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The power of food security

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ABSTRACT

The practice and policy of food security have been the subject of a large body of research. Less is known about the politics of food governance. This article responds to this gap by proposing that food security policies in the Arab Gulf states constitute a form of knowledge-power. This is manifest in a discourse that produces authority, legitimates the region's rulers, and facilitates the needs of the institutions and companies that oversee the governance of food. The discursive emphasis on food security as a technocratic matter serves to obfuscate political and environmental realities; it facilitates the acquisition of foreign land and fulfills objectives of security and profit.

KEYWORDS

Food security; Gulf states; governmentality; knowledge power

Food security is a prominent policy issue in the Gulf Arab states. The historical reliance on imports and dearth of self-sufficiency has created unease for the region's governments, an anxiety manifest in numerous think tanks and policy reports.¹ This attention is mirrored in the scholarly literature, and food security in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states has been the subject of a large body of research.² But this work notwithstanding, lacunae remain regarding the formation of food security policy in this region. Much of the research examines the practice of food security; supply, demand, and the effectiveness of governmental strategies. Less is known about the politics of these policies, an obfuscation partly created by the manner that the GCC governments are often treated as 'black boxes' in scholarly work on agriculture and food security (Woertz, 2013b, p. 87).

This article responds to this gap by proposing that food security constitutes a form of knowledge power, which embodies a discourse used to fulfill material needs. It applies a constructivist framework, an epistemological approach that departs from much of the existing work on the subject. With this lens, the problem is a 'dispositif' or an apparatus of security that embodies knowledge, practices, and objectives (Foucault, 2009). By focusing on this discourse, this article provides insight into how the practice of food security is configured in the Gulf states. Within the literature, there is increasing recognition that the Gulf uses the private sector to manage food security.³ But there are outstanding questions regarding the configuration of this strategy. There continues to be a strong emphasis on the state's involvement in these investments, sometimes to the point that it is taken as the defining characteristic, resulting in reification (Henderson, 2021). Examining food security as governmentality shows how the Gulf states balance the interests of security, profit, state, and capital. Given the opaque nature of policy making in the region, this method offers a means to scrutinize the configuration of food policy in the Gulf. It also offers a means to understand the relationship between state and capital in the region, which are often analytically segregated as a

result of an emphasis on the rentier state (Hanieh, 2011). In doing so this article intends to clarify the nature of the state in the GCC and its relationship to the market, a relevant theme of this special issue.

The argument made here does not take issue with the literature on the actual policy practice of food security in the Gulf states, nor does it refute the reality of the problem. It also acknowledges the class power that ensures the material conditions that Gulf agribusiness depends on and is manifest in the process of appropriation and unequal distribution of resources in the Middle East, a process established in the literature (Ajl, 2020, Ayeb and Bush, 2019; Dixon, 2014). Rather the point is that the governance of food security produces a power that serves different objectives. It makes this argument in the following manner. First, it lays out a framework that draws on Foucault and constructivist literature. Second, it argues that the ensemble of Gulf institutions and companies form a 'food security complex', a nexus configured by rationales of security and profit. Third, it shows that this complex uses policy reports, media articles, conferences, and plans to produce food security as a discursive problem. This dialogue has various facets that serve the agendas and needs of the complex.

Governmentality and the food security complex

Food security in the Gulf has been the subject of a large body of literature. A non-exhaustive search on Google Scholar revealed at least 23 research articles written on the GCC that refer to food security in the title or abstract; 20 articles on Saudi Arabia; 11 on the UAE and 14 on Qatar. The majority of these articles focus on food security as a technocratic problem. But some scholars recognize the political and geopolitical dimension of food in the Gulf (Keulertz and Woertz, 2015; Koch, 2020; Lambert et al., 2017; Monroe, 2020; Woertz, 2013b). These works explore the discursive meaning of food security, as well as its practice and acknowledge the manner that beyond a basic need, food governance is also constituted by logics of power.

But the constructivist approach remains underutilized in the study of Gulf food security. Elsewhere, this framework has been effective in revealing the power and social practice within the management of food (Barclay & Epstein, 2013; Maxwell, 1996; Nally, 2011, 2015, 2016). This lens is used here to define food security as a 'knowledge-power constellation that authorizes policy interventions pursued under the sign of process and social improvement' (Nally, 2015, p. 340). GCC food is managed through the private sector, and Foucault's definition of governmentality is an appropriate lens. As will be discussed this has resulted in the diffusion of control across different parts of the state and economy, what he described as the 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security' (1991, p. 102).

