. In approaching the topic of the global food crisis, the specific news values engendered by the business model of the media, impose a particular form of politics. By encompassing the global dimension of distant suffering, the media positions itself as a new force for the end of history or the forum for global civil society, in congruence with neo-liberal values. Such a construction of the political however, has a specific de-politicized and moralizing quality that validates the Western position as universal. A globalized civil society, through the media, is contradicted by the fact that while the field of real-time communication has expanded, this has become increasingly concentrated within a global media elite emanating from traditional power centers. Having considered the internal values of media production that dictate specific source relations and a structuring of political engagement, it is necessary to identify the co-constitutive role of the media in neo-liberal political economy in order to explain the symmetry of values between neo-liberalism and the media. In addition to the internal logic of commodity production and the perpetuation of capitalist accumulation, the media have been central to the formation of neo-liberal political economy. This extends from the legitimation of marketization and facilitating market operation through information and hardware. The symbiosis of TNCs, markets and the media around telecommunications is a crucial determinant in the techno-fetishism that enmeshes
neo-liberalism and the media. The coalescence around techno-values has made the media crucial in summoning new subjectivities around market disciplines.

A critical political economy approach to the media rejects a phenomenologist view of cultural production as existing within a natural order of things, rather it is a call ‘For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing’ (Marx 1978). The media, as cultural and commercial institutions of neo-liberal political economy, are fundamentally engaged in the process of commodity production and the reproduction of capital relations. This is a distinct process in media production as it involves specifically the audience commodity’ (Mosco 1996) which is sold on to advertisers. Of particular importance is attracting ‘audiences with buying power’ and sustaining the ‘buying mood’ which legitimizes commercialism (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. 16-17). This process of commodification involves the ‘active construction of audiences’ (Mosco 1996, p. 149) by the media to suit clientele needs. This cultural production is not unilateral in the sense that the audience, as bearer of labor power, may reject the prescribed terms of realization, however the field of action is largely dominated by capital (Mosco 1996).

A notable response to the challenge of audience fragmentation, and media crises of legitimacy has been the attempt to democratize news formats through blogs, twitter and online polls. Despite this apparent responsiveness to consumers there is still an important construction of audiences in neo-liberal terms as techno-subjects.

In terms of the construction of news items, media crucially ‘concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs’ (Herman & Chomsky 1988, p. 18) for the sake of economic efficiency. Such news gathering practices are validated around values of ‘objectivity’ and empiricism. In terms of reporting economic news, markets, de-politicized central banks, international financial institutions (OECD etc) and associated technocrats are seen to be the organs of objective information around
which to construct authoritative accounts. Thus dependence on institutional sources as a mark of precision and objectivity, privileges elite sources from centers of power and establishes a 'hierarchy of access' (Glasgow University Media Group 1976). This relation of structural dependence is not closed or forced but is conditioned by perceptions of professional integrity and does not preclude marginal groups from gaining access and a level of definitional power by generating newsworthy actions and material (McNair 1999).

The structural constraints of professional journalism entail not just a privileging of institutional actors but a set of news values that assigns newsworthiness to the selection and re-construction of certain events. Galtung and Ruge list twelve general news values (in Harcup & O’Neil 2001) remains essential in specifying the conditions that determine news selection and I will consider the most important for the purpose of this research, including frequency, threshold, unambiguity, consonance, and elite nations or persons. ‘Frequency’ and ‘Threshold’ denote the time/space factors that allow for a story to be properly condensed and contained within demarcated areas of interest and consumption such as sport, business or lifestyle. ‘Unambiguity’ is favored as well as ‘Consonance’ with consensus beliefs which legitimizes the construction of news stories around official, institutional sources and ‘Elite Nations or Persons’. The news media format of the ‘story’ employs episodic narrative construction which often imposes ‘artifical rhetorical closure’ (Gitlin 1987, p. 244) so as to ‘confirm what they [the audience] already know and leave their mental structures intact’ (Bourdieu 1998, p. 45). Such news values generate a specific context for political contestation that revolves around consensus and dissent (Hartley 1982). As the media projects itself to the national, local or global consensus, political deviations are marginalized as irresponsible, misguided or irrational (Hartley 1982). Moments of crisis may well provide an openness and contingency, however the media
worker is inclined to protect their authority as information gatekeeper and so seek to impose meaning and clarity on events.

The internal logic of news values and source strategies, born of commodity production, dictate a specific construction of political engagement, in normative globalist, neo-liberal terms, which circumscribes questions of human suffering. The global transformation of the media is constructed in self-perceived terms as a new interconnectivity, internationalism and global civil society through the media (Habermas 1999). The Cultural Globalization thesis (Giddens 1999) provides a powerful self-legitimizing neo-liberal ideology which informs media reportage. What such a globalization thesis is premised upon is the complete deterritorialising (Tomlinson 1999) of cultural production and hegemony through the democratization of the means of media production. The collapse of barriers to real-time communication now inextricably links us to the fate of the distant other and we are better placed for moral action in preventing hunger, disease and ethnic cleansing. The media thus constructs itself as a force for the end of history and the inevitable triumph of Western, democratic political forms.

The global civil society thesis, internalized by many elite media institutions, fails to capture the contradictions of media globalization. While the horizon and scope for consideration has expanded through media globalization, much as the terrain for investment has also increased, patterns of media concentration have in fact diminished the presence of international correspondents. The consolidation of ownership, the buying out of family-controlled firms and increasing demands by private investors have driven international news bureaus to near extinction. In the US only the Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, New York Times and Los Angeles Times, maintain foreign bureaux (McChesney 2008, p. 120). The ultimate irony of
such a global civil society thesis is that while the present means for global communicative dialogue are unprecedented, this global public forum is highly concentrated around the ubiquitous media brands of large corporations. While this new interconnectivity is premised upon equal exchange, the interests of elite companies like the *New York Times* in protecting and projecting its definitional power is paramount. Even in the face of audience fragmentation and the internet, the powerful print media brands left standing have increased their presence as part of the international, institutional power structure. What is left of the so-called global civil society is a new interconnectivity with distinctly Western or American characteristics. The interface with the distant other is still dependent on a national framing, with the necessary construction around foreign ministry officials or locally based aid agencies, however this convention receives a veneer of internationalism. The truly globalized media outlets, CNN, BBC World and to some extent the *Wall Street Journal*, are global in a particularly crucial sense that the international, cosmopolitan audience assumed here are the constituents of global financial capital that watch CNN from their hotel rooms around the world.

The media’s self-conceptualization in terms of global civil society, despite the serious journalistic constraints and economic deficiencies, has specific implications for the source strategies and coverage of distant suffering. What emerges as the dominant frame for the distant other is the Third World natural disaster spectacle. Appealing to news values of the spectacular and relatively ‘easy-to-report’ (McChesney 2008, p. 103), earthquakes, plane crashes and famine dominate international coverage as they do not require extensive pre-requisite knowledge of political contexts. In this structure, our inter-connectivity with the distant other is mediated through a moral compass and a ‘Politics of Pity’ as opposed to justice (Boltanski 1999). The politics of pity serves a self-satisfying role for the media, as the sphere of global civil society,
disturbing the comforts of the privileged Westerner, or cosmopolitan class, and rattling our moral consciousness. Our moral obligation as the privileged completely bypasses all manner of politics local and international as our engagement requires that we simply act to ameliorate suffering. The effective drawing out of the personalized politics of pity requires a certain structuring of personal engagement with individual sufferers, crucially contained within a safe distance, so as to legitimize our privilege and benevolence. The necessary source strategies to convey such a politics requires both a ‘hyper-singularity’ (Boltanski 1999, p. 12) in the details of wretchedness and a complete objectification of the suffering. Boltanski (1999) writes; ‘The Unfortunate who is the object or plaything of misfortune, is also the object of a realistic description in which mastery is distributed entirely on the side of the subject who is describing’ (p. 24). This intimate proximity of detailed suffering yet denial of definitional power for anything other than their own misery, reinforces the predominate cultural lens and authority that encounters the far off other, as opposed to the reciprocal ‘de-centering’ (Hardy 2008) process presumed by globalization theories.

Having considered the internal values of media production that dictate specific source relations and a structuring of political engagement, it is necessary to identify the co-constitutive role of the media in neo-liberal political economy in order to explain the congruity between neo-liberalism and the media. The media have been fundamental in expounding the logic of financialization and elevating the sector to the center of public economic consciousness. The media create the space to instill the neo-liberal subject with a sense of ‘finance rationality’ and ‘shareholder value’ through a ‘market populism’ (Greenfield & Williams 2007, that designates stock indexes as a consensus priority. In addition to the pedagogic role of marketization, media are intrinsically involved in servicing and facilitating financial markets. The
distinction between media and financial services in many instances has collapsed. Geoffrey Craig (2001) has identified the role Reuters news agency played in establishing a formal exchange for foreign currency and the fact that merely 7% of the company’s revenue in 1997, was derived from media products, with services to investors and transaction fees the predominant form (p. 10). The primacy of financial markets has co-developed along with an increased intensity of financial reportage in real time across the globe. Conceptually in neo-liberalism, the financial news media serve as the primary source of supply side information that ensures efficient market operation. This globalization of information at speed is crucial to the functioning of neo-liberal political economy. The ascendancy of finance capital has re-defined temporality, in the news cycle/marketplace, with exponential volumes of trading requiring greater capacity as ‘any failure to maintain a certain velocity of circulation . . . will generate a crisis’ (Harvey 1982, p. 85). The news media are thus integrally linked in the process of reifying markets and financialization.

To further grasp this symmetry of values between the market and the content of the media it is worth considering the political economy of telecommunications and convergence. The neo-liberal era of investment liberalization has seen the opening up of a wide variety of markets, formally national monopolies, including media and telecoms. Media companies like NewsCorp have been drivers and beneficiaries of liberalization, in places like China (Wilkin 2001, p. 24), while also expanding into multiple platforms of telecommunications. Functionally, for neo-liberalism, global high-speed communication flows are vitally important for TNCs managing new global operations (Herman & McChesney 1997, p. 111) and ‘accelerating the speed and volume of international financial capital flows’ (McChesney 1998, p. 331). As either proprietors or clients of telecom networks, large TNC media have espoused the values of speed and techno-fetishism. The same media technologies which create an
insatiable demand in the market for supply-side information have come to represent the pinnacle of self-perceived journalistic values. The development of on-site transmission from the far corners of the earth, or the live cross to an event is held to represent the uttermost authenticity of information.

The info-tech fetishism of neo-liberalism and the media is also central to the construction of new market identities and bio-political disciplines in the so-called ‘knowledge economy’. The ubiquitous flows of information on multiple platforms is deemed to unlock new potentialities for market self-realization. And while this concept and proliferation of technologies has arguably changed very little in terms of the production of value, a ‘mere pittance’ of overall productivity growth (McChesney 2008, p. 296) in comparison to exploitation, the hegemony of such ideology should not be underestimated in terms of organizing social life and production, even in the industrial process or agriculture. The neo-liberal agricultural developments of biogenetics and IPRs possess certain internal values of de-materialization, while farmers have increasingly become involved in information management and market analysis. The media are the spaces where the collapsible, fragmented subject emerges and is aided in self-realization. As the new worker of immaterial labor experiences an ‘indefinite division between work time and leisure time’ (Hardt & Negri 2004, p. 111), media technologies and products are devised for delivery anywhere, anytime across platforms. The same real time delivery of market information without restrictions and physical barriers is held as transformative and truly globalizing for producers around the world. The media can thus be seen as engaged in a process of bio-political reproduction through the casting of the predominant subjectivity as the neo-liberal, flexible worker or producer engaged in the constant process of knowledge uptake.
A critical political economy approach to contemporary news media, for the purpose of considering the operationalization of neo-liberal discourse, finds that the media are principally committed to the function of markets and processes of liberalization. As co-dependents of telecommunications, the media embodies the values of speed of information and techno fetishism inherent in the market. This has particular biopolitical implications with the media consumer a presumed collapsible, fragmented techno-subject. The fundamental process undertaken by the media of commodity production has specific implications for the construction and selection of news privileging elite institutions and consensus beliefs. The new political terrain the media covers in light of liberalization and globalization is paradoxically conceived. The media are at once the forum of a new equitable global civil society, yet patterns of media concentration have in fact diminished the physical presence of international journalists in this era of globalization. What emerges from this construction of the political and questions of distant suffering is a moralization of politics and an instrumentalization of the wretched.
**Chapter Three: Critical Discourse Analysis**

In order to assess the ability of neo-liberal discourse to respond to the legitimation challenge posed by the food crisis, I will here outline the methodological approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA allows for the selection of a wide and varied body of texts, (media items, political conferences, institute web sites, speeches etc.) that can be analyzed as co-constituents of a single discourse. A discourse is defined as a linear narrative that seeks to secure legitimation for a political project by expounding a genealogy of the present and future (Fairclough 2006). An analysis of discourse requires consideration of certain signifiers including linguistic elements and the construction of subjects and objects. In neo-liberal discourse, this has involved the marketization of language and the remaking of individual subjectivity as market actor. CDA holds that a discourse is composed of an assemblage of actors, complementary and competing discourses, in what is termed the ‘order of discourse’ (Foucault 1971). The complex ordering and (re)articulation of discourses in the social space, in response to crisis, offers a means by which to observe political and ideological contestations, power and hegemony. The successful development and proliferation of discourse rests upon a certain ‘technologization’ which allows for its flexible re-creation across textual genres. The utility of CDA in tracking political and ideological formations rests in its consideration of discourse within a particular social/political context, dialectically engaged with and shaped by, the social process. The process of discursive formation is not static, rather open, with power and coercion exercised through hegemonic consent. Having outlined the method for the discourse analysis that follows in the proceeding chapter, I will briefly flag key elements of neo-liberal discourse that contain and structure political contestation. The theses of ‘globalization’ and ‘end of history/ideology’ are foundational and preclude any disruption to a neo-liberal trajectory of reformation. With neo-liberalism as de-politicized orthodoxy, a ‘culturalization of politics’ (Mamdani 2004)
emerges with political opponents deemed backward cultural remnants. Neo-liberal discourse has also espoused a humanitarian anti-poverty rhetoric, relevant to the question of the food crisis, which circumscribes the space for political and ideological engagement. Further to this ordering of political, discursive competition, neo-liberal discourse, as a flexible technology, has in-built strategies to defer responsibility for poor social outcomes.

CDA offers a methodological approach well-suited to considering the constitutive role of language and discursive representation in political and social processes. CDA involves the specific identification of text and or language as a subset of a particular discursive practice connected to a social-political context (Fairclough 1995, p. 97). The ability of CDA to elucidate ideological and political economic dynamics, through the close analysis of texts, is premised upon a clear identification of the structures and practices of discourse (language/order/technologization). The analysis of texts and language can be grammatically assessed for passive/active emphasis and nominalizations which reveal ideological presuppositions (Carvalho 2008). This has implications in questions of aid as victims are routinely characterized as passive recipients of benevolent Western agency. A discourse is here defined as the process by which political actors attempt to impose definitional power over the social process by expounding a linear, explanatory narrative of political, economic or social processes (Fairclough 2006). This involves a dialectic between reflecting and projecting an experience of ‘reality’ that can explain events, past or contemporary, in such a way as to secure political terrain for a said political project. One example in neo-liberal discourse is the hyper-globalist characterization of capital and investment as globalized quicksilver necessitating the nation state to lay itself bare to foreign capital (Hay 2004). To the extent that such a discourse informs political policy it ‘is
endowed with the preformative power to bring into being the very realities it claims
to describe’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 2001).

