Crisis in 'a normal bad year': spaces of humanitarian emergency, the IPC scale and the Somali famine of 2011

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Abstract. This article takes the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale and its use in the declaration of famine in Somalia in July 2011 as a site for examining how the spatial imaginary and emplaced, affective registers of emergency are implicated in marking situations as spaces of humanitarian emergency, or not. The IPC scale is described and its role in removing the affective registers of crisis discussed in relation to the normalisation of the conditions constituting a classification of IPC Phase 4, 'Humanitarian Emergency', in Somalia. This is contrasted to the urgent mobilisation of humanitarian action following the reclassification of Somalia's food insecurity situation to IPC Phase 5, 'Famine'. It is argued that the IPC phase reclassification, by enacting a moment of rupture, led the normalised space of food insecurity to be seen as a space of humanitarian emergency, thereby triggering the rapid mobilisation of humanitarian action in response to crisis.

“It is important to state at the outset that ... humanitarianism is by definition an emblem of failure, not success. The disaster has already happened; the famine has started; the cholera is raging; or the refugees are already on the move”.

– David Rieff (2002, page 21)

On the 20th of July 2011, the UN officially declared a famine in the Bakool and Lower Shabelle regions of Somalia following the (re)classification of the situation there into the highest phase of food insecurity on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale: Phase 5 (maroon), 'Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe'. A few weeks later, on the 3rd of August, famine was also declared in two districts in Middle Shabelle as well as in internally displaced persons settlements in Mogadishu and Afgooye. This reclassification of the situation and the associated declaration of famine did not come as a surprise to the international humanitarian community or regional authorities – both the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) and the Food Security and Nutritional Analysis Unit (FSNAU) of the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) had been warning of an

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impending severe food insecurity crisis as early as the summer of 2010 (IPC, 2012; Levine et al, 2011; Hillbruner and Moloney, 2012; Lautze et al, 2012). Yet, despite this advanced knowledge of the coming famine, up until it was declared little had been done to scale up the humanitarian response to the chronic, growing food insecurity situation in Somalia. In fact, in the years leading up to the declaration of famine, humanitarian assistance in south central Somalia had been on the wane in accordance with shrinking humanitarian access and the drying up of donor funds for humanitarian work in the region (Haan et al, 2012; Menkhaus, 2012). In marked contrast to this long-standing inaction, however, the declaration of famine triggered a massive mobilisation of humanitarian action and donor funding, quickly mitigating the worst effects of the crisis and returning the situation to sub-famine levels by early 2012 (Darcy et al, 2012).

The IPC scale was designed to prevent severe food insecurity crises by providing timely, accurate and clear assessments of food security in real-time. And, indeed, in the lead up to the declaration of famine in Somalia (and thereafter) the IPC scale provided widely available, detailed data on malnutrition, mortality and other food security indicators to the point where the deteriorating food security situation could be monitored in “almost real time” (Seal and Bailey, 2013, no page; Maxwell et al, 2012). How is it, then, that in the presence of accurate and widely disseminated warnings on the escalating risk of famine, and an ongoing categorisation on the IPC scale as Phase 4 (red): ‘Humanitarian Emergency’ for large areas of south central Somalia, that the humanitarian community failed to respond until the point where the long predicted famine had already arrived?

There is, of course, no single explanation for the failure of early warning systems to work in preventing famine in Somalia (cf, Maxwell and Fitzpatrick, 2012; Menkhaus, 2012; Seal and Bailey, 2013). As a number of recent analyses of the 2011 famine in Somalia have detailed, there were an array of entangled political, economic and environmental factors contributing to this failure (i.e., Hammond and Vaughan-Lee 2012; Lindley 2011; *Global Food Security* 2012). Without discounting the multiplicity of immediate, concrete factors identified in these works, this article views the matter from an additional angle, taking the declaration of famine in south and central Somalia in 2011 as a site for examining how emergency – understood both as a spatial imaginary of crisis (Calhoun 2004, 2008) and as an affectively felt, emplaced state of affairs (Massumi, 2005, 2009) – is implicated in marking situations as spaces of humanitarian emergency, or not. More specifically, this article explores the development and use of the IPC tool in the measurement and representation of

food insecurity in Somalia and the relationship of these representations to international humanitarian efforts before and after the declaration of famine. Standardised tools for measuring crises such as the IPC scale have become common means of enacting spaces of humanitarian emergency on the international stage. However the relationship here is not necessarily straight forward: as this article will demonstrate, the simple designation of ‘humanitarian emergency’ by tools like the IPC scale is not enough on its own to effect a humanitarian response. An imagined space of emergency also requires an affectively felt state of rupture to the ‘normal’ course of events. In Somalia and other protracted ‘complex emergencies’ the long-standing designation of emergency has become normalised, thereby removing the affective triggers of emergency that drive international attention and thereby enable humanitarian response. Only through the mobilisation of a new designation – in this case, humanitarian *catastrophe* – was the IPC scale able to enact a space of humanitarian emergency and thereby draw international attention and effective humanitarian response.

In what follows, I first examine the category of ‘emergency’ as it relates to humanitarian action and humanitarian spaces. In contrast to other geographies of emergency concerned with the risk of future events and associated anticipatory action in the present (eg, Anderson, 2010; Massumi, 2005, 2009), the geography of humanitarian emergency is concerned with the immediately present space of humanitarian crisis to the exclusion of past and future (cf. Redfield, 2005; Bornstein and Redfield, 2011). I then consider spaces of emergency in the context of Somalia’s ongoing, complex crisis, followed by a detailing of the logic behind the IPC scale, looking at how ideas of objectivity and consensus have shaped global understandings of food insecurity crises. These two topics are then brought together in a discussion of the use of the IPC to declare famine in Somalia in 2011 and its consequences for the timing of humanitarian action². A concluding section briefly reflects on what this exploration of the ‘emergency’ designation adds to the understanding of the humanitarian response to Somalia’s 2011 famine and of humanitarian responses more generally.

