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Contentious Politics of Scale: The Global Food Price Crisis and Local Protest in Burkina Faso

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ABSTRACT *Global crises such as the financial crisis, the energy crisis and the food crisis have, without doubt, social, political and ecological repercussions on the local scale. This article explores the mechanisms that mediate global crises into local conflicts. Based on empirical insights, it aims to contribute to the study of how global structures and processes relate to local conflicts and protest. The study analyses conflicts over the high cost of living in Burkina Faso, where intense protests related to the global food crises have occurred. Scale and framing are used as the central analytical concepts. The location of a problem (such as high consumer food prices) on a particular scale (local, national or global) is a politically contested issue. Referring to the conceptual differentiation between 'scales of regulation' and 'scales of meaning', the article argues that scalar ascriptions and discourses as such are already integral parts of political conflicts and protest.*

KEY WORDS: Food riots, food crisis, social movements, scale, Burkina Faso, Western Africa

This article investigates the relationship between global crises and local conflict, using the food price crisis of 2007–2008 and related contention concerning the high cost of living as an example. In dozens of cities worldwide, particularly in Africa, large numbers of people protested against price increases of 50% or more for cereals, cooking oil and other staple goods. Though the food price crisis hit most African states similarly, contention occurred in many – but far from all – places affected. Where protests did take place, they differed in form and size. I explore the mechanisms that transform global crises into local collective action using a case study of the protests against the high cost of living in Burkina Faso. This West African country has been one place that has witnessed particularly intense and persistent protests since the 2007–2008 food price increases.

I start from an understanding of the global and the local as constitutively related to one another (Massey, 2005; Sassen, 2008). A spatial theory perspective that views the global and the local as inseparably intertwined harmonises well with relational approaches in contentious politics research that aim to explain collective contentious action as a process *sui generis* rather than develop causal models focusing on structural conditions and macro trends (Auyero, 2003; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). The principal question,

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therefore, is not *whether* global crises result in contentious political action, but rather *how* global events and processes are related to collective social action on the local scale.

Based on the empirical case study, this article hopes to contribute to research on ‘glocal’ conflicts, that is the ways in which global structures and processes relate to local collective action (e.g. Auyero, 2001, 2003; Walton & Seddon, 1994). Two analytical concepts provide a useful foundation: scale and framing. The article intervenes in the debate on scale in the study of contentious politics by suggesting that global–local relations are not restricted to scale-jumping and re-scaling by social movements and other oppositional actors (e.g. Haarstad & Fløysand, 2007; Masson, 2006; Tarrow, 2005). Drawing on Towers’ (2000) conceptual differentiation between ‘scales of regulation’ and ‘scales of meaning’, I argue that scalar ascriptions and discourses *as such* are already integral parts of political conflicts and protest. This applies even when conflicts are not specifically characterised by shifts between different scales of political power and institutional arrangements.

The article is structured as follows. I start by outlining the analytical perspective on which this study is based, in particular the concepts of scale and framing. After that, I present the 2008 food riots and their macro-structural context. This leads into a case study of the protests in Burkina Faso, organised into three parts. First, the study outlines the conflict that began with the February 2008 food riots, focusing on the actors involved and the social milieu in which they are grounded. Next I examine the protests’ central frame, ‘the high cost of living’ (*la vie chère*). This frame essentially encompasses three causal analyses, reflecting what are currently the most influential social movements in Burkina Faso: trade unions, human rights organisations and the student movement. Not only are these movements institutionally allied within the *Coalition nationale de lutte contre la vie chère, la corruption, la fraude, l’impunité et pour les libertés* (Coalition against the High Cost of Living, Corruption, Fraud, Impunity and for Freedoms, CCVC), but their core demands are also successfully linked under one common frame: wage increase, enhancement of public funding for secondary and academic education, reinforcement of ‘good governance’ and fighting corruption. Following the introduction of this central frame, I analyse the scalar framing within the actors’ arguments. Locating the causes of social problems and the responsibility and capacity to resolve them on different scales (local, national and global) is an issue contested among the conflict actors and part of their strategic framing in the mobilisation of protest. On the part of the protest actors, there are clear strategic and pragmatic reasons to locate responsibility for the high cost of living on the national scale. I conclude that scalar framings are crucial to the mobilisation of political protest, and that these mobilisation discourses are an important mechanism to translate global crises into local conflicts. Protest should not be understood as the local effect of a global cause but is rather itself part of the construction of interlinked scales.