The ability of a political project, in this case neo-liberalism, to achieve discursive
dominance, requires the operationalization of new linguistic forms and combinations
in the attempt to achieve definitional power. In terms of neo-liberal discourse this
has required the anthropomorphism of the market and the marketization of the
individual. Discourse establishes forms of ‘bio-power’ (Foucault 1988) in the ability
to summon up new subjects and objects of discourse. In the neo-liberal instance this
has meant the social/political subject (rational, free-to-choose individual) is re-
defined within the social/political object (the marketplace). Simply put, neo-liberal
discourse and language have responded to ‘the need to elaborate a new type of man
suited to the new type of work’ (Gramsci in Fairclough 1995, p. 93). Neo-liberal
transformation has relied heavily upon a vocabulary and discourse which attempt to
both project and describe the conditions of a new global reality. The sharp
vicissitudes of labor/capital relations have become euphemized with terms such as
absent from the new vulgate are words such as ‘capitalism’, ‘class’, ‘exploitation’,
‘dismissed under the pretext that they are obsolete and non-pertinent’ (p. 1). Social
welfare and economic rights do not centre on questions of justice rather the limited
sense of market ‘inclusion’ (Fairclough 2006). Individuals are not overworked but
‘time-poor’, suggesting a social life which is structured around a consumer logic of
voluntary market choices. Apart from the effacing of antagonism and contradiction,
neo-liberal discourse projects positive frameworks for identity construction,
including market ‘self-realization’ and ‘empowerment’ wedded with traditional liberal
democratic notions of freedom. Principally the language of neo-liberal discourse has
sought to establish the rational neo-liberal subject pursuing ambitions in the space of the market which is de-politicized and represents the ‘end of history’.

In critically identifying political, ideological contestations at a discursive level, it is necessary to employ the Foucauldian concept of an ‘order of discourse’ (Foucault 1971) at both an institutional and societal level. The conception of the order of discourse is premised upon the formation of discourse as antagonistic both within an internal order and at the broader level of ideological competition. At an internal institutional level, a structured or conventional relation between actors contributes to the formation of institutionalized discourse. In the instance of the World Bank, economic technocrats, development economists, developing nations, aid organizations and ‘civil society’ itself (World Bank 2009), are enmeshed in an assemblage in which definitional power is being contested. At the societal level, nationally or internationally, governments, competing institutions, think tanks, private lobbyists, and public protest movements are involved in antagonistic engagement within a particular order which naturalizes and marginalizes certain ideological positions (Fairclough 1995). It is here worth noting the particular nature of antagonism and competition that neo-liberal discourse has faced. This has consisted of a generally reactive social-democratic residue that persists after the defeat of Keynesianism and the successful annihilation of Marxian or socialist rivals. The principle opponent or competitor in the era of neo-liberalism has been a fragmentary civil society movement based on a universal rights discourse which includes, ecological, economic and human rights. This chief rival has been hindered through a lack of holism, something that neo-liberal ideology enjoys, and is therefore susceptible to hegemonic co-optation.
Moments of crisis are crucial in grasping the order of discourse and which particular ideological assemblage is insurgent. Crises, to the extent that political events cannot be contained and defined within existing normative ideological and discursive bounds, forces the restructuring of ‘an ideological complex’ (Gramsci 1971) through the ‘articulation’ or ‘re-articulation’ of discursive co-ordinates. Foucault’s concept of articulation is defined by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as the ‘construction of nodal points which partially affix meaning...proceeding from the openness of the social’ (p. 113). What a crisis response requires is either a repositioning of ideological competitors, a strident reiteration or rationalization of legitimacy or finally the hegemonic moment entailed in Laclau and Mouffe’s definition. ‘Nodal discourses’ (Fairclough 2006) which successfully encompass an expansive interconnectivity of discourses have a greater ability to absorb and incorporate problematic elements through the reshuffling of orders and actors of discourse. A particularly resilient nodal discourse which extends from the technological fetishism of neo-liberalism has been the ‘Knowledge Economy’. The power of such a nodal discourse, that permeates across sectoral boundaries, derives from the description of an elusive consensual goal that benefits all society and succeeds in eviscerating political antagonism and masking power relations. The ‘Knowledge Economy’ has been particularly useful in transcending capital/labor binaries while simultaneously consolidating the neo-liberal project with its specific class consequences. In the case of the food crisis, various humanitarian, development and technological discourses, to the extent that they are corralled under neo-liberal discourse, may serve a similar hegemonic purpose in responding to the openness of a social situation in order to rearticulate and consolidate an existing discourse.

A further structural element that merits specific consideration within neo-liberal discourse is its ‘technologization’ (Fairclough 2006). Technologization identifies the
level of sophistication achieved by a certain discourse that allows for its replication across various genres and provides the ability to engage with and adapt to challenges through different techniques and styles. The cultivation of discourse technocrats creates discourse as a flexible mobile technology that is able to respond to contingencies and potential moments of crisis. This element of discursive practice has seen the increasing institutional emphasis on simulating ‘context-free’ dialogue and engagement as a means of de-politicization (Fairclough 1995, p. 104). The neo-liberal modeling of interactions within the framework of customer service has been a strategy that has pre-dominated government, politics and public life. The discursive conceptualization of the subject as consumer, as opposed to citizen, de-politicizes interactions and premises equity. A further method of simulation and de-politicization occurs in the ‘conversationalization’ (Fairclough 1995) of discourse which involves a less formal manner of argumentation and rationalization. Conversationalization is aimed at making institutional discourses more democratic and engaged while in fact serving a crucial role in securing legitimacy and consent. The incorporation of competing critical discourses ‘enables rhetorical agents to exhibit self-imagined reflexivity’ and pre-empt anticipated criticisms by ‘integrating critical signifiers into a hegemonic logic’ (Phelan 2007, p. 40). The ability of a discourse to achieve this supple technologization and de-politicization creates a privileged position for specific discourse technocrats within esteemed institutions that have secured definitional power. This has been a crucial area of neo-liberal discursive dominance as key financial institutions, (central banks, IMF, OECD, etc.) have been insulated from politics and enjoy a monopoly of information enabling technocrats to make authoritative pronouncements.

Having considered the habitus and practice of discourse, one is faced with the question of how neo-liberal discourse affects and is effected by the social process, and
how it succeeds in the objective of securing political terrain for expansion, reconstituting subjects/objects and marginalizing critical opposition. The challenge I would like to accept is the retention of a political economic calculus which recognizes the openness and co-constitutive role of the social, thus rejecting linear casual logic and vulgar base/superstructure metaphors. Discourses are inculcated in and by political economic institutions, however these institutions themselves are cultural, social and discursive constructions that are susceptible to schematic shifts. That such institutions are discursively configured and reified is not to belittle their tremendous power: discourses of nationalism are fundamental in creating real, material ‘permanences’ (Harvey 1996) like the nation-state, although some are more permanent than others. The institutions of political economy represent the objectification of certain social relations and contingencies, at present neo-liberal relations, and as a consequence attempt to recreate their values through the dissemination and reproduction of discourse that rationalizes their definitional power. The means of reproduction and dissemination of discourse, held by neo-liberal institutions, is critical in both securing perpetuity and denying opponents access to discursive reproduction.

While the discursive power of neo-liberal institutions is immense, the discursive process passes through the social field in a dialectical engagement that diminishes the totality of reproduction and dissemination. Harvey (1996) has described the various ‘moments’ in the social process as including; power, social relations, language, material practices, institutions/rituals and beliefs/values/desires. These categories are not conceived of as singular, insulated social contexts but rather all possess an internal, dialectical relation to other moments. It is in this dialectical inter-relation that discourse, or a particular text, comes to ‘internalize all’ (Harvey 1996, p. 92). This is not to elevate discourse as the singular moment or exercise of
power but as the objectification of social relations and power. Discourse thus emerges as the grasping of ‘material reality’ through language ‘which as practical consciousness is saturated by and saturates all social activity’ (Williams 1977, p. 38). Therefore any discourse must be able to conform to, or directly face these various moments of the social process. If we make a brief theoretical over-simplification and assume that ‘institutions’, ‘power’ and ‘material relations’ can be dominated by the forces of political economy, that still leaves the crucial question of values and desires. No totalizing system can advance un-problematically without mobilizing subjects and instilling aspirational values congruent with common beliefs and desires. In contemporary, post sub-prime mortgage times, neo-liberal discourse has potential blockages in that the self-conceptualization in corporate or market terms may fail to meet the challenge of values, beliefs, desires and can be said to lack ‘practical adequacy’ (Fairclough 2006). It is this challenge that any discourse must confront, preserving the political economic basis of its power yet responding to the contingencies and fluidity of the social space. This unstable and crisis-prone process is subject to challenges of legitimacy.

The dialectical social origins of discourse present potential blockages and fissures to the effective operation of a single discourse or assemblage. Further to this, the realm of discursive reproduction and dissemination, through the powerful institutions of political economy, presents its own contradictions. Neo-liberal discourse has enjoyed a certain level of universalization as it has become entrenched in the most powerful global institutions. As the project of neo-liberalism is fundamentally based on the inclusion of all parts of the world in capital accumulation, this has necessitated the increase in ‘scale’ or the ‘ultimate horizon for action’ encompassed in neo-liberal discourse (Fairclough 2006). As a holistic discourse which works at the macro level of global/national economic co-ordination and the micro level of individual
subjectivity, tremendous political and cultural transformations have occurred. This process of reproducing an archetypal discourse, from concentrated centers of power, has introduced the problematic of ‘recontextualization’, (Fairclough 2006) that is some elements of discourse may prove practically inadequate for a particular social context. While this has allowed for the creation of different neo-liberalisms—for example, ‘Asian-values Capitalism’, EU Third Way Social Democracy—global discursive reproduction and dissemination represent the potential enlargement and expansion of contradiction. Fairclough (2006) uses the example of the neo-liberal welfare notion of ‘inclusion’ and its reproduction in Romania where poverty levels of 30% problematize the limited concept of inclusion (p. 35). The contradictions of recontextualization can create a fissure at one end of the world that may dislodge sacred orthodoxy or a ‘permanence’ at the discursive place of origin.

Having worked through the structural elements of discourse and the dialectical process of social transformation, it is now worth re-emphasizing the role of hegemony in securing consent for and stabilizing neo-liberal discourse. In describing discursive formations as necessarily crisis prone, this does not then mean that powerful institutional discourses are constantly being superseded and upset in a dynamic of political openness and contestation. Hegemony is held here as the process by which a dominant political and economic class is able to gain consent for their class project by forging alliances across civil society through certain ‘organic ideologies’ (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, p. 68). Organic ideologies are those that are not exclusively class based and will conform with beliefs/values/desires as determined by the social context. The alliances of hegemony can be seen as an ‘unstable equilibrium’ (Fairclough 1992, p. 93) requiring the re-ordering of discourses in often contradictory forms. Neo-liberal discourse specifically has, at different times, skirted with libertarian social ideals and staunch conservatism, chauvinistic nationalism and
globalism. The crucial insight of hegemony in combination with CDA is that it allows for an analysis that can track the complex re-articulations, re-configurations and compromises that sustain a particular discourse in relation to a class project.

The methodological basis for CDA now in tow, I shall consider the distinctive features of what can be broadly defined as neo-liberal discourse. Neo-liberal discourse principally rests upon two theses—globalization and the end of history—both presupposing post-ideological times. Globalization is based upon an evolutionary technological-determinist premise that the forces of technology have collapsed physical barriers, national and cultural bounds paving the way for a global village. In neo-liberal discourse, the engine of global transformation and heightened cross-cultural consciousness is capital and finance. Capital is deemed to enjoy perfect mobility, investing and divesting in a nation at an equally rapid rate (Hay 2004). Countries must therefore liberate capital in order to be competitive and act in a suitable manner to secure international investment, namely by slashing spending to ensure currency stability. What is crucial about the drivers of globalization, namely finance and investment capital, is the evolutionary logic which characterizes the process of capital liberalization as historically inevitable and as such without specific agents and interests. Investors are merely forces of nature and necessary for human historical development, not representatives of concentrated class power and/or imperialism. The characterization of globalization as a torrent that must not be disturbed by the state creates a state/market dichotomy which belies the constitutive role the state plays in valorizing the organizational forms and rights of finance capital.

The ‘end of history/ideology’ thesis, accompanies globalization in neo-liberal discourse, by proclaiming neo-liberalism as the inevitable march of history.
Furthermore this is held as the ultimate political achievement in human historical development. Free market capitalism with liberal democratic political forms, is presented as the blueprint for all political and social development. Ideological struggles in the economic realm are over, with national economies merely requiring technocratic oversight from de-politicized central banks and undemocratic international financial institutions. Freedom of markets is equated with democracy and personal political emancipation as market actors are afforded the freedom to choose and secure their futures. While some of the more simplistic ‘end-of’ discursive formulations of the mid-90s Washington Consensus have been dislodged and ridiculed in terms of definitional supremacy, the basic formula of neo-liberal discourse and conceptualization of political economy has been maintained: namely, the inevitability and desirability of global market integration as the post-ideological, universal political objective. While the Fukuyama doctrine is disavowed, Mouffe (2005) has identified its rehabilitation as the lynchpin of the ‘post-traditional’ society formulation of Third Way theoretician Anthony Giddens. Within the political parameters of the ‘end-of’ thesis, serious political antagonism remains largely between a right wing neo-liberalism of pure free markets against a Third Way neo-liberalism that is more gradational, developmentalist and ‘euphemistic’ (Phelan 2007). Slavoj Zizek (2006) has observed that the Third Way in fact represents the ultimate, logical embodiment of the interests and universality of neo-liberal capital as it negates, thus naturalizing, its basis in the free market.

The post-ideological premise of neo-liberal discourse has important implications for the ordering of discourse in relation to perceived competitors and structuring the nature of political contestations. As globalization and the marketplace are the ineffable forces of human historical development, the only remaining political challenges lie in expanding and perfecting their operation. Giddens sees the
dissolution of collectivist political bodies, in favor of the individual, as the conduit of
democratization and cosmopolitanism. What thus remains of traditional political
identities are anti-modern and reactionary. Mouffe (2005) critically identifies within
Third Way neo-liberalism the limited conceptualization of a radical opponent as
merely a ‘traditionalist’ or ‘fundamentalist’. ‘This type of opponent is not an
“adversary” but an “enemy” ’ (Mouffe 2005, p. 50) to be defeated or disregarded
offhand. The de-politicization entailed by the marginalization of neo-liberal
opponents as reactionaries or fundamentalists ushers in the ‘culturalization of
politics’ (Mamdani 2004). The culturalization of politics ‘analytically vanquishes
political economy, states, history and transnational and international relations’
(Brown 2006, p. 20) with culture instead summoned as both the explanation and the
political obstacle to overcome. Liberalism, in its neo-liberal reconfiguration of the
rule of law, individual rights and private property, serves as the universal principle to
defeat fundamentalism and morally bankrupt political orders. And while the
opponents of neo-liberalism, or the march of history, are motivated by culture as a
regressive force, (neo)liberalism as universality denies any cultural specificity.

Neo-liberal discourse and its ordering of political conflict as de-politicization,
conditions a specific response towards questions of distant suffering, charity and
humanitarian intervention with implications for the food crisis. As the neo-liberal
political sphere privileges individual, voluntarist civil society organization over
collectivist struggle, human rights and Third World aid have become the height of
radical politics. Furthermore the market has succeeded in presenting itself as the site
for moral and ethical acts. Discourses of Third World suffering, jarring our
complacency so ‘we cannot say we don’t know’ (Choullaraki 2004, p. 189), formerly a
domain of anti-imperialist politics, have become a central political dynamic of Third
Way neo-liberalism. Zizek has described this ethos, in Starbucks or in the decries of
Bill Gates, as instilling a fake sense of urgency; ‘There’s no time to reflect: we have to act now’ (2008, p. 6). Such discourses engage in ‘politics on a moral register’ (Mouffe 2005), reducing our scope of action, as moral rather than political subjects, to benevolent interventions thus effacing our direct political and material responsibilities. The moralization of our actions objectifies victims as passive recipients of our philanthropy, thus validating our liberal universal values. This depoliticization informs the work of many Non-government Organisations (NGO) as agents of liberal civil society development, ‘a frontline force of imperial intervention’ which undermines indigenous politics that do not conform to the political, cultural forms of neo-liberalism, and are thus integral to the ‘bio-political constitution of (neo-liberal) Empire’ (Hardt & Negri 2000, p. 36). Wendy Brown (2001) has identified within human rights discourse the formulation of ‘negative liberty’ equating ‘empowerment with individual liberalism’ with subjects ‘yearning to be free of politics and indeed of all collective determination of ends’ (p. 456). Humanitarian discourses have been crucial for neo-liberalism in successfully harnessing social aspirations to ‘do something’ about human suffering, with this politicization serving as the ultimate de-politicization of liberal values.