The application of governmentality reveals several significant aspects of food security in the Gulf. First it shows the relationship between security and profit embodied in this practice. Food was a case that Foucault used in his development of the notion of governmentality. In his lectures on Security, Territory, and Population, he identified food and its governance as an example of a 'dispositif' or 'apparatuses of security', a technique of government that ensured the political and economic needs of society (Foucault: 2009, 51). Due to a fear that food scarcity could lead to revolts, European states in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sought to regulate food markets through a logic of sovereignty that was 'both juridical and political, a system of legality and a system

of regulations' a system of 'anti-scarcity' (53). Later the emergence of physiocratic theory promoted the market as more effective at preventing scarcity and at generating profit. This principle was a way in which the economy was produced; 'the freedom of commerce and of the circulation of grain began to be laid down as the fundamental principle of economic government' (56).

This dispotif is manifest in the governance of food security in the Gulf, which combines elements of security and profit. Food is portrayed as a security problem in the Gulf states, a threat promulgated irrespective of the existing reliability in access and supply. According to Koch: 'food security narratives are pervaded by the themes of in/dependence, territorial sovereignty, national vulnerability, and the precarious integrity of food supply chains, which might become a site of attack in political confrontations' (2020, p. 120). Profit and economic rationale are cast as the solution to this threat, and the Gulf's growing agribusiness sector is presented in this way. In this sense, the dispotif does not replace sovereignty (and discipline) but 'recasts them within this concern for the population and its optimization' (Dean, 2010, p. 30). By using the notion of governmentality in this way, we can see that food security 'draws out a series of continua rather than breaks between state and non-state practices, public and private institutions' (Barclay & Epstein, 2013, p. 219).

This article argues that these public and private institutions form a food security complex, a 'unity of firm and state' that embodies both sovereignty and governmentality (Watts, 2004, p. 54). As will be evidenced, this complex advances a discourse through policy documents, company adverts, and promotional materials. This discourse serves the practice of food security in the Gulf states. It emphasizes food security as a technocratic problem, something that can be managed through 'technical adjustments', interventions that resolve and displace problems of supply (Günel, 2019, p. 8). By doing so, other more political definitions of distribution and sustainability are avoided. Food security is a policy domain that 'confine(s) thought (and political action) within boundaries that appear as "common sense"' (Hanieh, 2018, p. 118). This creates a 'logic of distribution' that contributes to the production of the economy in the Gulf states (Mitchell, 2011, p. 9).

The reduction of food security to a technical intervention means that it becomes 'something that can be measured and calculated across time and space' (Koch, 2020, p. 122). This is evident in the knowledge production of the Gulf food security complex and a lexicon that implies control over nature and geography. Policy documents emphasize technology, market power, efficiency, sustainability, and logistical circulation, desert reclamation, contracts, and reserves. These features constitute the wider economy; 'something which politicians, academics, industrialists, and others think can be governed and managed, evaluated, and programmed, to increase wealth, profit, and the like' (Rose and Miller, p. 280). This techno power plays a role in producing legitimacy for the ruling classes of the Gulf, on the basis that it is a problem solved. This intersects with a broader historical connection between managing the region's environment and political authority. According to Jones: 'Natural resources, territory, the environment more generally, and people emerged not just as things to control but also as obstacles to be overcome, projects to be developed, and subjects to be managed' (2010, p. 234).

This discourse also produces legitimacy by facilitating the ideology of 'immense abundance' within the Gulf states (Günel, 2019, p. 63). It enables the imaginary of infinite growth by providing 'a means for vaulting into a future where humans will continue to enjoy abundance without interrogating existing social, political, and economic relations' (Günel, 2016, p. 293). However, food security is underpinned by a contradiction. On one hand, supply can be resolved by technical intervention, yet at the same time, these adjustments are continually made necessary by the prospect of scarcity and the definition of limits. These technical interventions ensure that 'the regulation of scarcity ... does not signal the end of hunger so much as its displacement in space and time' (Nally, 2011, p. 49). One example is the use of the food security discourse to justify the acquisition

of agricultural land in foreign states. As will be discussed, Gulf agribusiness companies claim that these enclosures can be beneficial to both the investor and the host society despite their dispossession and extractive nature (Henderson, 2020). In this context, abundance is created by imposing scarcity and the 'promise of a surplus of life is most visibly predicated on a corresponding devaluation of life' (Cooper, 2008, p. 50).