² The empirical material presented in this article draws on a series of in-depth interviews conducted in 2010 and 2011 in Geneva and Nairobi with humanitarian officials from relevant UN agencies (including OCHA Somalia), the IFRC and humanitarian NGOs, as well as on a review of the relevant literature, policy documents, reports, presentations, grey literature and popular media. The interviews were conducted in the course of a larger research project ([Author’s name] 2012).

Geographies of emergency

What constitutes a humanitarian emergency? As Nicholas Stockton – a prominent practitioner in the humanitarian field – notes, it is the international aid system itself that decides which situations constitute ‘humanitarian’ emergencies and which do not and, moreover,

“until the label [‘humanitarian’] is applied to a particular situation, it rarely has any currency as an ‘abnormal’ state of affairs. After all, there is boundless human suffering and premature death to be found almost everywhere, the great majority of which fails to qualify as a ‘humanitarian’ crisis. In other words, it is not of concern to humanitarian organizations”. (2004, page 16)

Thus, in the field of humanitarianism even very high levels of human suffering and mortality may come to be understood as ‘normal’ and, therefore, marked as existing outside of the *abnormal* space of a humanitarian emergency. At the same time, once the international humanitarian community has decided that a situation does, indeed, constitute a specifically *humanitarian* emergency, “an urgent organisational effort [is made] to move human, financial and material resources to the site of crisis” (*ibid.*). But if it is the international humanitarian community that designates spaces of humanitarian emergency as such, which sorts of circumstances trigger the humanitarian community to label a situation as ‘humanitarian’ and thereby enact a space of humanitarian emergency? In later sections I outline some of the specific, contextual details of enacting humanitarian emergency in Somalia. Here, I want to first suggest that this question can be, at least partially, answered through attention to the category of emergency as a spatial imaginary and affectively felt, emplaced state of rupture.

The category of emergency implies a sudden, unexpected occurrence that disrupts the ‘normal’ functioning of everyday life (Calhoun 2004, 2008; Neocleous, 2008; Anderson and Adey, 2012). ‘Emergency’ is opposed to ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’, where the latter may be taken in “the double sense of what has become taken for granted and that which is divided from the abnormal” (Anderson and Adey, 2012, page 27). In addition, as a disruption of the normal, the spatial imaginary of emergency carries a corollary that urgent, emplaced action is needed to restore the normal order of things (Calhoun, 2004; Redfield, 2005). Thus as

Redfield explains, within emergency spaces, “action (especially technical, expert action) acquires self-authorising status by virtue of circumstance” (2005, page 337).³

Within the social sciences, the category of ‘emergency’ has perhaps been most thoroughly investigated in relation to national security regimes in the global North (eg, Beck 1992, 2009; Giddens 1999; Massumi, 2005, 2009; Lakoff, 2007; Aradau and Van Munster 2007; Collier, 2008; de Goede, 2008; Martin and Simon, 2008; Anderson and Adey, 2012). Notably, in the context of post-9/11 preemptive security regimes (for example, regimes focused on the deterrence, pre-emption and/or mitigation of terrorist attacks), emergency is often understood as a potentially impending *future event* (Aradau and Van Munster 2007; Beck 2009; Massumi, 2005, 2009; Martin and Simon, 2008; Anderson, 2010). Thus a potential security emergency is marked by a looming threat that, as Brian Massumi writes, “has the capacity to fill the present without presenting itself” (2005, page 35). Action in these cases is oriented toward prevention and foresight, often through the calculation of the risk of various future emergencies occurring (Anderson, 2010; Aradau and Van Munster 2007). In these spaces of emergency, then, it is the indefinite character of a potential *future* emergency that informs spaces of anticipatory action in the present (*ibid.*).

By contrast, the spaces of humanitarian emergencies (which, as designated and responded to by the international humanitarian community occur almost exclusively in the global South) are not potential future events but radically present ones (Bornstein and Redfield, 2011; Redfield, 2005; Fassin and Pandolfi, 2010). If looming security threats enact spaces of emergency where the future is “rendered present” (Anderson, 2010, page 779), then, the decision that a situation constitutes a humanitarian emergency (see above) enacts spaces of emergency where the future is *rendered absent*. Indeed, in the spaces of humanitarian emergency both the future and the past are suspended in favour of addressing an ‘immediate present’ (Mbembe and Roitman, 1996) of human suffering and mortality. As Peter Redfield writes, a humanitarian emergency

³ The self-authorising nature of action in emergency is also underlined by Mariella Pandolfi’s work on the “emergency temporality” (2003, 2008), a term she uses to capture the “need for mobility and speed” that justifies exceptional action in emergency. However, as I have suggested elsewhere ([author’s name], 2014), Pandolfi’s formulation of this emergency temporality as a creative force driving “[t]he occupation of space, the invasion of territory, and the crossing of borders” (Pandolfi, 2003, page 376), relegates the space of emergency to merely a static container (Taylor, 1994) of action, thus shutting down the possible insights gained from attending to the ways in which spaces of emergency might themselves unfold and be reordered through such occupations, invasions and crossings.

“is both a potential historical event and a historical deferment; a rupture that marks time indelibly yet stands outside it in a state of exception. Within crisis, time contracts and one inhabits the present as intimately as possible” (2005, page 346).

For international humanitarian actors, operating on a logic of clearly bounded projects aimed at relieving immediate suffering and saving lives in the moment of emergency, past contexts and the future well-being of beneficiaries are marked as outside the domain of specifically humanitarian action (Krause, 2014). As the quote that opened this article implies, the temporal present is a central marker of spaces of humanitarian emergency: famine is happening, an epidemic is raging, refugees are moving. The moments before crisis, when emergency could perhaps be foreseen and possibly even prevented, lies outside of humanitarian concerns; humanitarian action responds to the failure of ‘normal’ systems.