Having outlined the key tenants of neo-liberal discourse and how these order political contestations and questions of humanitarian crises, I wish to briefly identify the strategies of technologization in response to recurring legitimacy challenges. The principle strategy for deferring responsibility for the egregious effects of neo-liberalism rests in a temporal displacement of what is actually happening. Neo-liberal discourse possesses tremendous projective qualities. As fully functioning free markets are almost nowhere in operation, negative social consequences are displaced as a temporary result of peeling away layers of distortion. Again, supply-side market information has an almost infinite quality determined by the rate of technological
dynamism. In terms of neo-liberal discourse, technological development is a fix for all crises with no inherent limits. Neo-liberalism is therefore never the problem and always the answer. Another key post-Washington Consensus strategy, in combination with temporal displacement, involves a certain *dialogical engagement* with the perceived failures of globalization. Fairclough (2005) has flagged the Asian financial crisis as a key discursive moment for neo-liberal legitimacy where a tacit ‘mistakes were made’ discourse emerges. The basic dialogic and rhetorical strategy of the ‘mistakes were made’ discourse is part conversational民主 simulation, part culturalization and an ever expanding horizon by which to measure the ‘new prosperity’. Neo-liberal leaders (technologists) profess that they were not prepared for the hard edges of global transformation, that the proper ‘social safety nets’ were not in place and that governments must in good faith ‘work to minimize’ the ‘harshest elements’ of globalization (Fairclough 2006, p. 46). This admission of harm done suggests palliative care for the temporarily excluded while deflecting responsibility from the process of liberalization. Furthermore, this engagement with perceived failures suggests a self-correcting benevolence amongst our leadership that is racked with Othello’s predicament of not ‘loving wisely, but too well’ (Shakespeare 1989, p. 119). The market failures of the Asian crisis are deemed the result of ill-preparedness for the volume of capital flow on the part of financial institutions and governments. In addition to this technical supply-side fix, the leaders of neo-liberalism must work with the new economies to instill a proper business culture. The failures of neo-liberalism in the far reaches of the world are due to cultural factors; lack of good governance or transparency; and a political culture of cronyism and corruption. This supple technologization of temporal displacement and dialogical engagement represents the principle crisis strategy of neo-liberal discourse.
The method for discourse analysis entailed here allows for a focused examination of the response of neo-liberal discourse to the global food crisis. The degree to which the crisis falls outside of the bounds of containment, for the present discursive formation of neo-liberalism, necessitates a re-ordering of constituencies, the inclusion and exclusion of actors, and an attempt to reconcile any perceived failings. CDA holds that the process of ideological and discursive ascendancy is not secured through a mechanistic model of social domination but a malleable reconfiguration of co-ordinates and incorporation of consensus aspirational values. Neo-liberal discourse has been extremely proficient in this sense of hegemonic co-optation, in subsuming human rights discourses as its radical supplement. The ability to respond to crises of legitimacy and defuse the challenges of discursive competitors rests not only in the ability of neo-liberal reproduction and dissemination through powerful institutions, but in discursive techniques that simulate engagement and openness with radical critiques. The failings of neo-liberalism have largely been contained with a self-reflexive ‘mistakes were made’ discourse that suggests a self-correcting benevolence. A further technologization of neo-liberal discourse has been achieved through the temporal displacement of egregious effects, allowing the discourse to set new illusory targets for economic development. The ability to critically analyze discursive configurations allows the mapping of political and ideological contestations in a moment such as the food crisis. The articulation of a new discursive formation, in response to crisis, reveals the mobilization or hegemonic co-optation of aspirational values and re-ordering of actors set upon a course for a specific political trajectory.
Chapter Four: Neo-liberal Discourse and the Food Crisis

The following critical discourse analysis has been conducted on an extensive body of media and institutional texts selected from the period around which the discourse of the food crisis emerged. This time period extends from March to September 2008 but is increasingly concentrated around the early June events of the Rome Food Summit. The justification for this timeline lies in the sequence of events that led to the culmination of the food crisis. March saw a spate of social unrest across many developing countries, forcing the acknowledgement of a systemic crisis by world leaders, international institutions and the elite global media. The June Food Summit was the high water mark for the crisis as it was formally announced as the key event and potential turning point for the world food system. Talk of the crisis can be seen to dissipate until being superseded by the Financial crisis in October. The discursive structure of the food crisis that is outlined in the analysis is not to be taken as sequential. Despite the manifest temporal logic of the economism/urgency/new consensus discursive chain that will be explicated below, elements of this order of discourse exist across the time period in question. The fact that this discourse is not sequentially determined is indicative of a political coalescence around a central narrative of the crisis.

The print media surveyed includes 28 articles from the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post. While there is a clear American selection bias here, my contention is that the US media still function as important global agenda setters. To that point, eight of the top ten magazines in global circulation are American (Thussu 2006, p. 124). The Wall Street Journal is the most widely circulated US paper with regional editions in Asia and Europe. The New York Times, owner of the International Herald Tribune (formerly jointly owned with the Washington Post), has a similar interest in global projection with the Tribune’s
circulation in 180 countries (Hardy 2008, p. 75). While acknowledging that neo-
liberal political economy has created new centers of power in the developing world,
the US media remains crucial in forming discursive consensus. The range of articles
include different genres such as the standard news reporting of events, opinion pieces
from editors, economists and other experts, and more in-depth reporting and
analysis, as featured in the New York Times food chain series. The varying formats
and articles from competing papers are not here analyzed comparatively, but are
rather tracked as part of a shared discursive terrain. The analysis also includes 9
institutional texts from the key players in the international political field including
the UN, WFP, World Bank, IMF and OXFAM. The genre of texts vary from the
official policy report of the World Bank, the press releases of the WFP and OXFAM,
the speeches and op-ed of Ban Ki-Moon, and features in the IMF Survey Magazine.
In spite of this variety these texts are seen as comparable, from the standpoint of
analysis, as they involve the projection and generation of discourse for potential
media usage. The proceeding analysis merges the examination of institutional and
media texts, as it is held that they coexist within the normative political power
structure. All texts analyzed can be found in the accompanying appendix.

Despite the challenging events of the food crisis, neo-liberal discourse manages to
maintain coherency and predominance within the media coverage of the crisis. The
structure that allows neo-liberal discourse to remain dominant and co-opt critical
signifiers unfolds through a narrative framework of economism/moral urgency/new
consensus. The primacy of economism effectively embeds neo-liberalism as the food
crisis is reduced to a supply and demand disturbance effecting prices, with a
naturalization of the market and investors occurring in neo-liberal terms. Further to
this, the market itself is defined by way of organic metaphor, achieving a neo-liberal
market ecology. This primary framework of economism, in reducing the crisis to
factors of supply and demand, constructs a scope for policy and technocratic action which focuses exclusively on market efficiency and a supply-side fix. From this principle construction of the easily tested empirical fact of food price inflation, there follows moral urgency. Various scales of suffering are invoked in graphic detail to mobilize a humanitarian response. The politics of pity and the call for urgency does not lend itself to any critical analysis of political economy, which thereby limits questions of agency and responsibility. The humanitarian appeal effectively frames the developed countries as potential philanthropists who can be criticized only insofar as they are deemed ungenerous, and as such they have no material responsibility outside of universal morality. Extending from this criticism, the developed countries and financial institutions express regret for their complacency and neglect, or for the haphazard manner of liberalization, but not for the substance of liberalization. The only specific failures attributable to the leaders of the World order are failures to fully neo-liberalize. Having acknowledged the unprecedented catastrophe of the food crisis, and the urgent response required, while also limiting the scope of responsibility for neo-liberal policies, the discourse of the food crisis engenders the call for a new global consensus. Here, humanitarian concerns and internationalism demand a global response and effectively mobilize the extension of neo-liberal agriculture through a new ‘Green Revolution’ and a market developmentalism. Equipped with the humanitarian consensus, neo-liberal policies are able to achieve a reinvigoration in this crisis moment through the assemblage of a nodal, neo-liberal discourse with some new characteristics. Despite the overall ascendancy of neo-liberal discourse, the necessity for the hegemonic co-optation presents a shift and re-ordering of discursive co-ordinates which hint at the contingencies and contradictions of neo-liberalism. What crucially requires a re-articulation is the ‘end of history’ thesis, which is shown as fragile, contingent and requiring action. The need for the international community and states to defend
markets and democratic forms represents a crucial admission of the constructed nature of the neo-liberal political project, presumably with designers and agents, rather than the force of history described by globalization and neo-liberal discourse. This framework encompasses the political dynamics of the struggle for the neo-liberal world food order, however the discourse does introduce questions of cultural globalization and meat consumption patterns that will not be considered due to the space constraints of this thesis.

Economism

The food crisis as a media event or story worthy of focused coverage presents a challenge to traditional journalistic conventions. In formulating the ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘why’ etc., the food crisis is deficient of a central event but is manifest in the price of food and the shortage of food for the world’s poor at a price they can afford. What takes shape in media coverage as the kernel of the food crisis is the price of food, with a corresponding economizing of the story. As the conventions of journalism see the organs of production as existing within a natural order of things, there is little consideration that food prices bear witness to questions of social, political and economic organization, rather they are a self-evident fact requiring elucidation at the surface level. This fact allows for a reductionist pursuit of other facts which are empirical and can be measured against this primary analogue which is deemed objective. While much of the ‘what’ and the ‘who’ of this story concerns the world’s poor, the elite nations and leaders of the world are integral in validating the economism in the discourse of the food crisis. Ban Ki-Moon opens his *Washington Post* editorial with the stark summation that simply, ‘The price of food is soaring’ (Ki-Moon 2008a). This somber enunciation serves to structure the debate of the food crisis around this immediate indicator. The ability to expound an overarching analysis and model information in accord with ideological imperatives is reserved for
those institutions that through journalistic source strategies stand as collectors of objective information. Consequently, the World Bank, UN and other institutional sources are able to authoritatively construct the economistic framing of the food crisis. The June Rome Food Summit, which serves as a central event to the crisis as it attracted the world’s leaders, is seen as a ‘UN conference on spiraling food costs’ (Martin 2008a). The World Bank’s presentation to the G8 in early July is similarly presented with the title ‘Double Jeopardy: Responding to High Food and Fuel Prices’ (World Bank 2008). The near exclusive ability of such institutions to collate macro-economic information establishes a primary definition of the food crisis by traditional elite centers of power. The empiricist rationale of food prices, in conformity with media convention, inevitably elevates market signifiers as a universal objective measure and enacts an urgent call for action around this immediate reality. While there is a necessary abstraction here in dealing with starving people, the market and prices serve as the default mode of abstraction.

The principle fact of food prices is of undeniable significance, however it is crucial to consider what autonomy and performative power is implied by this. The inflationary pressures on the cost of food are deemed to ‘have caused riots and starvation in some of the world’s poorest countries’ (Martin 2008a). It is not considered that failed regimes of economic management or production and social relations have produced riots and starvation. The effect is to externalize food prices as if they were an anomaly. The World Bank and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) are sited as warning of a potential ‘social explosion from rising food prices’ (Bradsher 2008). While in this instance US and EU biofuels policies are identified as a cause of inflation, Third World tumult is seen as undesirable and reactive with the political subjects of the developing world only capable of a primal scream. Thomas Friedman (2008), the archbishop of
globalization discourse, positions the food price crisis as a politically epochal moment in Egypt and more broadly in the developing world. ‘If these prices keep soaring, food and fuel costs could reshape politics around the developing world as much as nationalism and communism did in their days’. Friedman indicates that Egyptian President Mubarak wisely ‘embarked on an economic reform path (ie. liberalization) that produced 7% annual growth over 3 years’, however this growth is being ‘devoured by food and fuel price increases, like a plague locusts eating through the Nile Delta’. The co-ordinates for potential political developments foregrounded by Friedman are dictated exclusively by the market and prices. If the Egyptian people respond and rise up it will merely be a reactive response with real agency lying in the market. Furthermore, the specter of looming political instability is paralleled to the old foes of nationalism and communism. This anticipated, potential outburst of the people will not merely be reactionary but a relapse to traditionalist and fundamentalist political identities. Aside from the diminution of people as real political subjects, the crisis itself is externalized in a manner of biblical metaphor. The food crisis cannot be understood in real political terms of productive and social organization but is rather a physiological aberration.

The discursive structuring of the food crisis in economistic terms essentially concedes that the food crisis is reflective of political economy. Despite this, consideration of the role of TNC power in agriculture is wholly excluded. While the Rome Food Summit brought the leaders of the World together to rectify the world food system, large agricultural TNCs, who largely control the international trade in food, are nearly invisible. One Wall Street Journal article (Kramer 2008) does elucidate the role between profits and the crisis in a rare admission of the actual presence of TNCs in agriculture. The tenor of the article is that of a profit report which indicates who is the projected audience, although the article does note that: ‘Some observers think
financial speculation has helped push up prices as wealthy investors have flooded the agricultural commodity markets in search of better returns’. The allusion to ‘some observers’ is very vague and abstract. Rather than allowing a specific actor, perhaps from outside the corporate world, to articulate a discourse of the role of corporate power, this impassive statement allows for a vigorous defense of the normative role of TNCs. The TNCs are able to uphold their foundational role in development stating that ‘bigger profits can be used to develop new technologies that will ultimately help improve productivity’. The communications manager of Archer Daniels Midland helps put the reactionary suspicion of TNCs in its place: ‘maybe the question should be not “Are you making money?” but, “What are you doing with the money you make?”’. The introduction of this potential problematizing of corporate power is quickly expelled with this question of speculation extremely limited in scope. There is the potential to attribute abuse of investor power at the edges of the economy but not in the fundamental power structure. Nowhere is there consideration of the role of IPRs as a means to extract rents from farmers across the world, which effectively transforms farmers into laborers for TNCs. The unquestioned position of TNCs prevents any critical analysis that might establish a correlation between massive profits and IPRs as a means to absorb cost fluctuations by passing them on to the farmer and consumer. To get back to the summit and the role of states, the state is considered in this conference in the very narrow sense of opening markets, however this designation belies the integral role of the state in IPRs. The ability of TNCs to exact rent profits would be impossible without the legal forms that recognize such property rights.

Market Ecology

In establishing the central cause and event of the food crisis as the spike in food prices, the discourse of the food crisis effectively naturalizes the contemporary neo-
liberal production paradigm with markets elevated to an organic entity. Extending from the naturalization of markets, proceeds the marketization of nature, or market ecology, which entails a specific relation to nature of commodification and subjugation. The most powerful and ubiquitous metaphor for this market naturalism is the food chain. The food chain is not meant in a biological sense, but refers instead to the globally integrated agro-food/fuel production systems. The New York Times ran an extended feature in around the food crisis entitled the ‘Food Chain’ series. Appearing in the world business news section, the food chain series focuses on industrial producers, farmers, agronomists, hedge funds, and futures traders, largely excluding questions of biological and metabolic dependencies between species and the earth. In the instances where ecological factors are introduced into the reportage, there is no consideration of metabolic imbalances in production systems, rather a market calculus predominates as a measure of sustainability.

In ‘A Drought in Australia, a Global Shortage of Rice’ (Bradsher 2008) the Australian drought and its relation to climate change are identified as a key trigger to the increase in rice prices introducing a biospheric component to the crisis of food production. While climate change is acknowledged, it is perceived as a non-negotiable external factor, placed outside of present productive organization and requiring innovative management. The IPCC is cited as the definitive source of information on climate change, but no mention is made of the impact of carbon emissions from agriculture. Having established climate change as an external non-negotiable, the article details the resourcefulness of Australian farmers ‘as they are learning to do things differently’ through water sharing, rotating livestock and diversifying into higher value crops. Climate change is also seen as a potential boon for agriculture in more temperate areas and ‘can actually help rice and other crops’. The ‘flexibility’ of farmers and ranchers may yet prove that ‘the effects of climate
change may be mitigated, if not completely avoided'. The ecological relations and agricultural management regime advocated here are highly dependent on technology and information systems as a means of overcoming an external threat from nature. While I would not advocate as a model of nature certain green discourses that see nature as a self-sustaining balance disturbed only by human arrogance, there is no grasping of co-evolutionary relations between nature and our species that would allow us to place natural challenges as arising from our organization of production.