Food security complex

The knowledge power of food security is embedded in a constellation of government bodies and private sector companies, a food security complex. This complex has emerged in all Gulf states, but in varying forms. Its most visible manifestation is in the UAE where multiple institutions, companies, and a dedicated ministry have been established. In other Gulf states, this nexus is smaller, less public, or partly served by institutions that exist in other GCC countries. This complex manages the technocratic practice of food security; it transforms the unruly geography, nature, and politics of food into a governable commodity; according to Mitchell: 'what appears as nature is already shaped by forms of power, technology, expertise, and privilege' (2002:, p. 210). This is a source of legitimacy for the region's ruling class, not just in terms of the importance of creating real existing access to food but also through the power that pervades a programme of government.

The food security complex balances and acknowledges the various agendas and perceptions that embodies this issue. Food as a sovereign concern was a prominent preoccupation for the region's monarchies and the British colonial authorities throughout the twenty-first century (Joseph, 2018; Toth, 2012; Al-Sayegh, 1998; Woertz, 2013a). This anxiety was grounded in real experience, particularly during the Second World War when disruption and conflict led to starvation and unrest in many Gulf cities (Hayman, 2018; Lambert et al., 2017). This concern drove policies that were primarily concerned with ensuring supply; a manifestation of Foucault's 'anti-scarcity system'. Following the increase in oil revenues, this apprehension resulted in the allocation of resources to domestic production and strategic reserves of commodities, a policy that was intended to achieve self-sufficiency (Nowshirvani, 1987; El-Mallakh, 1970).

The objective of self-sufficiency was managed by institutions that became more established in the oil era. One example was the establishment of the government-owned Grain Silos and Flour Mills Organization (GSFMO) in Saudi Arabia in 1972, which was tasked with managing the supply, storage, quality, and infrastructure of the Kingdom's reserves (Nowshirvani, 1987). Kuwait established the Union of Cooperative Societies in 1971, a collective of neighbourhood food associations (Abduljader, 1990). The institutionalization of food security was also a feature of the Gulf Cooperation Council, which was formed in 1981. The member states agreed to coordinate their strategic reserves and develop a system in which commodities could be exchanged during emergencies (Qureshi, 1982). This adoption at the regional level served the purpose of legitimizing and standardizing this problem across all GCC states.

Established as a threat, food security licensed solutions that served certain agendas. The quest for self-sufficiency became a means for redistributing oil rents. State subsidies for inputs, price supports for domestically produced commodities and land allocation was exploited by those with connections to the state, members of the ruling families and the 'merchants' or business families, both of which constituted the nascent capitalist class (Nowshirvani, 1987). This resulted in an initial phase of accumulation. The Saudi state's subsidy to domestic food production in the 1980s and the support price for Saudi wheat were up to five times the international rate (Elhadj, 2005). One estimate suggests the total cost of Saudi domestic agriculture was around US\$85 billion

(*ibid.*). This led to the capitalization of companies that comprise the regional agribusiness sector. One of the biggest producers of grain in the 1980s in Saudi Arabia was Hail Agricultural Development Company (HADCO), which was later merged into Almarai, one of the largest publicly listed companies in the Kingdom (Woertz, 2013a, p. 82).

The self-sufficiency programme and its purpose in rent redistribution were of questionable benefit to smaller farmers. Land and resource allocation were hugely unequal, and smallholders could not compete with these large farms, or imports that were often subsidized by the state (Nowshirvani, 1987). Policy was characterized by a contradiction. Governments sought to support domestic agriculture on the basis that large sections of their population continued to depend on subsistence agriculture or semi-nomadic pastoralism; in Saudi Arabia in 1974, this accounted for around 45% of the population (Jones, 2010: 32). Yet at the same time governments also subsidized imported food, out of fear that rising food costs could lead to political unrest (Woertz, 2013a).