Scale and Framing in Contentious Politics

Expanding on work by Smith (1984) and Taylor (1982), among others, radical geographers challenge the traditional tendency to take the nation-state for granted as a central unit of analysis, upon which analytical scales are defined as located either below it (sub-national) or above it (international). The radical perspective aims to overcome the hierarchically connoted dualism that locates causal factors on the global scale and social agency on the local one (Massey, 2005). It thus fundamentally questions equating ‘the local’ with the

everyday and locality while imagining ‘the global’ as an abstract space in opposition to it (Escobar, 2001, p. 155). With respect to social movements, this denies that power is located in an abstract, untouchable space, and that resistance is limited to concrete places ‘on the ground’. Global power structures are rather produced, reproduced, experienced and contested in everyday local life, while activism operates in multiple arenas and networks as well (Cumbers & Routledge, 2004; Miller, 1997; Routledge, 2003; Zeilig & Ansell, 2008). Therefore, neither power nor resistance should be located in definite, bounded spaces. Analysing student activism in Senegal and Zimbabwe, Zeilig and Ansell (2008) show that ‘political and economic conditions that [...] shape students’ lives and interests are products of decisions made in diverse arenas’ (p. 34).

It is thus misleading to imagine scales (global, national, local) as hierarchical and discrete bounded levels. Consequently, Marston, Jones, & Woodward (2005) suggest abandoning the concept of scale in favour of a ‘flat ontology’. This argument is plausible for debates in human geography; nevertheless it is contested within the discipline, too (Leitner & Miller, 2007). Particularly for social movement studies, scale turns out indeed to be a fruitful analytical concept (Hoefle, 2006; Masson, 2006; Zeilig & Ansell, 2008) – as long as scales are assumed to be social constructions, produced and productive at the same time (Delaney & Leitner, 1997). Social movements do not jump between or shift scales that are already given. Rather, through their discourses and activities, protesters and their adversaries produce, reproduce and contest scales.

Towers (2000) provides a helpful distinction to analyse these processes of scale construction by actors in contentious politics: he differentiates conceptually between ‘scales of regulation’ and ‘scales of meaning’ (p. 26). While the former is the institutional scale of political regulation (municipality, nation state, European Union and so on), the latter refers to a product of social interpretation. Both concepts focus on how scales are socially constructed, negotiated and changed, thus emphasising the actors’ scalar practices rather than ‘scale itself’ (Neumann, 2009, p. 399). As has been pointed out in the controversy over Marston et al.’s (2005) ‘human geography without scale’, the question is generally not ‘whether scale “exists”’ (Hoefle 2006, p. 238). Most politics-of-scale research inspired by the political economy focuses on political struggles over the scalar arrangements themselves (the scales of regulation), and how actors try to shift political power and competence to different scales. However, since my aim is to understand the mobilisation of protest, I focus on scalar interpretations (the scales of meaning) and their relevance in mobilisation discourses.

Discursively locating a social problem, its causes and possible solutions on a certain scale of action and decision is itself a part of contentious politics – and thus inextricable from the course and content of the respective political conflict (Delaney & Leitner, 1997; Towers, 2000): ‘The scale of struggle and the struggle over scale are two sides of the same coin’ (Smith, 1992, p. 74; cf. Miller, 2000, p. 18; Swyngedouw, 2004, p. 134). This being said, scale is a useful concept for analysing social movement mobilisation. Actors in contentious politics attempt to shift scalar notions in a way that serves their aims, forms and means of mobilisation. Scalar discourses and practices are central, strategic elements in political contention and mobilisation.