Given this temporal foreshortening to the urgent present, the imagined space of a humanitarian emergency resists extension over time. Though crisis conditions – and the human suffering and mortality that accompany them – often persist for months and even years after the onset of a crisis, humanitarian action is often delimited to the immediate space of stabilisation in the aftermath of disaster (Fredriksen 2014). At the same time, places where severe crisis conditions and the need for humanitarian relief aid have been protracted, such as in Somalia, are commonly referred to in the international humanitarian community as ‘complex emergencies’, challenging the imaginary of temporally limited humanitarian emergency.

The challenge of ‘complex emergencies’

The 1990s saw the rise of the designation of ‘complex emergency’ to describe humanitarian crises with multiple and often interrelated man-made and environmental sources (IFRC 2015)⁴. Along with the new designation of ‘complex emergency’ an agenda emerged among high-level humanitarian policy actors that there should be coherence between humanitarian and political and peace-keeping action in situations of complex emergency (Macrae and Leader 2001). Controversial from the start, the rise of this coherence agenda and associated ‘integrated missions’ nudged humanitarian work into the political arena, expanding the potential scope of humanitarian action and renaming situations that

⁴ Complex emergencies have been officially defined as “a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/ or the ongoing United Nations country program” (IASC, 1994). However the more general definition given above is more often used in practice (see also Keene 2008 for a longer discussion of the term).

might once have simply been called ‘wars’ as ‘complex emergencies’ (Terry 2002). Against those who saw promise of the coherence agenda were those who saw a betrayal of humanitarianism’s traditional principles of neutrality and impartiality (Stockton 2004) and the substitution of humanitarian action for explicit political and peace-keeping action (Macrae and Leader 2001). This rise of the designation of complex emergency and the debates surrounding its use and consequences have been well covered elsewhere (see, for example, Barnett and Weiss 2008; Duffield 2001; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Keene 2008; Macrae et al 1997; Terry 2002). For the purposes of this article, however, the immediate question is how the designation of complex emergency relates to the spatial imaginary and affective dimensions of humanitarian emergency.

Today, in large part as a result of the rise of human rights discourses and the designation of complex emergencies, most of the major international humanitarian agencies and organizations (with the notable exception of the Red Cross Movement) embrace some form of human rights and/or development principles as part of their mission (Barnett and Snyder 2008, page 158). Consequently, the temporal scope of these organisational missions has been expanded beyond the emergency present, as human rights is concerned with redressing past injustices and development with building future capacities (Redfield 2005). However, despite such expanded missions and even when humanitarian organisations extend their work into the longer-term in protracted situations or participate in projects to prepare for or prevent crises, the imaginary of space of a humanitarian *emergency* remains foreshortened. First, critical resources for such extended humanitarian actions (policy guidance and, especially, funding) tend to be limited (FAO 2005). Humanitarian action is dependent on funding and, as others have noted, the media frenzy that accompanies sudden onset disasters and the declaration of famine drives donors to pour funds into emergency responses whereas early warning systems do not (Devereux 2002; Howe 2010). At the same time, media attention to crises, however dire, quickly dries up and with it donor funds. The subsequent exit of international humanitarian actors, or the significant downsizing of relief efforts as was the case in Somalia, further signals an apparent end to emergency, despite the persistence of dire circumstances in many settings. Second, as most humanitarian work is organised into bounded projects (Krause 2014), even when this work is extended through time and scope, such extended projects tend to be understood as constituting *non-emergency* humanitarian work. (The lack of resources and an understanding of the situation as non-emergency in the specific case of Somalia prior to the famine is detailed below.)

Thus the protraction of complex political crises and the associated designation of complex emergency in places like Somalia has not in practice expanded the spatial imaginary or affective registers of humanitarian emergency. Instead, while (reduced) humanitarian efforts have been extended through time in Somalia, the crisis there had come to be normalised in the years leading up to the declaration of famine (cf. Bradbury 1998), removing the imaginary and affective registers of emergency and with them the urgency of humanitarian efforts, allowing food insecurity to grow over time. The acuteness of the situation, the catastrophic present of crisis, is lost within the ongoing quagmire implied by the designation of ‘complex emergency’. The next section explores this dynamic of normalisation in more detail.

Humanitarian space and the protracted emergency in Somalia

Mark Duffield notes that the expansion of humanitarian aid in the post-cold war period has been accompanied by a “social, intellectual and emotional withdrawal – a growing *remoteness* – of international aid workers from the societies in which they work” (Duffield 2012, page 478; see also Acuto 2014; Collinson and Duffield 2013; Hyndman 2000). In Somalia this withdrawal has been literal: following the withdrawal of US troops and UN peacekeepers from Somalia in 1995, many international aid organisations moved their Somalia operational headquarters from Mogadishu to Nairobi while some simply shuttered their missions completely (Hammond and Vaughan-Lee 2012). Those organisations that have maintained operations in Somalia while establishing remote management in Nairobi have done so largely by leaving national staff and subcontracted local organisations responsible for in-country programming (Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard 2011). International staff, meanwhile, sit in the Nairobi compound and rarely travel to Somalia and certainly not to the most dangerous areas where the humanitarian crisis has been most acute (ibid.).

While it is outside the scope of this paper to give a full history of the longstanding crisis in Somalia (for a more complete accounting of this history see Lindley 2011; Hammond and Vaughan-Lee 2012), it is worth summarizing some of the more recent conditions of crisis leading up to the declaration of famine in 2011. Of particular relevance here are the various factors contributing to the progressive closing off of humanitarian operational space in the years prior to 2011. Notably, since 2008 humanitarian actors in Somalia had been steadily moving northward despite the worst crisis conditions being located

in the south and central regions of the country as conditions in the latter became increasingly hostile to humanitarian workers.