Throughout the early oil period, the threat of food insecurity did not materialize. Although the oil embargo and periods of regional conflict heightened concerns, the anti-scarcity system ensured high levels of access to food. In terms of access, most GCC states recorded levels of more than 3000 calories per capita during the 1980s, greater than many OECD countries. For example, the UAE during this period recorded an average of 3714, more than the US, UK, and West Germany (FAO, 1988). This abundance was a means to ensure the population felt the benefits of oil wealth, a source of legitimacy. The creation of improved and prosperous subjects provided an opportunity for the consolidation of the state's control, and their transition into consumers of modern food commodities was a central part of this process. According to Menoret, 'Driving from their homes to shopping malls, mosques, and government agencies, Saudi citizens would be distracted from burning political issues by the dream-come-true of a Westernized, family-based way of life' (2014, p. 100).

The exigency of self-sufficiency and the pursuit of rent eventually hit the wall of environmental and fiscal boundaries. The production of domestic food was highly water intensive, and most large-scale agriculture in the region was based on the mining of fossil water from non-renewable aquifers. The intense nature of these schemes led to exhaustion. An estimated 300 billion cubic metres of water was used in total by these projects, the approximate equivalent to 6 years of Nile river flow (Elhadj, 2005, p. 18). This ecological exhaustion was linked to fiscal unsustainability of these policies, and the rising expense of subsidies was compounded by the declining returns on water extraction (Henderson, 2020). As a result, the food security complex changed tact and starting in the 2000s a greater emphasis was placed on external investments in farmland as well as the diversification of contracts on the international market.

Concomitantly the emphasis on the private sector and its ability to resolve these problems became far greater. The Gulf's agribusiness companies and their access to the global food market were framed as a means to vault the limitations of the domestic biosphere. By the end of the 2000s, the private sector and its international investments became the mainstay of Gulf food security. Business could secure food security, but in a more disciplined and efficient manner than the state. According to a US diplomatic cable in 2010, 'Saudi private companies and individual investors will take the leading role in investing in strategic agricultural crops overseas' (Farmlandgrab, 2010). In the UAE, a similar approach was adopted. In 2013, the managing director of Al Dahra said: 'The (UAE) government has come up with a new initiative to make the agriculture sector both profitable and sustainable. The Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority was formed (in 2005) to create a sustainable structure for privatizing the agriculture sector' (Oxford Business Group, 2013).

This orientation towards the private sector led the food security complex to a form of governmentality, through which concerns of supply are managed by the market. This was an

Table 1. Agribusiness companies that are fully or partially state-owned.

Country	Company	Year established
Oman	Oman Food Investment Holding Company	2012
Qatar	Hassad	2008
UAE	Al Dahra	1995
UAE	Jenaan	
Saudi Arabia	Saudi Agriculture and Livestock Investment Company (SALIC)	2009
Saudi Arabia	National Agriculture Development (NADEC)	1981
Saudi Arabia	Al Marai	1977
Saudi Arabia	Savola	1979

instantiation of the shift toward the corporate food system in the Gulf states, a manifestation of the global trend of the increasing power of the market and the privatization of agriculture and food (Henderson, 2021). However in the Gulf states, the corporate system has some particular features; the relationship between the state and the private sector is close. In many cases, the government was a direct investor in some of these companies and Table 1 reveals the details of some of these companies. This relationship with the state is also evident in the manner that many of these companies are directly owned by members of the ruling families.⁴ With this considered, differentiating between state and capital is difficult, but as will be shown in the next section, this allows the food security complex to deploy narratives of security and profit, depending on the context.

This period was also characterized by the growth of institutions that were tasked with managing this problem, and Table 2 details some of these bodies. These institutions were further evidence of the growth of the food security complex, but they were also illustrative of the different objectives that coalesce around this policy problem.⁵ This was particularly apparent in the UAE, which has established four offices that focus on food security since 2010, including a dedicated ministry in 2017. Qatar established the Global Dryland Alliance in 2017, which had an international agenda and enlisted 11 partner countries including Morocco. In this case, the institution provided a means to use issues such as food security to build bilateral relations.

Food security discourse

The complex of government institutions and private companies produces food security as a problem. It is asserted as a threat that must be administered with a range of solutions. This is manifested in a discourse expressed through publications, interviews, conferences, government plans,

Table 2. Government institutions directly tasked with food security.