To analyse global–local relations in contentious politics, the concepts of scale and framing harmonise well since scale is itself a way of framing political relations and processes (Delaney & Leitner, 1997, pp. 94, 95). Framing as a concept in social movement studies refers to how actors in contentious politics present a specific problem through their

discourses and practices and derive certain causes, solutions and means of action from it, which are then used for mobilisation (Snow & Benford, 1992, 2000). Discursive frames construct a link between structural conditions and the mobilisation of protest: they provide an explanation for why successful mobilisation sometimes but not always occurs, even when conditions are similar (Snow & Benford, 1992, pp. 143, 144). Frames are a means of producing collective identities and legitimating collective action. In doing so, they inevitably require an implicit or explicit reference to spatiality. Scalar narratives and practices construct a link from collective identities to the spatial conditions of daily life; they identify who should be held responsible for a social problem and to whom the protest should be addressed (Martin & Miller, 2003). In the case study on the struggle over the high cost of living in Burkina Faso, I show that allocating the causes of social phenomena to different scales is both the subject and a product of political struggle, and that scalar narratives and practices are crucial for framing in contentious politics.

The 2008 Food Crisis

The food price index of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations increased by one and a half times from February 2007 to February 2008.¹ Particularly in poor countries that are net importers of cereals, prices on the local markets rose rapidly in early 2008 (Bello, 2009; Mitchell, 2008; von Braun, 2008). Prices temporarily decreased in 2009 but rose again in 2011 and have since stabilised at a high level.² The causes are manifold: high oil prices, the expansion of biofuel production (which, of course, is closely linked to oil prices), poor harvests due to extreme weather, decreasing stocks, changing demand patterns (in particular, increasing meat consumption in growing economies such as China) and speculation (FAO, 2008, pp. 3–6; Holt-Giménez, 2008; Oxfam International, 2008; Stage, Stage, & McGranahan, 2009, p. 33).

In early 2008, more than 20 cities worldwide witnessed food riots, most of them in Africa.³ People gathered in the streets and markets and marched to symbolic public or private places, sometimes plundering shops or setting fire to buildings or barricades. In most cases, riots, demonstrations and strikes focused not only on the high cost of living but also on social inequality and political repression – and on ruling parties and presidents, who had often been in power for many years or even decades (Amin, 2012; Bush, 2010; Harsch, 2008; O'Brien, 2012; Patel & McMichael, 2009).

Global crises do not have the same effects in all places and at all points in time. Thus, the rise in food prices did not lead to food riots everywhere that it impacted local markets. In this respect, quantitative studies point to macro-structural and institutional factors such as the poverty level, urbanisation and regime type, arguing that these correlate to the likelihood of riots occurring (Arezki & Brückner, 2011; Berazneva & Lee, 2013; Hendrix, Haggard, & Magaloni, 2009). Moreover, governments reacted in different ways and at different speeds, and some cushioned the price crisis better than others (FAO, 2008; von Grebmer et al., 2008). Other state and non-state actors, social movements among them, also played a central mediating role. Authoritarian regimes generally witness political protest less frequently than hybrid and liberal ones (Hendrix et al., 2009), as many people, fearing repression, refrain from open political protest. Hence, protest becomes more probable when strong opposition movements exist and can mobilise on the occasion of price increases (Amin, 2012; Berazneva & Lee, 2013). In a content analysis of news reports, Sneyd, Legwegoh, & Fraser (2013) reveal that unlike international media, local

African sources report multiple factors explaining the food riots and emphasise the ability to mobilise as a core factor. Food riots are by no way a new phenomenon, nor do they occur only in the Global South. Historical studies show that food crises have played a central role in social and political turmoil in Europe as well (Bohstedt, 2010; C. Tilly, 2008; L. Tilly, 1971; Thompson 1971). O'Brien (2012) emphasises that the recent food riots have similar origins to their historical counterparts. In his ground-breaking work on the 'Moral Economy', Thompson (1971) argued that focusing on riots as punctual events runs the risk of obscuring the broader political context of these protests. This holds true for the recent food riots as well.