South central Somalia has been ranked the most dangerous place in the world to be an aid worker: in 2008 two thirds of all recorded aid worker murders globally occurred in Somalia (Fast, 2010; Bradbury, 2010) and between 2008 and the start of 2011, at least 48 aid workers were killed in Somalia, while attacks on personnel, offices, and assets of aid agencies had become frequent occurrences (OCHA Somalia, 2011). In 2010 the World Food Programme (WFP) suspended its operations in the south central region of Somalia in January of that year following escalating threats, attacks, diversions of relief aid and a subsequent ban on their operations by Al Shabaab, the Islamist insurgent group controlling much of south central Somalia. In August 2010 Al Shabaab publically banned three INGOs – including World Vision International – accusing them of propagating Christianity in Somalia; and in September three more INGOs were banned, this time accused of ties to the US government and of spreading Western ideology. Attacks on humanitarian operations continued into 2011, and in mid-April Al Shabaab entered and looted the OCHA offices in the UN Common Compound in Baidoa (ibid).

In addition to attacks on humanitarian personnel, offices, and assets, Al Shabaab has levied increasingly high “registration fees” for both national and international humanitarian organizations in recent years. Whereas Al Shabaab used to require a fee equivalent to a few thousand US dollars a year, in 2010 this was raised to USD 5,000 every six months (Bradbury 2010). At that level, most NGOs could no longer justify the expense. Adding to these monetary concerns, in the context of the ongoing transnational ‘War on Terror’, the linking of Al Shabaab – the *de facto* ruling body of the region – to terrorist groups has led to tight restrictions on funding from major donor nations and made it nearly impossible for many aid groups to operate in the region without falling foul of international law.⁵ As Lindley (2011, page 5) notes, the combination of Al Shabaab’s rejection of Western influence with Western donor’s classification of Al Shabaab as a terrorist group has effectively restricted international aid to Al Shabaab controlled territories, allowing the humanitarian crisis there to grow unabated.

⁵ More specifically, five donor nations – the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand –criminalised the funding of terrorist organisations post 9/11, among which they count Al Shabaab. As Al Shabaab is the *de facto* government for much of southern Somalia, it is practically impossible for most humanitarian organisations to meet the bureaucratic requirements for ensuring no funds end up in the hands of the group (OCHA, 2010).

Somewhat paradoxically, these severe restrictions on humanitarian operating space in Somalia were accompanied by relatively good communications infrastructures that made the timely exchange of information between national aid workers in Somalia and international staff in Nairobi possible. In the years leading up to the famine, as one commentator notes, “Somalia was one of the most frequently surveyed countries in the world, with detailed data available on malnutrition prevalence, mortality rates, and many other indicators” (Seal and Bailey, 2013 no page). However, due to the lack of access and the resulting remoteness of the international aid community, the vast majority of the international workers had little sense beyond these numbers and reports of what was happening inside the country. As a review of the failure of early response systems in Somalia concludes, “There has rarely – if ever – been a crisis and response so apparently rich in data, while so lacking in any human sense of what was happening on the ground among affected groups” (Haan et al, 2012, page 74). Resonating with these more formal statements, an OCHA Somalia staff member based in Nairobi described the situation as follows:

“For us to really know what’s happening on the ground is so difficult ... you lose that grasp if you’re not actually there and if you rely on everybody emailing and sending photos... And how [we] can actually wade through all of that, all this information, it’s super difficult. And if you were sitting at least a few hundred kilometers away in the same country you definitely would have a stronger feel than you do sitting here [in Nairobi]”

As these both formal and informal accounts attest, the physical distance of international aid workers from Somalia fostered an affective distance from the crisis, realizing the social, intellectual and emotional remoteness described by Duffield (2012). Moreover, without the affective responses entailed in the act of witnessing human suffering (cf, Boltanski, 1999; Redfield, 2006) it became all too easy for remote international onlookers to view the context-stripped data on food insecurity in Somalia as simply a *normal* state of affairs. The IPC tool used to declare famine, however, is specifically designed to remove the social, emotional and political dimensions of food insecurity in order to produce an ‘objective’ picture of the situation and thereby allow for apparently apolitical decision-making. As such, the lack of an affective sense of the crisis in Somalia was incidental. The following section explores the design and functioning of the IPC tool in greater detail.

Emergency and the IPC scale

The ‘real-time’ declaration of famine in Somalia in 2011 (Maxwell et al, 2012) was made possible for the first time through the use of standardised empirical data and predefined thresholds laid out in the IPC protocols for defining levels of food insecurity. As defined by its creators, the IPC system consists of “a set of protocols (tools and procedures) to classify the severity of food insecurity and provide actionable knowledge for decision support” (IPC Global Partners, 2012, page 3). The IPC aims to provide objective, commensurable answers to the following questions: “How severe is the situation? Where are areas that are food insecure? How many people are food insecure? Who are the food insecure people in terms of socioeconomic characteristics? Why are the people food insecure?” (IPC, 2012, page 3). To do this, it consolidates a wide range of indicators on food-insecure populations – from statistics on malnutrition and crude mortality rates, to levels of food and water access and availability, to rates of destitution and displacement, to measures of livelihood assets and civil security – into a single scale composed of five color-coded phase-categories for classifying food (in)security. In the version of the IPC in use in 2011 (it has since been updated⁶), these phases were delineated as follows: Phase 1 (green), “Generally food secure”; Phase 2 (yellow), “Moderately/Borderline Food Insecure”; Phase 3 (orange), “Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis”; Phase 4 (red), “Humanitarian Emergency”; and Phase 5 (maroon), “Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe” (see Figure 1).