Country	Institution	Year established
Saudi Arabia	Grain Silos and Flour Mills Organization	1972
Saudi Arabia	The King Abdullah Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad	2009
Qatar	Qatar National Food Security Programme	2008
Qatar (hosted in Doha with an international remit)	Global Dryland Alliance	2017
UAE	Abu Dhabi Food Control Authority	2005
UAE	Food Security Centre	2010
UAE	Food Security Ministry	2017
UAE	Emirates Council for Food Security	2020
UAE (Dubai)	The Food Security Dashboard of Dubai	2020

advert, and promotional materials of institutions and companies. This narrative is ambiguous and can utilize different semblances such as security, profit, altruism, and sustainability, which are used to justify and explain certain policies.

The production of this problem can also be observed in the volume of policy documents. In the UAE, 16 reports (extensive documents of more than 30 pages) on food security have been published in UAE government institutions or think tanks in English and Arabic over the last decade. In Saudi Arabia, two reports have been published and two in Qatar. In some cases, these articles were published in Western institutions with Gulf funding.⁶ Another example of the knowledge power of the food security complex is the formulation of plans and strategies based on metrics and targets. In Qatar and the UAE, these strategies have specific time frames with published objectives and features. The UAE government states that it is aiming to hold the top place in the Economist Intelligence Unit's 'Global Food Security Index' by 2051 and be among the top 10 countries by 2021 (UAE, 2021). In terms of events, the UAE will host 16 conferences on food security over the next 2 years (2021–2023), and Saudi Arabia will hold 3 in the same period (Conference Index, 2021).

The discourse of food security is reflected in coverage in the English and Arabic press in the region. A search on Factiva reveals that over the last decade, more than 7960 articles have been written on food security in the GCC states, (see Table 3 for more details).⁷ This surpasses other countries in the region who share similar environmental and social characteristics; the same search of media in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Israel revealed a total of 1538 articles. This is partly a reflection of the high number of publications in the Gulf states relative to other countries, and GCC media is well resourced. But it is an indication of the prominence of food security as a policy problem in the region, particularly compared to the number of articles published by some Western countries with larger populations and more diverse media sectors.⁸

Having established that this complex embodies a discourse, what is it and what objectives does it serve? One striking feature is the manner that food security policies are framed as 'technical adjustments'. Land purchases, contracts, supply chains, and logistics are portrayed as apparatus; tools that can break down environmental and fiscal boundaries. By doing so, limits do not impel a discussion of systemic questions of inequality, infinite economic growth, and broken ecological relations. Such questions are pushed aside as this techno power continually overcomes parameters of geography, politics, and environment. The power of the free market facilitates these adjustments, by creating access to a global market; governmentality has led to a process of deterritorialization as food security is achieved by the international market, but reterritorialization in the form of land enclosures.

The power of the global market is embodied in the discursive emphasis given to trade and logistics, in which there has been considerable investment (Ziadah, 2017, 2018). This narrative portrays images of a limitless market that would allow infinite growth, an idea that was well expressed by Fahad Al Attiyah, the chairman of the Qatar National Food Programme:

Table 3. Food security discourse in GCC print media.

Country	Number of articles 2011–2021
Kuwait	556
Saudi Arabia	640
Bahrain	853
Oman	1004
Qatar	2123
UAE	2784
Total	7960

We live in a globalized world, and trade is one of the backbones of the global economic system ... Our hope is to make Qatar a trading hub for food commodities and a Rotterdam of this region in the future, enabling food trade to come through Qatar and arrive at other markets surrounding us. Qatar only has a population of about two million people, and we do not have the economies of scale to influence international trade. However, the plan proposes that we use our ports to create that scale through transit trade. Once again, the idea is to utilize the new port that is currently being developed to make Qatar a regional, if not a global, food-trading hub. (Al Attiya, 2014)