Without a doubt, macro-structural conditions significantly impact the way and the intensity with which world market crises affect national economies. But whether and how protests occur depends on mediating processes on the national and local scales. Thus, the protests against high food prices cannot simply be explained as the local effect of a global cause: 'Food riots are [rather] generated at the intersection of local grievances and national or even international forces of economy and politics', as Walton and Seddon (1994, p. 33) put it. In the local field of contention, global influences are refracted through national and local institutions, social structures, actor configurations and the specific experiences of the social actors (Auyero, 2001). The following section will analyse the example of protests against high food prices in Burkina Faso in order to illuminate how the protest actors' discursive framing mediates the relationship between global crises, national politics and local struggles.

Methodology

Field research for the case study was conducted during two stays in Burkina Faso, from October to December 2011 and in August and September 2012. Primary research methods included 35 interviews with a total of 43 persons, as well as four focus group discussions (FGDs). Interview partners were current activists from youth organisations (nine), trade unions (eight), the student movement (university and high school students, eight altogether), human rights organisations (four), women's organisations (two), and merchant (two) and consumer (one) organisations. In addition, I interviewed seven representatives from state authorities (national ministries, province authorities, mayor), one journalist and one opposition party politician, who were both important actors in the protests. Twenty-one interviews took place in Ouagadougou, eight in Banfora, three in Bobo-Dioulasso and three in Koudougou. All four places witnessed intense protest. Interviewees were predominantly male, reflecting the fact that men are largely overrepresented among both protesters and authority representatives. Participants in FGDs were trade union members in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso and local market women in Banfora and Ouagadougou. Interviewees were selected to include almost all member organisations of the alliance that organised the protests, as well as merchants and students, who played a key role in the protests. State representatives were selected from different institutions and political scales (local, regional, national).

The interviews focused on the emergence of the 2008 food riots and subsequent protests, the various forms of protest and strategies of mobilisation, and the actors' assessments of the price crisis and its impact on Burkina Faso. Interviews were semi-structured. Key themes included: what interviewees identified as the causes of the price increase; how the protests began and how the food riots occurred; who participated in the

riots and the subsequent protests; what protesters claimed; how the government reacted; and to what extent the situation has improved since 2008.

Secondary sources included: press reports; documents from international organisations, national ministries, the parliament and NGOs; and leaflets and journals from trade unions and human rights, student and youth organisations. Secondary sources provide important but insufficient information insofar as written documents are available only from national state authorities and large protest organisations. In order to avoid a bias in favour of these actors' framings, I considered interviews to be an indispensable source. Furthermore, subjective perspectives of individual protesters could only be reconstructed through statements from the subjects themselves.

Protests against the High Cost of Living in Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, from January to February 2008, food prices increased by 30% for meat, 44% for corn and 50% for cooking oil, for example (Mission Conjointe Gouvernement, Agences du SNU, & Save The Children UK, 2008, p. 5). The rapid rise within only one month resulted from the world market crisis. That the crisis struck Burkina Faso and other African states so hard was rooted in long-term structural causes, in particular the tendency to focus on commercial agricultural production oriented towards the world market instead of emphasising local food security. Going back to colonial agricultural policies, this was further enhanced from the 1970s onward in the context of the debt crisis, structural adjustment and world trade liberalisation (Amin, 1973; McMichael, 2009). A dependence on seed and fertilizer imports have contributed to a constellation in which the world market crises are strongly reflected on the local markets in the Global South. In Burkina Faso, structural adjustment programmes were implemented starting in the early 1990s. Comprehensive cuts in public spending and privatisation of formerly state-owned firms resulted in increasing unemployment and decreasing wage levels (EI, 2009). In addition, privatisation in the education and health sectors led to increased costs of living. In January 1994, under pressure from the IMF, the West African Communauté Française Africaine franc was devaluated, which weakened purchasing power further.