In one instance, ‘Shortages Threaten Farmers’ Key Tool: Fertilizer’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008a), metabolic rift is breached in a rather sideways manner. The article examines the important role of petrochemical fertilizers in sustaining agricultural productivity growth, with the example of Asia’s Green Revolution. Access to ‘inexpensive chemical fertilizer, coupled with market reforms’ is credited with having saved generations of Vietnamese from stunted growth. The recent shortage of petrochemical fertilizer has created a trend of resourcefulness with ‘farmers cutting deals to have hog barns built on the edges of their corn and soybean fields’. Here we have a tacit admission of the high demand for inputs and resources born of monocultures, which translates into environmental degradation. One answer proffered is a form of industrial polyculture which replicates traditional closed-circuit production. This article appears to breach a radical break from convention, yet there is no explanation of how industrial agricultural production creates waste and environmental degradation (nitrogen leaching, hog effluent) from that which is traditionally recycled into the soil as ‘constituent elements’ (Marx in Perelman 1996, p. 69). Despite this admission and the detailing of the environmental damage caused by petrochemical fertilizer, Norman Bourlaug, the father of the Green Revolution, has the definitive say, concluding the article with the statement that, ‘without chemical fertilizer the game is over’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008a). While the article introduces
the threat posed to the environment by industrial production, in contrast to the externalization of climate change, there is no grasp of how this is built into the system and so calls for this process to be taken to its inevitable conclusion as ‘markets are asking farmers to press on the accelerator’.

Crucial environmental management issues and questions of sustainability are dealt with exclusively within a market calculus. The issue of water scarcity is raised in ‘Mideast Facing Choice Between Crops and Water’ (Martin 2008b) with the strategies for resource allocation determined as investment-driven technologization and comparative advantage economics. ‘Environmental Cost of Shipping Groceries Around the World’ (Rosenthal 2008) introduces the food miles debate and that our ‘moveable feast comes at a cost: pollution’. Having introduced the environmental issue, arguments of comparative advantage overwhelm the modest concerns; ‘The economics are compelling’. Further measures include enhancing consumer information in the marketplace and a flattening of global transport taxes. The management of ecology through the market implies a certain natural balance or evolutionary cycle intrinsic to the market itself which elevate it to a natural living entity. Returning to the food chain metaphor, the crisis is deemed to be exacerbated ‘by an unprecedented linkage of the food chain’ (Faiola 2008). If we take this linkage as related to the evolutionary progress of globalization and free trade, itself a natural force of history, then the obligation is to act in adherence to the laws of nature (the market). The admission that the market may fall short in providing food security, yet remain the primary means to achieve this goal presents an interesting concept of market-led-development. This admission can only be permitted if we assume that the market possesses an intrinsic logic to be unlocked. As such, the fulfillment of this natural potential requires a co-evolutionary adjustment on our part. This rationale that the market is not what we immediately experience but an elusive balance and
exchange requiring our full engagement mirrors the Marxian ecological theory of co-evolution, only in this instance, it is the ecology of the market over and above nature.

Comparative Advantage

Having established the economistic framing of the food crisis and the naturalization of the market, the challenges to market functionality require a crucial re-articulation of market principles and primarily comparative advantage. The economic theory of comparative advantage serves as the fundamental natural law of the market. In the attempt to place comparative advantage at the heart of all economic development it is historicized. The current crisis:

highlighted choices that nations have confronted for centuries. One relates directly to trade: Is it best to specialize in whatever food grows best in a country’s soil, and trade it for all other food needs- or even, perhaps, specialize in services or manufacturing, and trade those for food? Or is it best to seek self-sufficiency in every type of food that will, weather permitting, grow within a country’s borders? (Bradsher & Martin 2008c).

The linkages of the food chain is also nothing new as ‘food has moved around the world since Europeans brought tea from China.’ (Rosenthal 2008). This re-articulation possesses some telling mythologies mirroring the ‘insipid childishness’ of Adam Smith’s ‘previous accumulation’ (Marx 1906, p. 785) naturalizing all manner of the market’s primordial violence. That nations have been confronted with the choice of either comparative advantage or insular agricultural policies belies the fundamental coercion, violence and monopolization required to compel countries to open trade. As earlier, outlined the choice between self-sufficiency and rapid industrialization was a choice reserved for colonial powers. That we are still confronted with this choice similarly represents the fact that imperial centers of
power reserve the right to make that choice. US and EU subsidies allow for a degree of self-sufficiency while financial institutions dominated by their interests compel countries to specialize in cheap labor industries and cash-cropping agricultural production servicing affluent markets. The fact that exotic foods are said to have ‘moved around the world’ ignores the histories of slavery and forced cash-cropping that are at the heart of the presence of sugar, coffee, bananas and tea as staples of Western consumption.

The need to re-articulate the basic co-ordinates of neo-liberalism around comparative advantage vis-à-vis self-sufficiency arguments is a telling admission of the scope of the crisis in the neo-liberal project, yet it is here introduced to re-focus the battle against such policies. The IMF, through its online magazine *Survey* (2008b), engages in a simulated dialogue, question and answer session, with its ideological opponent self-sufficiency in a manner that suggests a democratization aimed at dispelling its reputation as autocratic. The IMF holds that self-sufficiency programs are inefficient as ‘few if any countries are naturally self–sufficient, geography and country don’t permit it’ (IMF 2008b). In the Food Chain series, WTO chief Pascal Lamy asserts that ‘If Egypt had to be self-sufficient in food, there would be no water left in the Nile’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008c), and it is concluded that they should produce flowers for export not food (Martin 2008b). In response to the tenuous reintroduction of self-sufficiency arguments, the US trade representative states that ‘One country’s act to promote food security is another country’s food insecurity’ and that if self-sufficiency ruled, ‘there would be less food in the world, and more people would be hungry’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008c). The premise here is that natural communities are not self-sustaining but must look outward for vital needs through trade, which essentially projects capitalist development and homo economicus as the organizing principle of a country. Here it is worth noting an Aristotelian distinction
drawn out by Polanyi (2001) in relation to markets and trade, that is, the difference between production for gain and production for use. The engagement in the market need not destroy self-sufficiency, ‘as long as the cash crop would also otherwise be raised on the farm, as cattle or grain’ (p. 56). To return to the simulated IMF dialogue, it states that national imperatives to encourage ‘domestic production and stocking food supplies are understandable’ yet ‘policy makers also need to be mindful of the trade-off between food security and efficiency.’ While there is a reserved acceptance of the national entity, the IMF holds that it should not impinge on the greater good of the internationalist market. Furthermore it is held that programs promoting self-sufficiency can have a negative effect on development and ‘the poor’ as ‘health and education can get squeezed out’ as well as the ‘detrimental environmental impacts’ (IMF 2008b). The logic of the market and comparative advantage is appealed to here in humanist development terms privileging the plight of the poor. The ‘short-circuiting’ (IMF 2008b) of the market, or market malfunctioning, is held to bring environmental destruction. To this point it is worth considering the impact of monocultures, the intensification of production in fragile tropical eco-systems (Murray 2001) or the effect of dairy on waterways in New Zealand (Jay & Morad 2007) as the hallmarks of comparative advantage and specialization in agriculture. While the crisis of neo-liberal policies is tacitly implied by virtue of the need to rearticulate basic comparative advantage theory, this strategy proves potent as the re-introduction of self-sufficiency logic is always defensive, embattled and illegitimate.

As the food crisis centrally involves the suffering of the global peasantry and the poor of the global south, they are routinely invoked to legitimize political prescriptions as is the case with comparative advantage theory. The surge in prices is held to have created a new comparative advantage commodity, land, which has created ‘an
opportunity: the first chance in years for the world’s poorest farmers to climb out of poverty’ (Ruxin 2008). In a telling admission of previous failures in comparative advantage theory it is said that for the first time since 1850 crops such as coffee have appreciated. So just as the situation looks at its bleakest there is finally hope. The situation for Sub-Saharan Africans is more ‘elastic’ than in partially industrialized countries, euphemistic econo-speak referring to the fact that their impoverishment is so severe that there is potential for migration back on to the land for farming activities. The poor may finally be able to earn a ‘decent wage’ if they are aided in the ‘diversification into higher-value crops that are less likely to be influenced by fluctuation in international commodities markets’. The distinction between a ‘decent wage’ or living/subsistence is a crucial one as it imagines wage-earners and cash croppers, not peasants.

The perceived failures of comparative advantage has necessitated a full deployment of containment strategies and neo-liberal discursive technologies. This includes a basic re-articulation of comparative advantage theory a simulated engagement with its rival self-sufficiency, and a temporal displacement of the effects of comparative advantage. Crucial to this argumentation is a self referential logic that can disavow the effects of comparative advantage and liberalization yet continually perpetuate its vital necessity as a curative measure. The IMF holds that in the face of the food crisis the commitment to liberalization and comparative advantage must be steadfast. While the expanse of the crisis is a result of market interdependency, this very fact will ultimately ‘increase supply and lower overall costs’ if agricultural markets are ‘modernized’ (IMF 2008b). Furthermore, if market signals are properly transmitted then ‘markets (should) respond by producing more food and getting to the people that need it.’ (IMF 2008b). If market information is stifled ‘and comparative advantage is not allowed to work . . . the effect of food shocks is amplified’ (Millman
& Thurow 2008). Comparative advantage is even held to provide the answers to its own shortcomings as long as the market is allowed to function. The Food Chain article, ‘In Fertile India Growth Outstrips Agriculture’ (Sengupta 2008), identifies India as suffering from a production shortage of wheat and rice while local agriculture is geared towards the consumption of the prosperous. Indian farmers are in a double bind attempting to grow crops like baby corn without the supply chains and refrigerator trucks necessary to get their produce to modern supermarkets while also suffering from poor government policy. ‘The market may yet help India’ writes Sengupta, as small farmers will now plant wheat as the market demands, helping the small holder and the national imperative.

Serious criticisms of comparative advantage ultimately reinforce the self-referential justifications. The typical refrain from ‘non-profit groups’ that comparative advantage arguments ‘are unconvincing, as long as rich countries heavily subsidize their farmers’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008c) contains a modicum of truth. This position however lacks a serious ability to discredit the theory leaving the rationale ultimately intact. It similarly fails to conceptualize that the imbalances of power entailed in the enactment of such theory, at the level of international financial institutions, are in any way designed to specifically privilege financial class interests. This failure on the part of NGOs, as representatives of the world’s poor, to discredit such theory allows the plight of the poor to be co-opted in the service of liberalization and free trade theory.

The lone critical exception to comparative advantage theory arises in the Australian drought story, yet the theory remains the answer to its own failings. The shift from rice to wine grapes is discerned as a ‘one of several factors’ (Bradsher 2008) contributing to the escalation in rice prices. The story ends with a critical statement
from an Australian rural mayor that, ‘Rice is a staple food...Chardonnay is not’.

Despite this sharp critique of the present situation, embedded within the story itself is the perceived solution which is rationalized in terms of comparative advantage. The ecological factors which have prompted the sensible shift in crops is said to create new comparative advantages for rice elsewhere. This instance may well be case of a genuine criticism that is unable to articulate a series of fixed points around which to elucidate an alternative discourse, thus leaving the predominant structures intact.

Supply Side Fix (Financial Instruments)

Another aspect of the temporal displacement that occurs in the neo-liberal discourse of the food crisis is the call for a supply-side fix to market efficiency. The premise is that the volatility of markets and the speculative rush into food commodities is not normative or endemic to market liberalization but a case of insufficient supply-side information that prevents the optimal functioning of markets. The World Bank (2008) identifies the need to ‘address critical knowledge gaps’ in the market to avoid ‘the recurrence of such types of crises in the future’. In addition to the monitoring and sharing of information, it describes the need to ‘encourage innovative instruments for risk management’. In establishing the role of oil prices in food inflation the IMF (2008a) calls for ‘investment in the oil sector’ to ensure ‘stability’, ‘predictability’ and a ‘transparent market through improved data dissemination on demand and supply conditions’. It is held that the problem of material dependence, and speculation for commodities in demand, can be mastered, or at least mitigated, by an info-tech fix. It is worth re-emphasizing that the horizon for innovation is nearly endless paralleling the insatiable demand for the increasing velocity of finance capital.
Despite the illusory nature of the optimal supply-side, market-info feedback loop it remains a consensus priority, with the need to create ‘new financing mechanisms’ (Ki-Moon 2008c) for a new market reality. The New York Times article, ‘Price Volatility Adds to Worry on U.S. Farms’, deals extensively with the urgent need to bolster and ‘modernize’ (IMF 2008b) markets. The article details the volatility of market prices entailing uncertainty for farmers with knock-on effects for consumers. This volatility is ‘damaging the mechanisms’ and ‘financial tools’, such as futures contracts, that farmers have relied on for financial security as ‘the system is beginning to break down’ (Henriques 2008a). Farmers have ‘lost confidence in the Chicago board of trade’ and demand reform to ‘a system that was designed a half century ago’. Such market reformation is not a call to impose price controls, rather an invocation of the forces of supply and demand as the guiding measure. Investors or speculators ‘stampeding into the market’ is not presented as the cause for concern; on the contrary it is the fact that markets have grown larger and that ‘they have outgrown their delivery systems’ that requires urgent action. In a sign of the breakdown of market transparency and information, farmers are making private deals with financial services companies that ‘do not provide pricing data to other farmers and to the rest of the food industry, which has long relied on the Chicago Board of Trade as the best measure of supply and demand’. The threat of price volatility envisaged in this article is a retreat from a supply-side oriented marketplace into the perceived safety of hedges provided by the likes of AIG. This threatens to make ‘the market less efficient. And anything that makes these markets less efficient increases the cost of food’. In the face of volatility created by the marketplace, we should not retreat from the market rather persevere in the hope of achieving the ultimate market equilibrium of the supply/demand feedback loop.


*Investors/Investment*

The centrality of the market as the principle means to remedy the food crisis has the effect of naturalizing investment and elevating investors to altruistic agents of the end of history. Investment is presented as both innocuous and a consensus priority for abating the food crisis. Investment can symbolize commitment and devotion to a goal which makes a statement such as: ‘greater investment in agriculture for under-developed countries, is needed to overcome the food crisis’, axiomatic. Obfuscation occurs when the structured social, economic transaction of investment is characterized in a similar unproblematic manner. The first challenge to this naturalization of neo-liberal international investment is reconciling the role of investors in triggering market volatility. The World Bank (2008) concedes ‘commodity investors and hedge fund activity’ has played a ‘minor’ role in the crisis and the IMF (2008b) concurs that there may be ‘some overshooting’ in the rush to food commodities. In these two instances where commodity speculation is flagged, it is described as a limited factor and its defenders hold the exclusive right to raise this matter. Nowhere is there an alternative discourse of the role of speculation, allowing the proponents of liberalization to respond to un-articulated challenges in an echo-chamber. The admission of limited responsibility is flatly rejected in other instances through the Freidmanite principle that the injection of ‘liquidity to the market...in theory should reduce price volatility’ (Henriques 2008a). Criticism of investors is implied as a reactionary response to surface appearance, a strangely Marxian form of argumentation: ‘Don’t blame speculators for the food crisis; it was already there when they arrived. Rather thank them for the wake-up call’ (Lerrick 2008). The key premise is that ‘rather than speculative activity’ it is the ‘fundamentals’ of the world economy that ‘are the key drivers of food price rises’ (World Bank 2008). The activity of investors has merely drawn attention to the imbalances and structural deficiencies
of the current global food trade regime which requires our attention and resolute action.

The increasing role of private equity and hedge fund investment in agriculture is detailed in the article ‘Food is Gold, so Billions Investing in Farming’ (Henriques 2008b). This article demonstrates journalistic values of threshold and concision which effectively compartmentalizes investment and finance; no outside or alternative sources are required for the construction of this text. The article states that investment funds are making ‘bolder’ long-term bets into agriculture ‘which could bolster food production at a time when the world needs more of it’. The investment will ‘introduce new technology’, ‘provide capital to modernize’ and ‘consolidate small plots of land into more productive large ones’. This development is not entirely unproblematic as some ‘traditional players...are concerned these newcomers will focus on profits above all else’. There is apprehension about financial speculation voiced by a fellow commodity broker: ‘Farmland can be a bubble just like Florida real estate’, yet this is not placed in the context of the speculation that is occurring at the time of the article’s publication. Despite the apparent impact of speculation the author does not deem it necessary to incorporate sources outside the insular community of investment. The question of speculation is here a conversation between those in the trade with a divide between ‘traditionalists’ and the ‘bold’ avant-garde of finance. The move into grain elevators, farmland and fertilizer depots is seen as a means to overcome the limitations of derivative-based trading and the ‘disadvantage of not being able to trade the physical commodity’. Therefore there is considerable interest in what the industry calls the ‘owning structure’, an effective euphemism denoting the financial takeover of wide swathes of farmland and production infrastructure. As neo-liberal political economy is here naturalized, the article is incapable of tracking a perceptible shift in internal class power with the
oligopolistic trend towards greater concentration of market controlling mechanisms, such as IPRs, in the hands of big capital.