Originally, the IPC scale was developed by the FSNAU in Somalia in 2004. This original, context-specific, classification protocol was then progressively refined and standardised for global use, and by 2006 it was already being used to assess food security situations for various countries across Africa, as well as in Asia and South America (IPC Global Partners, 2008). No longer specifically intended for use by FSNAU in Somalia, the IPC is now a ‘universal’ tool, jointly governed by a group of eight agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and funded by a range of major national donors.⁷

⁶ A Version 2.0 of the IPC was released in June 2012, in which the phase names have been revised for greater clarity, becoming: phase one (green), “None/Minimal”; phase two (yellow), “Stressed”; phase three (orange), “Crisis”; phase four (red), “Emergency”; and phase five (maroon), “Humanitarian Catastrophe/Famine.” Given that the empirical case here refers primarily to events in 2010 and 2011, throughout this paper I will refer to the previous, Version 1.1, phase names that were then in use. However, the conceptual argument made herein remains consistent with the IPC Version 2.0 phase names.

⁷ The IPC Global Partners include Care International, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Food Security Cluster (FSC), the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (EC-JRC), Oxfam, Save the Children, and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Major funders of the IPC include the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), European Commission

Figure 1: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Scale

Phase Classification		Key Reference Outcomes <i>Current or imminent outcomes on lives and livelihoods. Based on convergence of direct and indirect evidence rather than absolute thresholds. Not all indicators must be present for classification..</i>	Strategic Response Framework <i>Objectives:</i> (1) mitigate immediate outcomes, (2) support livelihoods, and (3) address underlying causes
1A	Generally Food Secure	Crude Mortality Rate < 0.5 / 10,000 / day Acute Malnutrition < 3 % (w/h < -2 z-scores) Stunting < 20% (h/age < -2 z-scores) Food Access / Availability usually adequate (> 2,100 kcal ppp day), stable Dietary Diversity consistent quality and quantity of diversity Water Access / Avail. usually adequate (> 15 litres ppp day), stable Hazards moderate to low probability and vulnerability Civil Security prevailing and structural peace Livelihood Assets generally sustainable utilization (of 6 capitals)	Strategic assistance to pockets of food insecure groups Investment in food and economic production systems Enable development of livelihood systems based on principles of sustainability, justice, and equity Prevent emergence of structural hindrances to food security Advocacy
1B	Generally Food Secur		
2	Moderately / Borderline Food Insecure	Crude Mortality Rate < 0.5 / 10,000 / day; USMR < 1 / 10,000 / day Acute Malnutrition > 3% but < 10 % (w/h < -2 z-score), usual range, stable Stunting > 20% (h/age < -2 z-scores) Food Access / Availability borderline adequate (2,100 kcal ppp day); unstable Dietary Diversity chronic dietary diversity deficit Water Access / Avail. borderline adequate (15 litres ppp day); unstable Hazards recurrent, with high livelihood vulnerability Civil Security Unstable; disruptive tension Coping "insurance strategies" Livelihood Assets stressed and unsustainable utilization (of 6 capitals) Structural Pronounced underlying hindrances to food security	Design & implement strategies to increase stability, resistance and resilience of livelihood systems, thus reducing risk Provision of "safety nets" to high risk groups Interventions for optimal and sustainable use of livelihood assets Create contingency plan Redress structural hindrances to food security Close monitoring of relevant outcome and process indicators Advocacy
3	Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis	Crude Mortality Rate 0.5-1 / 10,000 / day; USMR 1-2 / 10,000 / dy Acute Malnutrition 10-15 % (w/h < -2 z-score), > than usual, increasing Disease epidemic; increasing Food Access / Availability lack of entitlement; 2,100 kcal ppp day via asset stripping Dietary Diversity acute dietary diversity deficit Water Access / Avail. 7.5-15 litres ppp day, accessed via asset stripping Destitution / Displacement emerging; diffuse Civil Security limited spread, low intensity conflict Coping "crisis strategies"; CSI > than reference; increasing Livelihood Assets accelerated and critical depletion or loss of access	Support livelihoods and protect vulnerable groups Strategic and complimentary interventions to immediately food access / availability AND support livelihoods Selected provision of complimentary sectoral support (e.g., water, shelter, sanitation, health, etc.) Strategic interventions at community to national levels to create, stabilize, rehabilitate, or protect priority livelihood assets Create or implement contingency plan Close monitoring of relevant outcome and process indicators Use "crisis as opportunity" to redress underlying structural causes Advocacy
4	Humanitarian Emergency	Crude Mortality Rate 1-2 / 10,000 / day; > 2x reference rate, increasing; USMR > 2 / 10,000 / day Acute Malnutrition > 15 % (w/h < -2 z-score), > than usual, increasing Disease Pandemic Food Access / Availability severe entitlement gap; unable to meet 2,100 kcal ppp day Dietary Diversity Regularly 3 or fewer main food groups consumed Water Access / Avail. < 7.5 litres ppp day (human usage only) Destitution / Displacement concentrated; increasing Civil Security widespread, high intensity conflict Coping "distress strategies"; CSI significantly > than reference Livelihood Assets near complete & irreversible depletion or loss of access	Urgent protection of vulnerable groups Urgently food access through complimentary interventions Selected provision of complimentary sectoral support (e.g., water, shelter, sanitation, health, etc.) Protection against complete livelihood asset loss and / or advocacy for access Close monitoring of relevant outcome and process indicators Use "crisis as opportunity" to redress underlying structural causes Advocacy
5	Famine / Humanitarian Catastrophe	Crude Mortality Rate > 2 / 10,000 / day (example: 6,000 / 1,000,000 / 30 days) Acute Malnutrition > 30 % (w/h < -2 z-score) Disease Pandemic Food Access / Availability extreme entitlement gap; much below 2,100 kcal ppp day Water Access / Avail. < 4 litres ppp day (human usage only) Destitution / Displacement large scale, concentrated Civil Security widespread, high intensity conflict Livelihood Assets effectively complete loss; collapse	Critically urgent protection of human lives and vulnerable groups Comprehensive assistance with basic needs (e.g. food, water, shelter, sanitation, health, etc.) Immediate policy / legal revisions where necessary Negotiations with varied political-economic interests Use "crisis as opportunity" to redress underlying structural causes Advocacy