Land grabs are an objective of the discursive power of the food security complex. It is not coincidental that the UAE, the state with an extensive array of food security institutions is the state that is the largest purchaser of foreign agricultural land.⁹ The role of these bodies is to manage the sensitivity of land acquisitions. There is a need to be seen as a benign actor, particularly given that the land investments of the Gulf countries draw disproportionate controversy (Cochrane & Amery, 2017). The previous chairman of Hassad in Qatar stated that the company seeks to promote the win-win nature of agricultural investments and is concerned about potential reverberations of an 'intimidating' image (Wikileaks, 2009). As a result, he wanted to be seen to do 'the right thing all the way' (ibid.). Food security is a frame used to soothe vexation, and land investments are often advertised as beneficial for both the host and the investor. UAE's Al-Dahra referred to the aim of its land acquisitions in Egypt by saying: 'We consider ourselves to be strategic partners for the Egyptian government in terms of food security' (El Dahan and Fick, 2014). Land grabs are portrayed as a public good, a virtue, a 'moral sanction' (Nally, 2015, p. 340); interviews and promotional materials express pride in turning the desert green and fertile (Al Dahra, 2017; Amtaar, 2015). A film about Saudi Arabia's Savola project in Egypt was preceded with a verse from the Quran: 'This is dead earth: We give life to it, and bring forth from it grain, so they eat of it' (Savola AUCR 2015).

However, this altruistic face is contradicted by an alternative narrative that stresses efficiency and market discipline. For example, in a promotional film regarding its operations in Sudan, UAE's Jenaan stated that 'first and foremost, the men of Amtaar run a business, a very productive one' (Jenaan Investment, 2019). This emphasis on economic logic stresses a commitment to the market. By doing so it allows companies to counter accusations of mercantilism. Al Hassad in Qatar publicly announces its profit and loss, despite its state-owned status. By doing so the company presents itself as a commercial enterprise active in the international market, rather than a state-owned entity solely concerned with the sovereign interests of Qatar. This assuages fears over the company's external investments and provides assurance it would not circumvent local markets in the event of a crisis, particularly in Australia where most of its investments are concentrated (Sippel, 2015).

Technology is a facilitator of adjustments and it is a ubiquitous feature of this discourse. Innovations are portrayed as a means to rationalize and improve the efficiency of agriculture, they are framed as a means to overcome ecological limits and manage the biosphere. According to Mariam Almheiri, the UAE Minister of State for Food and Water Security: 'The private sector plays a vital role in the transition towards more sustainable food systems. Private sector organizations have entrepreneurial traits that drive innovation. They possess the qualities necessary to disrupt existing non-sustainable agricultural systems'. The use of innovations is also apparent in land grabs, and the science and capital of the Gulf's agribusiness companies are depicted as bringing order and control to their farms in places such as Egypt and Sudan. Promotional videos show the use of satellite technology, GPS-guided machinery and other forms of automation (Aljunaibi, 2018). According to the CEO of one UK agritech company that had received investment from Saudi Arabia's SALIC: 'Some

people might call it a ‘land grab’, but we’re expanding into geographies where there are millions of hectares of farmland that have not yet been analysed like this. It’s still very much a frontier market’, he said (Kane, 2020).

This discursive presence is particularly important given the looming spectre of climate change. Technology and ‘climate smart’ agriculture are frequently framed as solutions to the planetary limit breached by greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ This is further evidence of the importance of the food security complex and its role in ensuring environmental realities can be kept at bay for the sake of political exigencies, at least for the time being. In this sense, food security intersects with a broader objective in the Gulf states, one that places an emphasis on technology as a means to administer the oncoming crisis. Carbon extraction and renewable energy are two examples of other ‘adjustments’ that will be mobilized to manage climate; solutions that will serve both the security needs of the state, and the profitability of the economy.¹¹ This constitutes the project to ‘offer a status quo utopia, creating technological innovations with the goal of preserving the present during a time of ecological destruction’ (Günel, 2019, p. 13).

Conclusion

This article has contributed to the literature on food security in the Gulf states by focusing on the knowledge power that accompanies the practice of this policy. It has been proposed that food security is a form of governmentality that balances logics of security and economy. This is manifest in the creation of the food security complex, which is a nexus of government institutions and private sector companies with close links to the state. This complex embodies the discourse of food security, a feature evident in the policy documents, conferences, plans, and media articles that have been evidenced here. By illustrating this discourse, this article has uncovered the politics of the formulation of food security policies in the GCC. More than just a technocratic concern with supply and demand, food security also produces power and facilitates agendas. This intersects with a wider historical relationship between the environment and political power in the region (Jones, 2010; Joseph, 2018; Günel, 2019). On a broader level, the illustration of governmentality in the Gulf strips away the exceptionalism that sometimes pervades studies of politics in the region. It shows these states have also come to use the market and private sector to resolve state concerns.