Having aired the restrained concerns of industry skeptics, as opposed to ideological competitors, the visionary leaders dominate the rest of Henrique’s article. Investors are able naturalize their activities around consensus aspirational goals which transcend political divisions. It is said their ‘investments will be a plus for farming and ultimately for consumers’ (Henriques 2008b). Their ‘new investment will buy more technology...accelerate the development of infrastructure’ and ‘help bring down costs to farmers’. The potential for abuse of power is dismissed off-hand by a manager of the Ospraie Hedge Fund through an appeal to rational self interest theory; ‘It is not in our interests for anyone to be negatively affected by what we do’. While this statement pre-dates Alan Greenspan’s renunciation of the rational self-interest theory, it bares considerable irony as the Ospraie fund itself was forced to fold in September 2008 (Ackermen 2008) amid the market turmoil created by the sub-prime exploits of hedge funds. The article goes on to detail the emerging pattern of transnational land leasing driven by hedge fund investors. Emergent asset management explains the comparative advantage rationale in choosing Africa as ‘land values are very inexpensive’. While the fund is unproblematically portrayed as altruistic and bringing social development to impoverished Africa, their own website professes cynically that they aim to ‘exploit the surge in agricultural opportunities across sub-Saharan Africa’ (Emergent Asset Management 2008). The fund is to raise in excess $500 million to ‘consolidate small plots into more productive holdings, introduce better equipment’ and ‘also plans to provide clinics and schools for local labor’ (Henriques 2008b). The article concludes with an agriculture consultant and analyst claiming that ‘The new investments by big financial players could be just what global agriculture needs...Investment funds are seeing that this [consolidation of
small holder into industrial farms] brings value to them. I’m saying this brings value to everyone’. The effect of this article is to contain concerns about speculation and off-shore investment in agriculture as an internal consideration within the investment community. The executives and fund managers are allowed privileged access within the article to expound a discourse which characterizes their investments as fulfilling consensual, desired goals, in the face of the food crisis, with beneficial outcomes for the world’s poor. The new set of property relations and subjugation required by such neo-colonial measures are totally excluded and as such are naturalized. There is also a contradiction in this article that underlines the pattern of privileged media access for elites, across the food crisis discourse. Despite the fact that the impact of investment is held to affect the poor, the poor themselves or anyone outside of investment are excluded from communicating their discourse.

The Wall Street Journal features an article which more clearly identifies the trend in agricultural outsourcing, however in this example, the debate remains internal and economistic as opposed to ethical (Wright et al. 2008). The article details the trend of Gulf nations pursuing land deals, a move the World Bank called a ‘promising avenue for channeling support which could benefit both regions’ (World Bank 2008), however there is no detailing of similar Western-based initiatives. This process is portrayed as ‘Emerging nations trying to cash in on the global food crisis’ (Wright et al. 2008). The concept of the nation and the potential concerns are very specific. The nation is here held as the very narrow financial sector and political leadership which benefits, not the indigenous peoples, campesinos and urban poor who are voiceless in the article despite the admission that they will be the most affected. The concern raised in the article is that ‘there is a big risk in the new trend’. The risk is not a threat to food security as the ‘influx of capital and technical knowhow . . . could help boost production and benefit the entire local agricultural industry’ but that
investment will be ‘politically sensitive’, ‘a tricky balancing act’ that may engender a ‘political backlash’. The management of this risk to securing investment returns and ensuring that ‘foreign investments in agriculture serve the local population’ is a conversation exclusively had between Saudi investors, Finance and Economics ministers, not the public stakeholders that have the most to lose as clearly identified by the article itself.

A truly remarkable example of strident, self-absorbed neo-liberal investment naturalization and de-politicization occurs in an article detailing foreign investment into Russian tracts of land, ‘Russia’s Collective Farms: Hot Capitalist Property’ (Kramer 2008). The story frames the recent history of Russia’s collectivized farms within the epoch of the end of history. ‘After the collapse of the Soviet Union’ which marks the end of history, Berlin Wall etc, collective farms ‘literally went to seed’. Now however ‘an agricultural revolution is stirring in the countryside, shaking up village life and sweeping aside the collective farms that resisted earlier reform efforts’. This revolution is clearly linked to the inevitable process of globalization and in this instance, ironically mirrors the revolutionary communist metaphors of the forces of history. The revolutionary, perhaps emancipatory, agents involved are unsurprisingly, the international investment class with one exceptional example. One of the leaders of this revolution is Micheal Orloff: ‘a former director of the Caryle Group’s Moscow Office and the scion of a White Russian Noble family’. This one investor manages to traverse oil wealth and nobility in the Gulf, the most powerful strata of American and Western political leadership and one of history’s most brutal regimes, yet this requires no critical comment. The revolution aims to turn ‘the painful history of collectivization’ into ‘large corporate factory farms’ dampening the food crisis by reducing ‘starvation and malnutrition’. While the collectivized farms bare a ‘painful’ history, the monarchist history is looked upon favorably and paralle
with the post-historical epoch. ‘Before the Russian Revolution...it was the largest
grain exporter in the world’. Orloff envisions a ‘model for Russia that would hearken
back to the noble estates of his family history, only lubricated by modern finance’. The implications of this rear guard counter-revolutionary action against history
seemingly implies that if only the Tsar had been lubricated by modern finance maybe
the ‘painful’ Bolshevik experience could have been avoided.

As with the other articles that mention aspects of the neo-colonial land grab, the
depiction of this process is not without challenges. In this case the noble (literally)
visionaries of investment face the traditionalist and reactionary remnants that
oppose the end of history. These traditionalists take the form of cold war, Stalinist
sterotypes which characterize much contemporary xenophobia and fear of Russian
assertiveness. The threat to this investment stems from the fact that ‘privatization
has gone too far and too fast for some’ (Kramer 2008), ‘for some’ implying a
minority, maybe KGB remnants. It is said that this could lead to a ‘muscular state
intervention’ ‘reminiscent of the Soviet era’ as Russia ‘jealously guards its natural
resources’. The looming ‘Specter of State Control’, as a subheading reads, stems from
the antiquated, militaristic Russian view of ‘food in terms of national security’. The
other ‘obstacle’ facing investors is the ‘rural Russian work ethic that has been shaped
by decades on collectivized farms’. This challenge has led investors ‘to hiring
psychologists to untangle village culture and determine how best to instill a work
ethic’. This is a remarkable admission of the bio-political power of capital and the
necessity to mould the right kind of worker for the right kind of work. Having
acknowledged the construction of wage labor by capital, the article resorts to
ethnography in documenting the cultural backwardness of rural Russians. ‘Outside
this village of log homes with decorative wooden trim, with piles of birch firewood in
the yard...a drunken man slept on a pile of sawdust one recent afternoon. A cow
meandered nearby munching grass’. Even the cows are lazy! The culturalization of politics in this article is extreme. The threat to fulfilling the potential of the end of history are the hyper-culturalized Russians who, as unworthy opponents (Mouffe, 2005), are described in derogatory terms. Orloff and his associates are held to have no such cultural specificity despite having an exceptional personal and professional history of a specific class, cultural background. Orloff merely stands in for the end of history which is de-politicized and de-culturalized despite some important hallmarks such as the ‘John Deere tractors and Western-trained agronomists’ (Kramer 2008) who power his technological revolution.

**Sudanese Exception?**

There is one crucial exception to the standard de-politicization of the investment driven neo-colonial, land grab: the case of Sudan as detailed in ‘Darfur Withers as Sudan Sells Food’ (Gettleman 2008). This deviation however reveals a Western liberal hypocrisy as the criticisms center on the human rights record of an officially designated enemy, while failing to address neo-liberal policy in a direct manner. The new outrage visited upon the people of ‘war-riddled’ Darfur is that while ‘they barely have enough to eat’, ‘Sudan is growing and selling vast quantities of its own crops to other countries’. The Sudanese leadership is said to be ‘capitalizing on high global food prices’ while millions of its own people starve, an ironic criticism when one considers the self professed ‘exploitation’ of African agricultural opportunities by the Emergent Hedge Fund. The article details the vast development and technologization of Sudanese agriculture driven by Gulf state investment with relative admiration. The problem is however ‘how much of this bonanza is getting back to the hungry Sudanese, like the 2.5 million driven into camps in Darfur?’ This imbalance is ‘emblematic’ of one of the ‘most scandalous features of the Khartoum regime’s domestic policies’. The Sudanese government is said to be manipulating
‘national wealth and power to further enrich itself and its cronies, while the marginalized regions of the country suffer from terrible poverty’. This story of government corruption, far from challenging the model of export driven agriculture and land outsourcing, manages to project the egregious effects of policy onto a human rights violating leadership. That such policies benefit cronies and elites is not the rule, but the exception. In the *Wall Street Journal* article, which does feature Sudan as part of the trend in land-leasing investment, such a narrow sector of elites may well represent ‘the nation’. The marginalization of the domestic market is not a result of the high production costs of industrialization but the neglect of local leaders. The effects of rural displacement are considered however these are largely a result of the ‘government’s brutal counterinsurgency...running many of the people of Darfur off their farms’. While I would not wish to discount evidence of venality, abuse and genocide, such claims in this specific case serve as a fig leaf for certain neo-liberal policies while ultimately validating its political form through human rights discourse.

**Urgency/Moral Agency**

The primary framing of the food crisis in economistic terms lends itself to the urgent call for effective action around a discernible empirical reality. The required action, getting food to the hungry, is emphatically appealed to in moralistic terms with a distinct anti-theoretical element that precludes a serious analysis of political economy. This urgency is mobilized through wide-spread representation of the various scales of suffering both intimate and global, factual and metaphorical, in a convergence of discursive genres which have the effect of conveying how things ‘really are’ out there in the suffering world. The enormity of the crisis is first established at the international level where it is simply ‘shattering entire economies and people’s lives in developing countries’ (Oxfam 2008) and is an existential threat: ‘For the 1 billion people living on less than a $1 a day, it is a matter of survival’
The litany of individual hardships borne of the crisis is also extensive: ‘children in Mauritania go to bed hungry’ (Faiola 2008), 'In Liberia people who normally by rice by the bag, today they buy it by the cup' (Ki-Moon 2008c). The extent of the crisis imparts psychological trauma as ‘It breeds anger social disintegration, ill-health’ (Ki-Moon 2008c) and ‘makes people doubt their dignity as men’ (Ki-Moon 2008b). Finally, from this broad and individual suffering extends the political scale of the crisis which brought ‘down a PM in Haiti’ (Faiola 2008) threatens to become ‘enormously destabilizing’ (Friedman 2008) and is ‘a multidimensional problem affecting economic growth, social progress and even political security around the world’ (Ki-Moon, in Faiola 2008).

In addition to the various empirical scales of suffering, which help contextualize and map the event of the crisis, metaphor and symbolism are necessarily employed to emphasize urgency, immediacy and moral obligation. The Executive director of the WFP, Josette Sheehan dubs the crisis a ‘silent tsunami’ (World Food Program 2008) in an attempt to overcome the absence of a central journalistic event to the food crisis. The limitations of visual, empiricist media practices cannot succinctly convey the scale of death of such a crisis so Sheehan here bridges the gap. Also the image of the Tsunami implies the convention of the Third World disaster spectacle which requires from us, the Western cosmopolitan media consumer, an immediate outpouring of good will and the moral imperative of charity and compassion. Similarly, Ban Ki-Moon (2008b) quotes the foreign minister of Burkina-Faso that the crisis in food is a 'greater threat than terrorism'. The scourge of international terrorism is invoked as a rallying point to call for the rejection of hunger in no uncertain terms by the international community. The appropriate response to terrorism is unconditional solidarity with victims and perhaps, the donation of blood. It is telling that in portraying the food crisis the two most forceful conventional
images of suffering in recent times are conveyed in the attempt to implore a
depoliticized moral action to end suffering.

The effect of such extensive and exhaustive detailing of the suffering resulting from
the food crisis is to reinforce the urgent clarion call to action in humanistic terms.
The tenor of the UN food crisis summit was indeed surmised as such by *The New
York Times* headline; ‘U.N. Food Meeting Ends With a Call for “Urgent” Action’
(Martin 2008a). The priorities for action were laid out by Ban Ki-Moon as ‘First, we
must meet urgent humanitarian needs’ (Ki-Moon 2008c). This humanitarian appeal,
while undeniably important, is amplified with the pressing moral dilemma that is
posed to the Western reader or global cosmopolitan citizenry. This question of moral
obligation is put to us by Mohmaed Faruk of Egypt, ‘a 38 year-old grocery worker
who moonlights as a bus inspector’ (Martin 2008b) who states of his compatriot's
situation, ‘Most people are really suffering, but what can they do?’. The detailing of
Faruk's despair and the fact that he must get bread from a state-subsidized bakery
located next to a ‘mountain of garbage, 25 feet by 5 feet, that looks as if it is moving
because so many flies swarm over it’ is a direct challenge to the Western reader’s
tolerance for moral outrage. The situation for an Egyptian such as Faruk is truly
wretched and the question ‘what can they do?’ is really directed at us as moral agents
with an obligation to remedy what the Egyptian poor cannot. The dependence of the
starving developed world on us is a call to engage in our responsibility as the
privileged but also from a position of global leadership. If we recall the
characterization of indigenous political revolt as reactive or traditionalist, then our
leadership serves as the desired moral outcome. This passive designation that ‘they’
can do ‘nothing’ is paired to the moral assumption that ‘we’ can do something’.
This call for moral engagement and leadership is echoed by the IMF (2008c) calling it a ‘moral and economic imperative’ to ameliorate the effects of the crisis. The moral element is similarly raised around the surge in food commodity trading. Jeff Voge, a trader and chairman of the Kansas City Board of Trade, articulates a humanist discourse that ‘This isn’t just a commodity. It is food and people need to eat’ (Faiola 2008). What is remarkable about these two moral arguments that couple economic and moral considerations, is that they stem from a macro-economic advisory institution and a commodity trader, two fields that do not seemingly involve moral calculation. In contrast to this, it would be easy enough to imagine a campesino or peasants group declaring food a human right not a commodity, being characterized as reactionary or fundamentalist in conventional terms. These moral appeals from the heart of the economic system that ascribes no value, either social or moral, over and above monetary worth, can be seen as attempts to rehabilitate and recast market actors as moral agents, thus avoiding questions of what social values are entailed in the market.

The avoidance of self-reflexive questions of the moral and political failings of our predominant political economic institutions is even engendered in the attacks on the economic technocratic elite. In attending to the urgent necessity of feeding people there arises a human rights conception of doing what is needed outside the esoteric realm of theory and conjecture. This theoretical aspect appears non-essential when ‘the most immediate need is more aid to people in distress’ (Krugman 2008) and ‘the time to act is now’ (Keys 2008). Ban Ki-Moon engages this premise of action over forbearance in wryly castigating the laissez faire Washington Consensus rationale; ‘It might be tempting to let the markets work their magic. If prices go up, the thinking goes, supply will too. But we live in the real world, not the world of economic theory’ (Ki-Moon 2008b). This critique demonstrates the ideological effectiveness of neo-
liberal politics in casting contestations between the poles of economic rationalism and human rights. The Secretary General’s mocking of neo-liberal dogma as abstraction, comparable to belief in the supernatural (magic), is an attempt to claim ideological superiority by appeal to the visceral reality of the empirical world. This human rights appeal to urgent necessity does not attempt to impose a theory of market functionality that sufficiently explains what forces shape the appearance of our real world experience. Human Rights politics is thus engaged in a constant reactive exercise in responding to and fixing the problems of neo-liberalism, declaring itself the radical opposition, while ultimately reinforcing the monopolization of meaning by technocrats and the validity of the neo-liberal political form.