Source: (IPC Global Partners, 2008)

Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (EC DEVCO), European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Royal Government of the Netherlands, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the UK Government (DFID), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Emphasising its universal intents, the IPC Manual Version 2.0 notes that “The IPC approach is designed to be applicable in any context irrespective of the type of food insecurity, hazard, socio-economic, livelihood, institutional or data context” (IPC Global Partners, 2012, page 3).

It has been argued more generally in relation to development interventions that the identification of problems and solutions by international experts rarely involves a consideration of the specific political economies of places where intervention is planned (see Li 2007; Ferguson 1994). In the case of the IPC this exclusion is explicit. The global standardisation of the IPC will, according to its makers, enable humanitarian stakeholders, including major funders, to make unbiased – i.e., nonpolitical – decisions on the appropriate allocation of resources and program interventions across countries (IPC, 2009). Prior to the development of the IPC for global use, most food security classifications were based on assessments particular to the context of each situation. The developers of the IPC criticise this previous ad hoc method of determining food insecurity for being “relative” and therefore lacking in objectivity, writing that by

“striving to capture the overall essence of a crisis, this type of [ad hoc] classification system is based on relative terms whose meaning is open to interpretation ... thus opening their use to bias and leading to ambiguous or subjective categorizations. As such, systems based on relative terms typically do not enable technical consensus and are not comparable over space and time” (IPC Global Partners, 2008, page 8).

By thus stripping away specific elements of context and presenting only “the facts” of food insecurity, the IPC protocols intend to remove politics from the otherwise contentious questions of when acute malnutrition becomes famine and when international intervention is warranted (see, for example, de Waal, 1997, on the politics of famine). In disparaging relative, contextual measures of crisis, the IPC Technical Manual promotes an understanding of standardised, quantitative data as more transparent, accountable and objective than context-specific, qualitative data.⁸

In addition, the apparent desire for commensurability between crises points to the aim of the IPC Global Partners to reach a standardised system for designating food insecurity situations as of specific humanitarian concern or not, and thereby marking out clear spaces

⁸ As a number of authors have shown, quantitative data not only standardise information, thus allowing for commensurability, they also represent the information they contain as objective, definite and transparent (e.g. Porter, 1995; Power, 1997, 2003; Poovey, 1998).

for different types of action. Underlining this second point, the IPC Technical Manual also states that a lack of clarity in how food security situations should be classified “is operationally problematic because the way in which a situation is classified determines not only the form of response, but the source of funding and its scale, the planning timeframe and the organisational roles of different stakeholders” (IPC Global Partners, 2008, page 7). Achieving commensurability between different food insecurity situations across places and times, then, is intended to set universally standardised triggers for the mobilisation of humanitarian action.

Critically, alongside the expansion of its scope and scale – from a specific tool for measuring food insecurity levels in Somalia to a globally standardised set of protocols for making commensurable assessments of food security – the IPC now lists “Building Technical Consensus” as one of its chief functions, putting it first in a list that also includes “Classifying Severity and Causes”, “Communicating for Action” and “Quality Assurance” (IPC Global Partners, 2012). This is explored further by Nicolas Haan, the IPC Global Programme Manager, in an online interview in which he notes that the IPC Version 2.0 was launched in 2012 order to achieve “a technical compromise to allow us to have a seamless collaboration between different agencies and to make sure that Version Two is relevant in many different contexts” (IPC, 2012). Elsewhere in this interview Haan states that the IPC is objective in part because

“we get multiple stakeholders from different national governments, from the NGO community, from the UN community and from technical agencies as well as different sectoral expertise – so, climate experts, crop production experts, market experts, conflict experts, gender experts – sit around the table and they agree on a classification, which makes it an objective classification in that it’s not one person’s or one particular agency’s viewpoint on the situation” (IPC, 2012, no page).

These accounts point to an understanding of objectivity not as a priori fact, but as negotiated consensus. By gaining a negotiated consensus from a range of humanitarian stakeholders and food security experts around how food insecurity levels should be assessed, the IPC produces a representation of transparent, apolitical and objective categories for classifying food security situations and determining what type of response action is appropriate. Thus, as others have shown with policy ideas (Mosse 2004) and policy documents (Hunter 2008), as a policy tool the IPC successfully translates a diversity of stakeholders perspectives into a unified representation of objectivity (see also Latour 1996). At the same time, as the case of

Somalia suggests, the IPC tool's unified representations of food insecurity categories do not necessarily translate directly into the humanitarian practices with which they are associated 'on paper'. The following section shows this in relation to humanitarian action and inaction in Somalia prior to and just after the declaration of famine.

Declaring famine in Somalia

In late July and early August 2011, the slowly deteriorating food insecurity in parts of south central Somalia finally crossed the pre-agreed thresholds for reclassification from IPC Phase 4 (red), 'Humanitarian emergency', to Phase 5 (maroon), 'Famine/Humanitarian catastrophe': at least 20% of the population in Bakool and Lower Shabelle were getting fewer than 2,100 calories of food per day; more than 30% of children were suffering from acute malnutrition; and there were at least two adult deaths per 10,000 people or four child deaths per 10,000 children daily. With this reclassification, the formerly "forgotten" humanitarian crisis in Somalia became headline news and a top priority on donor agendas, with funding doubling practically overnight (Maxwell et al, 2012).