The analysis of this discourse has significance for the study of food across the MENA region. Food security is a dominant lens in Anglophone scholarship on the region’s food and agriculture sector. This creates a tendency to assume that different segments of the Arab region suffer from the same form of food insecurity, despite the enormous economic inequalities that exist within this region.¹² Another manifestation of this is the focus on production, with little emphasis on distribution and the social relations of production. This influence on knowledge production is part of the reason that food and agriculture in the Gulf, and to a lesser extent the wider Arab world, has largely been omitted from critical agrarian work (Ajl, 2020). Food security discourse has permeated the way in which knowledge of the region’s agrarian sector is produced and understood.

Another feature of the food security discourse is that it is embodied by a contradiction between abundance and scarcity. The economic component assumes sufficient food for infinite growth, but the security facet generates anxiety about sufficiency. However, the two sides depend on each other; security concerns justify and legitimize the actions that create food for profit and growth. This discourse of scarcity and abundance is a part of the strategic control of resources across the Global South. According to Khalili, ‘production and attenuation of scarcity is as

much a part of establishing the parameters of capitalization in Asia and Africa,' (2018, p. 6). Most of the research on commodity flows in the Gulf has focused on oil, but food is also a significant form of circulation.

The food security complex and its political significance will become more explicit in the future. Climate change and its deleterious effect on agricultural yields will likely lead to rising food prices and weather events that will cause disruption to international markets (World Bank Group, 2020). Geopolitical shocks are also in this sense, the security dimension of food supply may become more exigent, an objective that will place greater emphasis on the discursive. Climate is a reality that can only be ignored for so long but capital and adherence to the political ecological status quo suggests that it will be some time before the Gulf's leadership needs to come to terms with environmental actualities. This is in contrast to poorer neighbouring countries in which food insecurity will be part of a higher, more inequitable price for a warming world.

Notes

1. Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, 2007; Bailey & Willoughby, 2013; Bazza, 2005; Efron et al., 2018; Fischbach, 2018; State of Qatar, 2013.
2. Babar & Mirgani, 2014; Cochrane & Amery, 2017; Elmi, 2017; Fiaz et al., 2018; Harrigan, 2014; Hopma, 2015; Kotagama et al, 2009; Pirani & Arafat, 2016; Lippman, 2010; Sippel, 2015; Spiess, 2012; Woertz 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2020.
3. Hanieh, 2013; Hanieh, 2018; Henderson, 2020; 2021; Koch, 2020; Monroe, 2020; Keulertz and Woertz, 2015; Woertz, 2020.
4. Savola, Al Marai have both included members of the Al Saud as major shareholders. In the UAE, Al Dahra is owned by a member of the Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi's ruling family.
5. In 2009, Saudi Arabia encouraged this policy with the launch of a \$800 million fund entitled 'The King Abdullah Initiative for Saudi Agricultural Investment Abroad', which intended to subsidize the private sector's investment into agricultural land (Lippman, 2010). This institution has received little public mention since the passing of King Abdullah in 2015, suggesting that its function was a vehicle of personal prestige specific to the rule of Abdullah, rather than a broader institutional initiative that could serve his predecessor King Salman.
6. For example in 2013, Chatham House, a think tank on international affairs in the UK published a report entitled 'Edible Oil: Food Security in the Gulf', which was funded by the government of Abu Dhabi. In Qatar, another example of sponsored research was the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2010 report called 'The GCC in 2020: Resources for the future' that included a chapter on food security (EIU, 2010). The report was funded by a Qatar Financial Centre Authority, a government institution.
7. The search was done on all media outlets listed on Factiva with all languages available, including English and Arabic. Media outlets included websites, newspapers, magazines and government news agencies.
8. The US media has written 14,368 articles on food security in the US over the last decade.
9. According to research conducted by Cochrane and Amery (2017), the UAE was the largest purchaser of agricultural land between 2000 and 2015.
10. This was one of the strategies that was referred to in a joint statement by UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and other Arab states (Arab News, 2021).
11. Also see this statement.
12. Access to food in the GCC states stands in contrast to Yemen, which is subjected to a state of famine partly created by the Saudi and UAE led war, or to Egypt where 30% of children in rural areas suffer from stunting as a result of food insecurity (WFP, 2013).

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