The urgent moral imperative to act which is embodied in the humanitarian response to the empirical fact of food price rises, dictates specific co-ordinates in ascribing agency and responsibility for the food crisis. The moralization of politics implicates the West or developed nations in so far as they are failing their moral obligations. The challenge to rattle the complacent, privileged cosmopolite from their ivory tower is structured by the juxtaposition of North and South suffering. The effect of the food crisis on the affluent Western consumer is rightly belittled in comparison to the suffering of the world’s poor, ‘food inflation might cause pain in rich countries but it is shattering entire economies and people’s lives in developing countries’ (OXFAM 2008). The complacency to the plight of the starved distant sufferer is challenged as ‘most Americans take food for granted’ (Faiola 2008). Our own self-centered discontent over the food crisis is derided and ridiculed. While it presents us with ‘discomfort’ the suffering endure ‘hardship’ (Ruxin 2008). The food crisis might ‘provoke grumbling in America’ meanwhile the objects of pity face ‘the specter of greatly increased malnutrition’ (Streitfeld & Bradsher 2008). The increase of food
prices may ‘dismay even relatively well off Americans- but they’re truly devastating in poor countries’ (Krugman 2008). Finally while the food crisis is said to have caused political upheaval and the starvation of children, for us privileged folk it has forced ‘American executives to restrict sales of large bags of rice’ (Faiola 2008). This mocking and often sarcastic tone is intended to shame our smug self-indulgence with the hard facts of what is truly ‘out there’ in the world. The effect is to reiterate urgency and moral obligation while obfuscating political entanglements and material responsibilities through a seemingly radical self-reflexive critique. I would not wish to contradict the ethical imperative to go beyond one’s immediate experience in thinking about the food crisis. The key in this instance is how neo-liberal discourse is able to construct human rights and radical self criticism as nodal points which connect uncritically to neo-liberal principles.

The initial framing of the privileged in relation to the poor, in enduring the food crisis, allows for the ascribing of blame upon the developed countries. The admitted failing of moral responsibility by elite nations is crucially dependent upon the denial of the food crisis as a political dynamic internal to neo-liberal political economy. Rather, the food crisis represents a perfect storm of unforeseeable circumstances. The food crisis is said to have ‘emerged as a blip on the big boards and computer screens of America’s great grain exchanges. At first, it seemed like little more than a bout of bad weather’ (Faiola 2008). However it developed an ‘ominous snowball effect’ in an uncontrollable momentum of chain reactions, creating ‘a global panic’ (Faiola 2008). Such metaphors of weather and a snowball rolling down a hill suggest a tragic but freakish event that imparted psychological impacts creating an irrational marketplace. These images which demonstrate the absence of premeditation, exculpate market actors and cast events outside of the range of reasonable predictions. The IMF (2008b) concurs, ‘Nobody could have seen that the financial
crisis, some flight into commodities and an oil price hike would all happen at a time when food stocks happened to be low’ (IMF 2008b.). The failings of the market and the global economic leadership in this case are indirect rather than an internal fault. ‘Major players in the grain market grew complacent’ (Krugman 2008) and ‘the world lost its focus on crops’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008b). These failings oblige the global leadership to respond forcefully to the crisis and re-focus the commitment to poor countries. This moral imperative is sternly directed as ‘Organizers of the conference [Rome Food Summit] challenged the world’s wealthiest countries in unusually sharp language’ (Martin 2008a). Similarly it is remarked in a New York Times editorial that ‘Industrial nations are not generous, America and other developed nations need to step up to the plate (NYT Editorial 2008)’. The implications are that the elite nations have so far failed to respond to a natural disaster. This is rather a redemptive criticism as it positions the rich as potential saviors of the wretched. Again, the challenging in sharp language appears as a radical critique of world leaders but is comparable to shaming the rich into charity and does not specifically identify any correlation between the poles of prosperity and immiseration. To this point however the World Bank conceded remarkably that ‘even stable high growth countries are not immune...India has the double the rate of stunted children than in sub-Saharan Africa’ (World Bank 2008). There is no consideration that developments championed by the World Bank, such as India’s economic growth, could possibly create destitution through displacement, slum-urbanization and class inequality.

The failure of the global political leadership, by way of neglect and complacency, is succinctly characterized by the article, ‘World’s Poor Pay as Crop Research is Cut’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008b). The article details the devastation being wrought on rice crops in East Asia by a pest, the brown plant hopper, ‘threatening the diets of many poor people’. This compounding crisis ‘could have been prevented’ but ‘governments
and development agencies lost focus on the importance of helping poor countries improve their agriculture’. The director of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) laments that, ‘people felt that the world food crisis was solved, that food security was no longer an issue and it really fell off the agenda’. As ‘vital research programs have been slashed’ the IRRI has been reduced to a shell of itself with ‘empty offices’ and green houses with ‘peeling paint and holes in their screens and walls’. The IRRI, a crucial component of the Green Revolution agro-tech infrastructure, is elevated in the food chain article, into an apolitical technocratic realm of science. From this perch scientists and development workers can bemoan the current failure of moral leadership; ‘It’s as if we have lost track to the fact that food is linked to agriculture, which is linked to human survival’. Such negligence is primarily directed at the privileged as ‘the biggest cutbacks in donations to agriculture in poor countries are from the governments of the wealthy countries and in loans from development institutions that the wealthy governments control’. The World Bank and the US have both cut funding to agricultural development programs by about 75%. The failure is not exclusively theirs however as ‘many poor countries, instead of developing their own agriculture, turned to the world market to buy cheap rice and wheat’. The effect is to cast this neglect as a collaborative failure between the developed and developing countries. From this we can assume that World Bank and IMF structural adjustment policies were consensual and voluntarily pursued by the developing countries, despite being wrong headed. Indeed ‘nobody was listening’, ‘the stage was being set for a food emergency’ and ‘now a reckoning is at hand’. In elevating the IRRI to the sphere of apolitical science, the underlying proposition is that the IRRI and the Green Revolution need to be restored to their former glory. And while it is self-evident that technology and research are crucially needed for the challenges of the food crisis, the premise here is that the Green Revolution is politically neutral. Therefore there is no space to reconsider what social relations are
embodied in the Green Revolution pattern of development. The undermining of the peasantry and small holders through systems of private property, mechanization, industrial inputs and reliance on corporate supply chains cannot be contemplated. While there are distinct differences between the former Green Revolution and the present neo-liberal regime, such as state supports, the inability to distinguish the political dynamic, outside of world leaders ‘losing focus’, in effect naturalizes the most severe impacts of de-peasantization and accumulation by dispossession wrought by TNC control of agriculture.

*Loving Not Wisely but Too Well*

Perhaps the most significant blow to the pervading neo-liberal order to emerge from the food crisis were the tacitly acknowledged failures of the World Bank. The attribution of World Bank policies to the development of the food crisis occurs in one exceptional instance in the *Wall Street Journal*, ‘Food Crisis Forces New Look at Farming’ (Millman & Thurow 2008). The manner in which this *mea culpa* is structured allows the World Bank to retain privileged authority over development policy, having achieved an introspective clarity over how things went wrong. The article navigates the example of Haiti: ‘a cautionary tale of how development advice has left a country facing an uncertain future in the food crisis’. The article explicitly details how the elimination of tariffs and supports for rice farmers ‘often at the behest of the US and World Bank’ led to the destruction of Haitian rice farming by American subsidized rice. The case of Africa is also considered where, ‘prodded by the World Bank’, African nations cut agricultural programs, extension services to farmers and agronomy training institutes languished. The food crisis is said to have forced the World Bank and others into a ‘major rethink’ of policy advice and the role of agriculture in economic development. Millman & Thurow write that the World Bank ‘acknowledged the damage caused by its advice’ and Bank President Robert Zoellick,
who is not revealed as an appointee of George W Bush, or the former managing
director of Goldman Sachs as well as the US trade representative, ‘promised the bank
would reverse course’. The absence of this disclosure from all the texts examined,
despite Zoellick’s importance as an actor, is vitally important to sustain the premise
of shared interests between the bank, its backers and the world’s poor. Furthermore
given the deference to such institutional powers as the US administration and Wall
Street, such questions would be deemed non-pertinent by the media unless there
were a specific scandal.

While the article is clear about the overall effect and impact of World Bank policies,
the baby is not thrown out with the bath water and neo-liberal theory is salvaged.
The problems are cast as not so much about neo-liberalism but the manner of its
implementation. It is held that ‘countries should in general rely on trade for food
security . . . the problem is when comparative advantage is not allowed to work’
(Millman & Thurow 2008). In Africa, state agricultural distribution systems were
replaced by an ‘unprepared private sector’. Food security and public provision are
thus not antithetical to the private sector; it was merely unprepared. Similarly the
devastation of tariff reductions was a ‘negative blow’ to the extent that Haitian
farmers were not supported by ‘transition(ing) into more profitable crops’. The IMF
(2008b) similarly stresses the problem of managing the transition and the
responsibility of accurately ‘gauging the pace of reform’. The acceptance of
responsibility for the failed transition, as opposed to the bankruptcy of neo-liberal
theory, is encapsulated in both the IMF’s and World Bank’s recommendations for the
immediate humanitarian response. The World Bank implores the need to have
‘transparent and well targeted’ subsidies with an ‘exit strategy built in...and
communicated publicly’ (World Bank 2008). This temporary measure is to be
limited so as not ‘risk crowding out private input supply’. The premise is that the
state should keep intervention to a minimum by ‘effective short term measures’ (IMF 2008c) which cushion the transition for the “excluded”. The entrenchment of such provision must be avoided as ‘it would be inappropriate to use them to support the consumption of the rich’ (IMF 2008b). The emphasis on short term measures at the margins of society and that the rich might abuse such state intervention shows an incapability to conceive of the scope of suffering in instances where a majority of the population is impoverished. The familiar “mistakes were made” discourse that emerges in the article assumes a normative function for the World Bank which is in congruence with the interests of the world’s poor. The Bank’s culpability is restricted to poor judgment while the political interests of its leadership and masters remain unquestioned. The preservation of the Bank’s perceived community of interests between itself and the poor is maintained even in the face of the Haitian example where much force and imperial coercion were required to carry out World Bank policies (Chomsky 2004). The failing of an advisory policy, as opposed to the inevitable result of an imperial program, is reproduced in the description of World Bank influence as having ‘prodded’ African nations, with no suggestion of more severe methods of persuasion.

The ultimate redemption of the World Bank comes through its immediate association and connection to the world’s poor. It is here worth re-emphasizing the objectification of the poor and suffering through a ‘politics of pity’ which ensures a monopolization of meaning by ‘the subject who is describing’ (Boltanski 1999). Throughout the coverage there is extensive ethnography of ‘the new face of hunger’ (World Food Program 2008). The intimate details of desperation and anxiety among the world’s poor are graphically detailed. We learn of ‘Manthia Sau, a 43-year-old widow in the Mauritanian desert village of Maghleg’ who supports a family of three on 50 cents a day and has been forced to cut out breakfast and ‘ration a small serving
of soupy sorghum meal for family dinners’ (Faiola 2008). There is a tailor in Lagos who has ‘been forced to cut back on the bread he and his family love’ (Streitfeld 2008). Such anecdotes provide the stark images with which journalists mould and construct the discourse of the food crisis. As objects of pity, these victims are not entitled to agency, while meaning is constructed from the privileged vantage point of journalists who can contextualize these immediate experiences around the analysis of authoritative sources such as policy experts and institutional technocrats. The formula consists of invoking the wretchedness of the poor and projecting a set of policy prescriptions as pertaining to their interests. In one instance Pascal Lamy speaks out against protectionist measures, ‘It’s obvious that these export restrictions fuel the price increases’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008c). Extending from this the authors of the article maintain that export restrictions drive up the price of imports and small farmers of the developing world are denied the flow-on benefits of higher prices.

Arfa Tantaway Mohamed, an Egyptian farmer reactively concurs with the ascribed prognosis, ‘for sure it has a negative impact’, while smoking a ‘Cleopatra brand cigarette during a break from working his fields, while 18 members of his extended family labored nearby’. The particularity of the sufferers’ condition is here emphasized to effectively contain them as authorities within their immediate visceral experience while the privileged retains a macro perspective and authority to configure meaning out of events.

The Wall Street Journal article follows a similar construction of agency for the poor, however the World Bank’s redemption is premised upon a partial breakthrough and re-ordering of this discursive pattern. The article begins with Leonid Eustache, a Haitian farmer whose condition typifies the failure of developing world agriculture. The article posits that Leonid ‘could use some help from his government’, with irrigation and drainage systems incapacitated, he stands ‘barefoot in a pool of
stagnant water’ observing that ‘they should do something about that’ (Millman & Thurow 2008). We learn thankfully that ‘for the first time in a long while somebody might’. From this initial plea for intervention we discover the ineptitude of the Haitian government bureaucracies, ‘few of the agency’s employees bother to do much work for their pay...you can’t fire a state worker’. To revisit Leonid’s call for help, ‘they should do something’ and the following optimistic reply ‘somebody might’, that somebody is the World Bank. The typical response of the World Bank to its policy failures in the Third World of poor governance or corruption, a distinctly culturalist discourse, is here used to recast the World Bank as potential savior. This redemption is derived from the World Bank’s self-correction of policy implementation and dialogue with other developing countries. Malawi is shown as an example where a government program supporting farmers was installed with great success and the ‘World Bank offered to expand the program’. In a telling exposition of the normative pattern of Third World media representations the Malawian finance minister states that ‘we didn’t want our children on TV begging for food’. This example is the most clearly identifiable instance of Third World self determination within the entire body of texts and it is remarkable that standard conceptions of suffering and hopelessness are cogently dismissed, suggesting an all too familiar understanding of the politics of pity by the sufferers themselves. It is also significant that the World Bank retains its position as the vehicle to enact economic development. The World Bank’s mea culpa and the modification of Third World agency represents a distinct re-ordering of neo-liberal development discourse which is significant. This in part represents an internal institutional power dynamic between development economists and the necessary incorporation of developing nations who are clearly not without agency. The overall effect is redemptive for this powerful neo-liberal institution as it retains definitional power and crucial agency.
Globalization, Free Trade & the End of History

The most explicit failure of Western agency to come out of the food crisis is the foundering of the WTO Doha Round, primarily, though not exclusively, at the hands of the West. This lament at a missed opportunity charges the West with failing to uphold its obligations to sufficiently neo-liberalize and reduce tariffs and farmer subsidies. While explicit Western culpability is measured solely against a neo-liberal standard this nevertheless requires a significant schematic reconfiguration of the end of history. In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed written by Adam Lerrick of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the G-8 come under heavy attack as the ‘culprits’ in a food crisis ‘that has moved hundreds of thousands from subsistence to starvation’ (Lerrick 2008). The article entitled ‘The Rich World and the Food Crisis’ appeals to the plight of ‘poor farmers...deprived of a livelihood’ at the hands of the G-8 who ‘have distorted agricultural markets to the paralysis point’. The protectionism of the G-8 is said to be driven by the narrow sectarian interests of ‘conservationists’, ‘green energy advocates’, a ‘myopic US congress’ and ‘old style [French] Farmers’. The tragic failure of Western leadership means that developing nations ‘have responded to protest and riots with backward measures’ such as export restrictions which further distort markets. Such protectionism is deemed to ultimately hurt the poor as it prevents the necessary supply side response and ‘schools will not open, roads and ports will not be built’. This characterization of the protesting hungry and their governments response fits with the diminution of the Third World actors as real political agents, while responsibility ultimately lies with the G-8 and the market. Despite the castigation of EU, US and Japanese complacency the end of history is still assured to us. The article ends by enumerating the signs of the new dawn, Ethiopian farmers:
are pooling funds to buy $75,000 John Deere harvesters, Swedish and English entrepreneurs are assembling small land holdings in Ukraine and Russia to build world-class cereal producers. In Sudan, Abu Dhabi’s sovereign fund is planting 70,000 acres with corn and wheat. Monsanto has promised new modified seeds that will double drop yields and, this time, finicky European bans will not prevail.

This inevitable outcome will ultimately be at the expense of the smug ‘Rich World’ as ‘when the dust settles, there will be a time of plenty in developing lands- and far fewer Porsche dealerships in the US farm belt’. While the G-8 are held to have stalled the inevitable progress of globalization it will eventually materialize and it will benefit the poor. The neo-liberal agents that embody the forces of history are the bio-tech corporations, those involved in neo-colonial land leasing, including significantly Sudan, and poor farmers who embrace technologization with specific Western hallmarks. The sustaining of the end of history, free trade discourse requires a temporal displacement and a tacit admission that the charted course of globalization has so far failed.