After prolonged inaction, even in the face of increasingly dire early warnings, the IPC reclassification spurred the transnational humanitarian system into urgent action. Recounting this moment, Haan says

"This most recent [declaration of famine] is quite dramatic. ... as soon as that classification was made and communicated so clearly in, on the IPC map, there was no bickering amongst different agencies or different actors about what is the situation, there was immediate action on that classification. Meaning appeals for millions and millions of dollars. Meaning change of policy from different governments on how we interact and work in Somalia" (IPC, 2012, no page).

Quite simply, the change in IPC classification generated almost instant consensus in the international aid community that a rapid, large-scale humanitarian response was needed (Hobbs et al, 2012). The extensive humanitarian mobilisation that quickly resulted from this galvanisation of humanitarian sentiment "mitigated the most extreme food deficits and reduced mortality levels" (FSNAU Somalia, 2011) leading to the downgrading of the situation back to Phase 4 (red), 'Humanitarian Emergency' within months.

Although Somalia's progression into famine was inevitably a matter of degree – the grim indicators used to designate Phase 5 (maroon), 'Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe', were simply more of the same grim indicators that had previously marked Phase 4 (red),

‘Humanitarian Emergency’ – the IPC scale represented this progression into famine as a step-change, or rupture, in Somalia’s food (in)security situation. Following years of rising food insecurity, violence and massive population displacements, the declaration of famine was accompanied by the grave assessment that nearly half the population of Somalia was *now* “in crisis” (United Nations, 2011). This underlines how the reclassification to a higher phase on the IPC scale, rather than the scale’s label of ‘emergency’ itself, enacts a space of humanitarian emergency. As one humanitarian actor is quoted in a review of the situation as stating, “When we realised that famine was going to be declared, suddenly it was treated like any other rapid onset emergency” (Hobbs et al, 2012, page 53).

The closing off of humanitarian operating space in south central Somalia and the associated remoteness of international aid workers were no doubt major factors in humanitarian inaction in the months leading up to the declaration of famine. Yet, although the closing off of humanitarian space in the face of such ‘risky geographies’ (Amoore and de Goede, 2011) certainly posed a serious challenge to effective humanitarian action in the region, it cannot fully account for why, once famine was declared, humanitarian access was suddenly and dramatically re-opened in the region, *despite* these risks remaining in place. Rather, I suggest that the ‘normalisation of crisis’ (Bradbury, 1998) in south central Somalia prior to the declaration of famine had marked the region as other than a space of emergency. That is, the ongoing food insecurity crisis leading up to the famine, marked by a longstanding classification on the IPC as Phase 4 (red), ‘Humanitarian Emergency’, was not, by virtue of its normalisation, experienced by international onlookers as a humanitarian emergency.

In the months leading up to the declaration of famine, the general sentiment of humanitarian actors had been summed up as one where deteriorating conditions in south central Somalia could be characterised as simply “a typical dry year in the Horn” (Hillbruner and Moloney, 2012, page 25), a “normal bad year” (Lautze et al, 2012, page 47), or as “routine crisis conditions” (Hobbs et al, 2012, page 50). Underlining these statements, in February 2011 a UN OCHA official explained to me from the UN Somalia compound in Nairobi that,

“Somalia is unique in the sense that it’s a twenty year humanitarian crisis, and I’m personally sick of calling it a humanitarian emergency because I think it’s nonsense. You can’t possibly—*most* of the things happening in Somalia are not an emergency, such as drought or floods. We can time it to within the *week* of when it happens and ... ultimately, it’s actually *not* an emergency” (emphasis original).

For this official, as for the others quoted above, the situation in Somalia in early 2011 did not constitute a humanitarian emergency because, although it involved enormous levels of human suffering, this suffering had become predictable and recurrent. As such, the OCHA official went on to say that the situation in Somalia was “more a development, early recovery, development issue rather than a humanitarian issue”. Perhaps more tellingly, the Consolidated Appeal for humanitarian funding for Somalia launched in December 2010 was met with a 50 percent shortfall in committed funds, forcing the WFP to reduce rations in Somalia by about 65 percent in April/May 2011 and around 79 percent in June 2011 (Tran, 2011; WFP, 2011).

Accounts of the situation in south central Somalia in early 2011 as normal, despite the persistence of an IPC Phase 4 (red), ‘Humanitarian Emergency’ classification underline how a space of humanitarian emergency is not enacted simply through such technical designations (just as it is not enacted through the designation of ‘complex emergency’), but rather as something affectively experienced and acted out as a sudden rupture of the normal state of affairs. And, rather than being experienced as rupture, the cyclical droughts and floods implicated in Somalia’s persistent food insecurity were seen as predictable recurrences. Similarly, the non-environmental factors contributing to the deterioration of food security in Somalia, including the protracted conflict and its associated population displacements and politicization of food aid, as well as government and militia restrictions on the mobility of pastoralists were painfully drawn out, with predictably dire consequences for human suffering (Levine, 2011). Thus, although the level of human suffering in south central Somalia was so great as to reach Phase 4 (red), ‘Humanitarian Emergency’, this designation, through its consistency, was unable to enact a space of humanitarian emergency. As one review of the 2011-2012 Somalia famine notes, “there is a sense that ‘Phase 4 happens every year’ and hence the urgency intended by such a severe classification is lost” (Haan et al, 2012, page 75). As with Massumi’s analysis of affective responses to the US’s (similarly color-coded) terror alert system, in the case of Somalia’s IPC classification, “habituation dampened response” (Massumi, 2005, page 32).