The re-calibration of the end of history discourse emerges in response to the failures of the West and the acknowledgement of a specific agency behind globalization that is normally disavowed. The World Bank, in the opening of its report to the G-8, implores the need to make ‘globalization work fully’ by ‘acting now in the interests of the poor’ (World Bank 2008). This recasts globalization as in the hands of the G-8 not history. History can be used as a threat to say one is on the wrong side of it, but overall this diminishes the supposed gravitational pull of globalization and free trade. A similar admission is made in a *Washington Post* article that laments the failure to follow the correct path of globalization. The identification of nations going off course
is framed against the genesis of the end of history: ‘After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world seemed to shrink with rapidly opening markets, surging trade and improved communication and transportation technology’ (Faiola 2008). Despite this, there is ‘one big problem. The global food market never became the kind of well-honed machine that has made the price of manufactured goods...increasingly similar worldwide’. Both the developed and developing nations are said to have failed to complete Doha and now both sides are ‘digging in’. This deadlock is attributable to narrow national political interests, such as French farmers, who ‘have become addicted to generous government handouts’. From this political entanglement ‘we can now see that the World has largely failed to create an integrated food market’. The projected outcome of the processes of trade liberalization are here held as the objective measures of political success and it is posited that the current crisis represents the failure to enact the end of history. While neo-liberal policy remains the exclusive measure, that such policies could be impeded and ultimately thwarted, as the article suggests, is an admission of crisis for the end of history status of neo-liberalism.

The political form of the end of history, Western, secular, liberal democracy receives a similarly nuanced re-configuration. The food crisis bares with it the threat of a reactionary, traditionalist political mobilization around food prices as ‘fragile democracies are feeling the pressure’ (Ki-Moon 2008c). While this appeal to action in support of liberal democracy is embedded in the designation of Third World political protest as undesirable, the political end of history is consolidated as the objective measure of progress. The food crisis is said to have revealed that ‘freer, more democratic nations with better economic policies appear more immune to the spike in food prices’ (Ruxin 2008). In one instance of unrestrained exuberance titled, ‘Hunger Pains for Mubarak’ (Diehl 2008), the food crisis itself is conceived of
as a new Berlin Wall moment that will bring down repressive political forms and open markets. We learn that ‘dictators are tottering’ from North Korea, to Robert Mugabe, Pervez Musharaf and lastly Hugo Chavez ‘because of the combination of soaring food prices and shortages of food he has inflicted on Venezuela’. This fact is unexplained but we are clearly urged, from an American perspective (again end of history with specific Western hallmarks), to fantasize about the demise of our enemies which even includes Vladimir Putin and Mahmoud Ahmadenijad. In Egypt it is said ‘the price of bread has triggered the revival’ of the pro-democracy movement. A secular movement that challenges not only President Mubarak but the traditional politics of the Muslim Brotherhood. Dubbed ‘The Facebook Party’ they have skillfully ‘used cellphones and the internet to get their message across’. Their agitation is held to bare witness to the irrepressible freedom and emancipatory potential of a global civil society embodied in globalization and information technologies. The article concludes optimistically posing the question ‘will those hungry for bread join those hungry for freedom?’ The status of the political end of history in the food crisis discourse is subject to a bifurcation. Either the end of history is threatened by reactionary Third World actors or in the instances when we know intimately of their struggles, we project all our desires and aspirations into their political acts.

To return to the question of direct Western Agency in propelling the food crisis, bio-fuels and ethanol related subsidy programs and quotas are held as the ultimate evil to effective market function. Paul Krugman states that ‘where the effects of bad policy are clearest...is the rise of demon ethanol and other bio-fuels’ (2008). While it is self-evident that bio-fuels have dramatically accelerated the food crisis through the allocation of arable land into fuel as opposed food crops, they are attacked singularly as market distortions propped up by unsustainable subsidies. The resolution to this
crisis dynamic is not held to be a moratorium on Western bio-fuel ambitions but is rather a market solution. The World Bank calls for a move to ‘facilitate private investments in bio-fuel production in developing countries’ and goes on further to note that ‘many developing countries, especially in Africa, have a comparative advantage in bio-fuel production’ (World Bank 2008). This policy prescription is one that was already in motion at the time with land-leasing investment creating bio-fuel plantations across the developing world. Such a free market fix to the problem fails to consider ethical questions about whether markets will respond to the demand for fuel from the rich or food from the poor. There is no forewarning of the political implications and exacerbation of the crisis through the control of agriculture by off-shore investment typified by such deals as the Daewoo investment in Madagascar (Braun & Meinzen-Dick 2009).

NGOs

While much of the questions of agency and responsibility for the food crisis are structured around international relations and state actors, NGOs are for the most part sidelined in the discourse at the same time as they are assumed to be central to the crisis response. As the humanitarian response is of utmost urgency and its delivery is preferably handled by the professional class of development officers as opposed to the state, which might entrench subsidies, NGOs are a silent central dynamic to the story. Their limited presence within the discourse exemplifies their service to power and the extent to which a human rights politics versus neo-liberalism, is a false dichotomy. It also bears witness to a certain hierarchy of NGO access. The sole example of critical engagement with neo-liberalism in the entire body of texts comes from Via Campesina, a grassroots peasants political organization. A single quote is used in a New York Times article which states that the food crisis is ‘being used by political and economic elites as opportunities to entrench corporate
control of world agriculture and the ecological commons’ (Martin 2008a). This comment is used without articulating the ideational context which might elucidate the antithesis between the commons and corporate control. While the range of NGOs is immense, there is distinct privileging of de-politicized philanthropic efforts, such as the Gates and Buffet Foundations (Ruth & Thurow 2008), that enhance the operation of international institutions in the abstract technocratic realm of neoliberalism, as opposed to community based groups which are more sharply politicized. That the role of NGOs in the discourse overall would remain marginal suggests either a reluctance on the part of NGOs to engage in politics or an assumption amongst the power players that NGOs can be called upon to do their bidding.

The two exclusive examples of NGO articulation demonstrate the complementary nature of human rights discourse to neo-liberal policy. One is an editorial from Josh Ruxin, a Columbia academic involved in a development project in Rwanda. The article is a rather clumsy assemblage of contradictory discourses that ultimately redeems neo-liberalization. The article talks of a potential new prosperity in Africa that can be had through ‘diversification into higher value crops’ and resisting ‘the temptation to apply traditional fire control responses…such as protecting markets’ (Ruxin 2008). Laying out this argument for a market driven supply side response that will help small farmers gain a comparative advantage, the article proceeds to talk about ‘the common sense of buying and producing locally’. The article applauds ‘farmers who are not reliant on expensive fertilizer’, calls for reducing ‘dependency on fossil fuel…fertilizers and pesticides in favor of locally available resources’ yet welcomes an ‘African Green Revolution…the timing could scarcely be better’. This pastiche of opposing discourses has the effect of lending a peasant-centric façade to neo-liberal principles. The article also shows the limitations of the contemporary
alternative food discourses. Here a farmer’s market, buy local motif is welded unproblematically to neo-liberal marketization and there is no apparent contradiction between a reduction in fossil fuel dependency and the Green Revolution. The second such example, an editorial from the president of International Relief and Development, immediately signals the limited accompanying role to which NGOs are designated. The title ‘The Food Crisis, We Can’t Control Costs, But We Can Lend a Hand’ (Keys 2008) accepts the diminutive role of withdrawing from the political struggle to ‘control costs’ in favor of ‘lending a hand’ to the suffering. Detailing the work of a local Washington D.C. charity, Miriam’s Kitchen, the articles implores us: ‘opportunities to volunteer and contribute exist all over our community’. The article concludes with the global civil society mantra ‘think globally act locally’ urging a global surge in voluntarism and charity as the antidote to the food crisis.

A New Consensus?

The discursive framing of the food crisis within the calculus of economism (naturalization of market and actors), urgency (humanitarian need over theory/politics) and limited agency (moral failing/not enough liberalization), allows neo-liberalism to maintain hegemony. Despite this containment, a new consensus and forward momentum around projected utopias is required to reinvigorate the neo-liberal project. This necessity to create renewed impetus for neo-liberalism relies upon a temporal displacement and a bifurcation of the present around crisis and opportunity. The watershed moment that the food crisis represents, in jarring our complacency, is repeatedly said to offer a chance for a new global consensus. The construction of this consensus involves a complex nodal assemblage of consensual, aspirational values that veil or lend legitimacy to neo-liberal policy. This hegemonic moment dictates a re-ordering of discursive constituents dislodging certain
conventions and elucidating contradictions and contingencies. The crisis/opportunity bifurcation, while co-opting desired values and outcomes, calls for an active engagement in constructing a political project. In the call for a new idealism around markets, technology and the Green Revolution, neo-liberalism reveals itself as political, ideological and requiring the construction of subjectivities against a projected desire.

In coalescing around a food ‘crisis’ the media and discursive actors signal both a present failure and a battle for the trajectory of the current system. Out of the political necessity to transcend the immediate circumstance, the ‘crisis’ is framed in relation to the familiar cliché ‘opportunity’. The food crisis discourse is replete with such attempts to anticipate a new consensus around common values. The opportunity presents both a moment for reflection and mobilization. To the latter, the crisis is held as a chance to ‘re-visit past policies’ (Ki-Moon 2008c) and ‘address the root problems of many of the world’s poorest people’ (Ki-Moon 2008b). The food crisis is ‘challenging Africa’s poor but also presents an opportunity’ (Martin 2008a) and a chance ‘to unite around a New Deal for Global food Policy’ (World Bank 2008).

The discursive construction of the in-built opportunity within the crisis moment contains allusion to openness and self-reflexivity, however this space largely collapses as the opportunity becomes one for neo-liberal re-articulation. ‘Africa’s Food Crisis Opportunity’ is said to be ‘the first chance in years for the world’s poorest farmers to climb out of poverty’ (Ruxin 2008) through comparative advantage and the international market. The World Bank signals ‘a window of opportunity to make progress on [Doha]’ (World Bank 2008), and a ‘glimmer of hope’ (Ki-Moon 2008b) involves the releasing of exports onto the world market. The crisis/opportunity moment of the food crisis manages to incorporate consensus priorities, a simulated self-reflexivity and engagement with perceived failures while achieving a forceful re-
articulation of neo-liberalism. It is worth noting that the Rome Food Summit itself
does not provide a blueprint for the new consensus. The final declaration called for
the opening of markets, increasing agricultural output and more research into the
benefits of bio-fuels (Martin 2008a). As it avoids the specific identification of the
actors in the global food trade, ie. corporations and investors, it allows these agents
to configure and direct the new consensus.

What emerges as the nodal construction of the new consensus is the Green
Revolution linked to a market developmentalism. The discourse of the Green
Revolution manages to enmesh a wide range of aspirational goals including industrial
and technological development, ecological sustainability and food security. The most
potent deployment of the Green Revolution in its attachment to the new consensus, is
in the mythology of the East Asian miracle and Tiger economies. The World Bank
has hinged its recalculations on the back of the Green Revolution’s role in industrial
development; ‘the manufacturing booms that swept Asia only happened after the
region’s farm sectors developed’ (Millman & Thurow 2008). Ban Ki-Moon himself
implores this message of development and potential to flourish, by reference to his
personal story. In an editorial entitled ‘World Food Crisis: Through Africa With
Hope’ (Ki-moon 2008b), he details his personal story as a microcosm of South
Korea’s development. ‘Visiting a Primary School under construction in
Ouagadougou, I told the children how I grew up: no walls, just bare dirt to sit on. I
told them I knew hunger as a boy’. The Secretary General concludes that ‘If my
country could emerge from trauma to become an economic power, I know that Africa
can as well’. The Green Revolution is appealed to even in instances where it is said to
have worked in bringing prosperity, development and having saved a billion lives
(Seilen 2008). Indian PM Manmohan Singh calls for a Second Green Revolution ‘so
that the specter of food shortages is banished from the horizon once again’ (Sengupta
The appeal to a second Green Revolution suggests that the present crisis is one of the Green Revolution itself, although this is not directly raised anywhere and the Green Revolution remains an infallible model. The Green Revolution is even invoked as a means to assuage anxieties around environmental and sustainability problems. This moment presents us with the potential ‘to mount a greener Green Revolution’ (Sengupta 2008) and it is said that ‘the next green revolution must be “greener” than the first’ (Washington Post Editorial 2008). This environmental appeal to redouble the Green Revolution is a remarkable contradiction that evades the political origins of the very terminology of green. The imagery of “green” in the Green Revolution bears no resemblance to current discourses of green but was rather a political response the threat of Maoism, designated the color red, in Asia (Shiva 1991) and its actual basis in petrochemical intensification would seem antithetical to current conceptions of green.

This new consensus of the Green Revolution, includes the nodal construction of supplementary discourses including technologization, investment and market developmentalism. The process and agents of technologization are largely specific to facilitating neo-liberal development. There is talk of the demise of the IRRI and optimism around the hammering out of a new consensus; ‘when did you last have heads of state coming to talk about seeds and fertilizer?’ (Martin 2008a), however there is no suggestion of implementing an international framework agreement for technology sharing. Technology transfers are already said to be underway at the hands of benevolent investors and corporations. Agricultural outsourcing and hedge fund investment is repeatedly identified as the means to achieve technologization in developing countries. The discourse of technologization, as a neutral force of progress, intrinsically privileges capital as the natural agent of development. In dealing with the threat of water shortages drip irrigation is featured as a remedy with
the crucial qualification that ‘You can’t run it like a peasant, a farmer. You have to run it like a businessman’ (Martin 2008b). This privileging of capitalist-led technologization and development extends to the Monsanto Corporation. While the food crisis discourse entirely excludes question of corporate control and rarely critically addresses the presence of corporations in the global food market, Monsanto surfaces in ‘Monsanto Seeks Big Increase in Crop Yields’ (Pollack 2008). It turns out ‘Monsanto scientists are working on genetically engineered crops that would grow better with less water and fertilizer’, apparently just what we need to meet the challenges of the greener Green Revolution. We learn of the suitability of Monsanto for achieving the new consensus as the company states that ‘it would work to improve the lives of small and poor farmers by sharing its technology’. As an agent of the new consensus, Monsanto is able to pre-empt criticism of its actions by simulating a dialogue with its anti-corporate opponents who are wholly excluded from the article and otherwise marginalized in the food crisis discourse. The CEO of Monsanto states that ‘skeptics might say Monsanto was exploiting the food crisis to win acceptance for its technology, other people “will say it’s long overdue and thank goodness the companies are stepping up’ . While Monsanto is the driving agent of the story, able to elucidate its self-perceived altruism, the construction of the article does resemble journalistic concepts of balance, however the limitations of this balance is revealing. Criticism of Monsanto is incorporated through bio-tech skeptics: ‘The hype-to-reality ratio of that one is essentially infinity . . . seeing an exponential change in the yield curve is unlikely’. The issue of bio-tech is seen as one of de-politicized science. There is no consideration of the specific property relations of bio-tech licensing which have allowed TNCs both to amass huge profits and to pass on costs to farmers. The inability to consider political economy is evidence of journalistic embedding within neo-liberal political economy. In formulating the new consensus around the Green Revolution, the powerful agents of political economy, such as Monsanto, are able to
refract common aspirations for technologization, development and food security against their interests allowing the old to appear as the new.

The final, crucial component of this nodal assemblage of the new consensus is a market developmentalism discourse that succeeds in securing a neo-liberal political trajectory while displacing certain dogmas. This emergent approach of market developmentalism is the most cogent response to the self-perceived failures of managing the pace of and transition to neo-liberalization. In the rush to open markets, certain aspects were overlooked: ‘private entrepreneurs, with too little access to financing, couldn’t produce enough fertilizer and seed to farmers. Nor did they have the means to store and move vast volumes of grain’ (Millman & Thurow 2008). Such an oversight, that a certain market capacity was inoperative in developed countries, has forced a discursive re-shuffling of market autonomy. At this point the market’s independence of action, or ‘magic’ as Ban Ki-Moon disparages, is displaced. There is an attempt to restore a balance between development and marketization and the Green Revolution is identified as having incorporated technological advancements ‘coupled with market reforms’ (Bradsher & Martin 2008a). The failure to address problems of market capacity is held as the dampener of comparative advantage: ‘long and inefficient supply chain means that the average (poor) farmer receives less than a fifth of the price the consumer pays’ (Sengupta 2008). In Haiti, the potential for growing tomatoes as a cash crop is imperiled, ‘they spoil on the way to market, the roads are so bad’ (Millman & Thurow 2008). The discourse of market development emerges as the mechanism to enact the emancipatory potential of globalization, free trade and comparative advantage. ‘Simply improving market efficiency can have a great effect . . . improving local agriculture and to better connect small farmers to markets’ (Ki-Moon 2008a). It would seem obvious that increasing market access for farmers is desirable, allowing
poor farmers to better service their locale. This inward market logic is not self-evident however as the local non-traditional forms of market organization are wholly excluded from the discourse and transnational capital assumes the normative market function. The World Bank in formulating the new market developmentalism, articulates the need ‘to design and implement “market-smart and agronomically intelligent” subsidies for agricultural inputs targeted at small scale farmers’ (World Bank 2008). The need for subsidies in order to effectively create markets is in sharp contrast to certain market discourses and is a telling admission of the political and ideological commitment that is required to create a system which is deemed self-sustaining and comparable to a force of nature. Finally the IMF similarly urges the need to ‘upgrade infrastructure, distribution and storage systems, expand irrigation systems’ (IMF 2008a). The fusion of the discourse of market developmentalism within the new consensus that places aspirational outcomes within the agency of traditional market actors, suggests that this developmentalism is geared less towards the needs of beleaguered producers in the developing world, but is rather a means to ensure further market penetration by international investors.

The bio-political power in forming new market identities that encompass the consensus values of humanitarian development, technology and marketization, is evident in one New York Times article ‘Market Data Far From Market’ (Arango 2008). The article begins with a neo-liberal truism ‘Whether it’s for an Armani suited Wall Street trader or a farmer in rural India, the right information at the right time is a baseline for success’. Immediately the article signals a confluence of identity between peasant farmers and the financial avant-garde in engaging in productive activity. Bridging the divide between the Armani suited trader and rural Indian farmers is new market technology and innovation thanks to Reuters. The article elucidates the integral co-constitutive role of the media, information technology and
the market; ‘for 157 years, since signing a contract in 1851 to supply stock prices from exchanges in Continental Europe to the London Stock Exchange, Reuters has served up the numbers to the finance set’. The article details the new service piloted by Reuters, cell phones to Indian farmers that allows them seek out price information on competing markets. The service is held up as ‘a great example of how information can be used to improve economic inefficiencies and help alleviate poverty in general’. While championing the humanitarian potential of market efficiency and technology the article excludes rural Indians. We have photos of a farmer driving an ox-drawn carriage and another using a mobile phone in his fields. While the images are used to invoke the typical Indian farmer, we do not even have a name for one of them or a personalized anecdote that might structure the story, instead market analysts and NGOs speak in their place. The farmers pictured are on the one hand shown as typifying their cultural specificity, a vivid colored turban, painted ox horns, traditional technology, and are yet fully engaged in a process of globalization that puts them on par with the Wall Street trader. At the same time as they are shown as unique and culturally specific, they are excluded and are visited upon by new forms of bio-power which enmesh them in market disciplines and info-tech dependencies for self realization. The traditional societies that are said to be enhanced by technology and development are subsumed into a world of increasing market calculation, competition and intensification of production. The appeal to the plight of peasant farmers through the discourses of technological and humanitarian development, reveals the new consensus as a means to mobilize new neo-liberal subjectivities and further accelerate marketization.
Conclusion

This analysis of the discursive construction of the food crisis, across media and institutions, has demonstrated that the political project of neo-liberalism emerges from this crisis with renewed vigor. Despite the clear impacts of neo-liberal policy, through increased financial control, the intensification and mechanization of production, the reliance on petrochemicals and the displacement of traditional rural communities, there is no critical systemic analysis of the neo-liberal agriculture and development model. The role of financialization in triggering a price spiral is played down while financialization and investment are held as emancipatory forces for technologization and a means to overcome the food crisis. While the link between increasing investment, mechanization and intensification is explicitly identified, it is nowhere considered that the ‘technology treadmill’ represents the enlargement of contradiction and crisis. Technologization and the increased application of inputs entails fossil fuel dependence, environmental degradation and sustainability challenges, all while exposing producers to increasing dependence on credit, the insatiable demands of finance capital for exponential returns and rent-seeking behavior from bio-tech TNCs. The drive for technological innovation is inextricably linked to the increased velocity of the financial flows of neo-liberalism, which necessitates larger returns and an ever-increasing expanse for investment. This inevitably produces crises of speculation, overcapitalization and natural limits to accumulation. The social effects of neo-liberal agricultural transformation escape scrutiny or are otherwise deemed normative. The process of accumulation by dispossession, which drives increased slum-urbanization through the replacement of traditional rural subsistence communities with large capitalized producers, is left unmentioned. While the interests of farmers from the developing world are routinely appealed to, this inclusion is premised upon projections of them as cash-cropping
capitalists exploiting comparative advantage as opposed to subsistence-based peasants. The leaders of the neo-liberal world order, such as the US and EU, do receive castigation however this is specific to their failures to properly neo-liberalize through the abolishing of tariffs and protections such as bio-fuel programs. While this criticism is theoretically accurate, there is no conception that such imbalances of power are fundamental to the architecture of neo-liberalism. The Third World debt crisis, which led to enforced structural adjustment and the opening up of economies to investment, was principally about rescuing New York investment banks (Harvey, 2005). While there are certain allusions to the food crisis being ‘man-made’ (KIM-Moon 2008c), this is held as the failure to properly enact neo-liberal tenets with neo-liberal political economy evading analysis.

The global media and the institutions of the international order are crucial in assembling the order of discourse around specific actors and the neo-liberal narrative structure of economism/urgency/new consensus. Analysis of the food crisis discourse reveals a near complete symbiosis of institutional and media discourse that bears witness to the symmetry of values between the media and the agents of neo-liberal political economy. Institutional sources from the World Bank, WTO, economists, market analysts and investors feature heavily as defining sources. While the suffering of the developing world gain access to the media, with often specific detail of their misery, they are but a complementary subset of institutional definitional power justifying the overarching neo-liberal analysis. The elite print media of the New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal, clearly position themselves within the constellation of global institutional power through the projection of a potential internationalist order that is deemed in the humanitarian interest. Rather than promoters of a parochial Americanism the papers largely disavow their national basis, which allows them to promote American corporations and investment as the
agents of a new global prosperity. This is demonstrative of the persistently national or imperial character of the globalized media environment. The order of source access to the media largely excludes critical voices, while it is the institutions themselves that draw radical criticisms into the discourse so as to vanquish them. The IMF re-engages self sufficiency arguments in order to extol the virtues of comparative advantage, Monsanto dismisses critics of corporate power that are otherwise unannounced, and finally the World Bank stages a self-reflection that is designed to secure its definitional power. This is a striking example of media subservience to institutional power. The media fail to elucidate or even mention the alternative discourses that are partially articulated by the institutions themselves. Aside from the reporters, the specific media actors that are identified within the texts as authoritative voices, reveal the broad spectrum consensus underlying neo-liberalism in the media. In the *Washington Post* editorials are written by NGO affiliated actors, Josh Ruxin and Arthur Keys Jr, the resident experts of the *New York Times*, Thomas Friedman and Paul Krugman weigh in, while the *Wall Street Journal* calls upon Adam Lerrick of the AEI. The affiliation of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board with fervent right wing neo-liberalism, as embodied in the AEI, is not surprising. If we make a brief simplification we can identify between the sources a block from the American political Left (*New York Times* and *Washington Post*) through NGOs, Krugman and Friedmannm, while the *Wall Street Journal* is on the right. Despite this apparent political divide, neo-liberal discourse cuts through these superficial political demarcations.

The discursive techniques and accommodations involved in securing a renewed political investment in neo-liberal policy, reveal the supple character of neo-liberal ideological formations. Within the order of discourse seemingly antagonistic actors and competing narratives are incorporated as a means to stage self-reflexivity,
contestation and co-opt radical critiques. In response to the initial problematic of the food crisis, that the plight of the world’s poor is inextricably linked to the actors of neo-liberal political economy, institutional actors that have ultimate authority are positioned alongside the poor as sharing common interests and values. The agents of neo-liberal economism are held to do battle with a human rights discourse, however this antagonism is false and helps complete the ideological circle as the economic project of neo-liberalism is welded to self-correcting political forms. The theoretical tenets of neo-liberalism are rarely tested by the human rights discourse and in instances where comparative advantage theory is scrutinized the techniques of temporal displacement and dialogic engagement are effective. The nodal discursive construction of a new consensus manages to hegemonically co-opt aspirational goals for development, humanitarianism and economic equity. The necessity of this hegemonic moment does however require a certain re-ordering of market discourse that exposes contradictions.

The ability of neo-liberalism to emerge unscathed from the food crisis is crucially dependent on its containment within a de-politicized discursive causal structure. The primary framework of economism succeeds in reifying neo-liberal market structures as universal measures. Market structures and their symptoms are ascribed with formative political power which has the effect of relegating Third World populations in revolt into traditionalist or culturalized reactive agents. This economism calls for a market driven, supply-side response to the crisis naturalizing the forms and actors of neo-liberal political economy. The market itself is elevated into an organic entity by way of metaphor; the role of investors, hedge funds and corporations is not just unproblematic but rather they are essential to unlocking full human development potential. The issue of neo-colonial land leasing does not receive a critical analysis; concerns are raised about investors striking the right balance and in the case of
Sudan, a brutal regime fails to find this balance while the neo-liberal rationale remains sound.

Extending from the fundamental framing of the food crisis in de-politicized economistic terms, follows the call for urgent humanitarian action to mitigate suffering. While the urgent crisis response is of undeniable significance, the human rights discourse that pervades is not a substitute for politics with this engagement revealing a false dichotomy between a neo-liberal and human rights discourse. It is in this moment of urgency where neo-liberal discourse is able to effectively engage in simulated political antagonism and contestation in which neo-liberalism retains ultimate hegemony. The moralizing discourse of human rights and the call to de-politicized action over theory fails to engage directly with or supplant neo-liberal theory while validating its political form as self-correcting. Our moral engagement with distant sufferers, from our vantage point as privileged cosmopolitans, serves to validate the redemptive quality of our moral leadership while excluding questions of direct material and political responsibility for the crisis.

The limited extent to which the developed nations are held responsible is in their failure to properly fulfill neo-liberal obligations of trade liberalization and most directly through bio-fuel programs that are seen as distortionary. That producing crops for fuel instead of food could be seen as distortionary and not unethical exemplifies the limitations of market logic in addressing the root causes of the food crisis, namely the servicing of consumer classes over the poor. The direct failure of the West in enacting the ‘end of history’ does engender a certain re-ordering of neo-liberal co-ordinates as history re-emerges as contingent and malleable to political interventions. The most significant neo-liberal re-ordering occurs within the World Bank, however responsibility is limited to a ‘mistakes were made’ discourse that
acknowledges a failure to properly implement the transition to neo-liberal policies as opposed to the substance of such policies.

The ability to contain the crisis within neo-liberal discursive parameters through the naturalization of the market, the de-politicized call for moral action and the displacement of responsibility for neo-liberal policies allows, for its further mobilization through the nodal construction of a new consensus. In structuring the food crisis discourse around the immediate indicator (economism) requiring urgent action (moral engagement), there emerges the need to articulate a new consensus that re-establishes a projected desired outcome. It is in this necessity to mobilize around a new Utopia that the most sophisticated hegemonic re-ordering and discursive construction unfolds. The neo-liberal discourse of the food crisis thus culminates in a nodal assemblage of humanitarian aspirations such as social, economic development and technologization. This moment of crisis is held to offer us a redemptive opportunity for self-reflection and appeals to the consensus desire for a new direction while addressing the perceived failures of the current regime. The new consensus incorporates some critical signifiers of what is deemed wrong with the present system including environmental problems as well as development inequities.

The principle catch-all discourse that succeeds in incorporating all the aspirational potential of the new consensus, emerges through the rehabilitation of the Green Revolution. The discourse of the Green Revolution manages to encompass mythology of the Asian miracle and is credited with having saved a billion lives from famine in the Indian subcontinent. Elevated into a de-politicized realm of science and technology, the Green Revolution is held to embody the techno-fix to problems of the environment and sustainability. This construction of a non-ideological consensual model allows the traditional agents of neo-liberal political economy to
recast themselves as the prime movers of the Green Revolution. The process of creating new Green technologies and their transfer to developing countries is said to be heroically pursued by TNCs and the hedge fund investment into land-leasing agricultural deals.

The ability to simulate self-reflexivity and mobilize the new consensus around the same players who typify the current regime of neo-liberalism, does require a reconfiguration of some discursive conventions through emergence of a market developmentalist discourse. The limited concessions from the World Bank and IMF that they failed to gauge the correct speed of reform in implementing policy, preserves the foundational role of the market and the private sector while some of their ‘magic’ is lost. The new consensus portrays markets as the necessary basis for development while the market itself is said to need facilitating through infrastructural investment. The recalibrated formula of market developmentalism holds that the magic of the market is dependent on proper policy implementation and political will. This acknowledgement that unlocking the power of the market is totally contingent on our full engagement with a political project is a crucial admission that stands in stark contradiction to the characterization of neo-liberalism as an abstract force of history. While this market developmentalism is a significant shift that alludes to more equitable North-South relations, in the context of the new consensus where traditional forms of agriculture are wholly excluded and where TNCs and investors are elevated into emancipatory agents, this market facilitation inevitably favors the interests of the powerful, traditional agents of neo-liberal political economy.

That this new consensual development model is geared towards further eradicating traditional systems of organization is discernible in bio-political terms around a
globalized techno-market subjectivity. The example of the Indian farmers who remain culturally specific and authentic through traditional imagery, yet who share an inextricable link and commonality with the Armani suited financial elite, exemplifies the sophistication of this neo-liberal reconfiguration. To return to Zizek’s premise of the Third Way, that in denying its theoretical foundation in the free market through discourses of social development, it represents the ultimate logical embodiment of neo-liberalism: the new consensus is not a strident re-articulation of neo-liberalism but one of supple accommodation to shared desires for a level of global equality. In this case of the Indian farmers, the universalization of neo-liberalism is not an attack of Americanization threatening their way of life, but is portrayed as a complementary augmentation of local identity, thus allowing neo-liberalism to appear as its opposite.

Having tracked the development of the new consensus that emerges from the neo-liberal discourse of the food crisis, one can make some conclusions about the pliability of neo-liberal ideology and the trajectory of neo-liberal agriculture. The rehabilitation of the Green Revolution as a de-politicized consensus priority suggests a certain oscillation between the proper level of state involvement and the operation of free markets, mirroring the debate around the neo-liberal financial crisis and the ‘New Deal’. The New Deal has similarly been part of the language of the post sub-prime mortgage handwringing with calls for a ‘New New Deal’ (Beinart 2008) much like a ‘Greener Green Revolution’. What both these examples demonstrate is an appeal to a perceived effective model while obliterating its specific content: in the case of the New Deal the labor/capital compromise and in the Green Revolution a state-led system. The de-politicization of a specific political project, while protecting the agents of neo-liberalism from critical scrutiny, represents the ultimate sustaining of the present constellation of imperial class power. In ascribing the agents of neo-
liberal investment with the prime ability to enact the new Green Revolution, rather than there being a swing back to the old, we have a radical intensification of the neo-liberal process. The most dramatic example of this effective ideological cover for an escalation of investment penetration, has been of the explosion in neo-colonial land leasing arrangements. The expansion of the market calculus to include land as a comparative advantage factor has seen a level of exploitation and resource extraction for the benefit of consuming classes that is unparalleled. To return to the question of agency and neo-liberal culpability for the food crisis, the discourse of the crisis has culminated in a call for unleashing the potential of investors to enact transformation, the outcome of which has led to unprecedented reach of neo-liberal investment into developing countries. The discourse of the crisis can thus be seen as a coordinated ideological, class project with the intent to prize open new terrain for the expansion of accumulation, further exacerbating the causes of the food crisis.
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