Moreover, when affective registers of humanitarian crisis are absent, the IPC scale, with its phase-categories, masks the progression of a food insecurity crisis within the mathematical limits of each category. Once again, the reality of progressive human suffering and even starvation, represented as ‘objective’ numbers, was all too easy to file away as a “normal bad year” until the seemingly sudden change on the IPC scale to a higher category

triggered an affectively felt state of rupture, moving the space of ‘normal’ starvation into a space humanitarian emergency.

Conclusion

The ‘objective’ and universal measures employed by tools like the IPC scale, by removing the ‘subjective’ contextual details of particular food insecurity crises, act to remove important affective registers of crisis that underlie demands for humanitarian action. In the absence of such affective triggers, the longstanding categorisation of the food security crisis in Somalia on the IPC scale as Phase 4 (red), ‘Humanitarian Emergency’, circulating in the form of context-stripped data, had the effect of making the condition of food insecurity in the region appear ‘normal’, thus marking it as a non-emergency space. In this situation, only the movement between categories on the IPC scale, from Phase 4 to Phase 5, by performing a moment of rupture, was able to mobilise rapid humanitarian action in response to what was only then enacted as emergency.

In one sense, the IPC tool achieved what it was meant to do. In south central Somalia the declaration of famine using the IPC category successfully mobilised a seemingly heroic response on the part of the international humanitarian community and its donors as they rapidly embarked on a large-scale response to end suffering and save lives despite the considerable obstacles to reaching populations in need. It may even be the case that the category of Phase 5 (maroon), ‘Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe’ was purposely mobilised by the international community as a means of jump starting stalled humanitarian relief in the area (see Korf 2006 for an example of how technical indicators have been deployed for such ends; more generally Li 2007). Before the famine was declared the severe level of food insecurity in Somalia had become the normal state of affairs. By contrast, once famine was declared using the IPC tool, the weight of the global humanitarian apparatus was thrown into the scene, urgently populating the space of emergency with humanitarian action and rapidly overcoming the barriers that had contributed to previous humanitarian inaction (see Menkhaus 2014 for a detailed accounting of how these barriers were overcome).

However, this ‘success’ must be weighed against the failure of the IPC tool to elicit effective humanitarian action to relieve the protracted severe food insecurity situation in the period prior to the declaration of famine. As noted above, the declaration of famine and the massive influx of funding from major donors that it induced were preceded by dramatic shortfalls in committed funds for humanitarian action in Somalia and an associated reduction

of food aid. Humanitarian *inaction* in the early part of 2011, then, not only failed to prevent the progression into famine, *it contributed to this progression*. Moreover, in achieving its negotiated representation of objectivity, responsibility for measuring famine is turned over to a global community of experts to the exclusion of the beneficiaries of food aid, whose voices are left absent from this table of stakeholders. The question of whether responses to specifically located food insecurity crises should be the domain of global experts to the exclusion of those suffering from the crisis is never raised (de Waal, 1997). The IPC thus engages in a process that de Waal characterises as the “leaching of power from those who suffer famine” by removing the specificities of context from assessment and with them “specific, local political accountability” for famine (1997, page 5). With the past and future bracketed out of the space of humanitarian emergency, the context and the continuity of crisis is lost, and each moment of emergency appears as one in “an archipelago of isolated misfortunes” (Hewitt, 1983, page 12).

In the case of the IPC and food insecurity in Somalia, humanitarian emergency’s association with rupture has led to a situation where reclassification to a lower phase is represented as a humanitarian success – even though that lower phase was Phase 4 (red), ‘Humanitarian Emergency’. Seeking to capture this weak threshold for ‘success’, Gezner (2007) refers to the ‘institutionalisation of partial success’ as a way of capturing a humanitarian system oriented to its own institutional needs rather than to those suffering from famine or other crises. In south central Somalia the success attributed to the reclassification to Phase 4 highlights the ethical tension between what is saved by humanitarian action in emergency spaces and what is lost through the restriction of the emergency temporality to the urgent present.

The IPC tool provides a globally predictable means for defining a humanitarian food security crisis, but the “overall essence of a crisis” provided by affective registers of crisis, including contextual, subjective assessments formerly in use is lost, and with it the situated, subjective humanity of those suffering from crisis. In marking out spaces for humanitarian action based on globally standardised thresholds, the IPC tool, like other assessment tools of its kind (see, for example, Redfield, 2006, on MSF’s ‘bracelet of life’, Hyndman, 2000, on various ‘ordering technologies’ used in refugee camps) – measures human suffering only in terms of ‘bare life’ (cf, Agamben, 1998; Fassin 2007). That is to say, it tells the humanitarian community how many lives are at risk (or are already being lost), the number of calories being taken in by the average person, and numerous other rates and percentages measured for

populations as a whole. But it tells nothing of the elaborated qualities of the lives of people living, suffering and dying in food insecure situations. It leaves no room for an accounting of, or affective response to, the socially, politically, or emotionally elaborated lives of individual sufferers as they progress in aggregate from one phase on the IPC scale to the next.

It should be clear that all of this, of course, is not to suggest that the famine in Somalia did not deserve the massive surge in humanitarian action triggered by the reclassification of its food insecurity situation; clearly millions of people in the region were in dire need of assistance. Moreover, I don't wish to imply that the progression through stages of food security is always linear; indeed, as Howe (2010) points out, changes in food insecurity can be sudden and self-reinforcing such that famine can come as a surprise. However, as noted from the onset, the 2011 famine in Somalia was neither sudden nor a surprise. The point I wish to emphasize, then, is that, had the mounting food insecurity situation in Somalia been addressed sooner, famine (both as a classification and as a very real, lived experience for many people) may have been averted. The data that the IPC collects and circulates in the form of phase-classifications is undoubtedly important for supporting international decision-making processes, but as the preceding account of the Somali famine makes clear, in registering technically but not affectively, such data can fail to mobilise timely action to prevent humanitarian catastrophe.

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