In late February 2008, food riots occurred in several cities in Burkina Faso. Public buildings, shops and petrol stations were damaged. Road blockades were erected and set on fire. Numerous people were hurt and hundreds arrested.⁴ In Bobo-Dioulasso and Ouahigouya, shopkeepers at the local markets protested against the implementation of a communal development tax (*taxe de développement communal* [TDC]). The planned duty on mopeds, motorcycles, cars and trucks had been approved several years earlier, but it would now come into force at a point when prices for consumer staples were rising enormously.⁵

On the day of the Ouagadougou food riots, trade unions assembled and adopted a declaration, rhetorically condemning the damage caused by the riots but outlining that the protests expressed the population's legitimate anger over the high cost of living. They called for other civil society actors to participate in an assembly on 6 March and a central demonstration in Ouagadougou on 15 March. On 12 March, all big trade unions, consumer and professional associations, human rights organisations and the student and youth movements entered into an alliance: the *Coalition nationale de lutte contre la vie chère, la corruption, la fraude, l'impunité et pour les libertés* (CCVC, 2008a). The coalition initiated a countrywide general strike on 8–9 April and 13–15 April 2008. Furthermore,

several mass rallies in Ouagadougou were organised, for example on 15 May 2008, 8 April 2011 and 26 May 2012.⁶ Led by the trade unions, the CCVC is the main force in the current mobilisation against the high cost of living in Burkina Faso. The trade unions were able to take up these demands promptly after the food riots because the price issue had already been on their agenda for some years. Just a week before the riots, the trade union federation *Confédération générale des travailleurs du Burkina* (CGT-B) published a declaration calling for joint initiatives on the cost of living with the ‘other organisations (of students, the consumers and human rights movements, women, the youth ...)’ (CGT-B, 2008).

The CCVC was able to successfully mobilise protest on short notice because it is institutionally and personally based on the *Collectif d’organisations démocratiques de masse et de partis politiques* (Collective of the Democratic Mass Organisations and Political Parties, or ‘Collectif’). The ‘Collectif’ was formed in early 1999 by trade unions, human rights and student organisations, opposition parties, and women and lawyers’ groups following the death of journalist Norbert Zongo, who was killed in December 1998 after criticising the government and the family of President Blaise Compaoré (Frère, 2010; Harsch, 2009; Hilgers, 2010). In contrast to the ‘Collectif’, which is led by the *Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l’homme et des peuples* (MBDHP, Burkinabe movement for human rights) and continues to exist and has a certain personnel overlap with the CCVC, the CCVC is led by the trade unions.⁷

This is not to say that all civil society groups and social movements are united within the CCVC and its struggles. Nor are they homogeneous and void of internal conflicts and contradictions. Important civil society organisations such as the *Ligue des Consommateurs du Burkina* (Burkinabe Consumers’ League), which was among the founding members of the CCVC, share the CCVC’s demands but collaborate with state institutions in implementing the government’s measures against high prices (e.g. by managing shops for subsidised foodstuffs).⁸ The role of several social movement leaders has long been controversial within the movements, too. Internal controversy arose, for instance, when some leaders sent their children abroad to continue their studies when the University of Ouagadougou was closed because of the student struggles in 2000 (Hagberg, 2002, pp. 229, 230).

From 2008 onward, the Burkinabe government adopted various measures such as temporary price fixing, the suspension of import duties and VAT on staple goods and the establishment of shops for subsidised foodstuffs (called ‘*boutiques témoins*’; *Africa Research Bulletin*, 2008; AN, 2008; Chouli, 2012; Zahonogo, Bitibale, & Kabre, 2011). In 2011, the government suspended the communal development tax and reduced wage taxes while increasing salaries in the public sector (*L’Observateur Paalga*, 28 April 2012). The CCVC organisations declared both to be the result of its struggle⁹; however, the changes did not affect the entire population evenly. Protests, in Burkina Faso and elsewhere, take place first and foremost in the cities. In Burkina Faso and other West African states, the great majority of the activists involved in the protest movements are salary earners and high school and university students whose ties to the rural subsistence farmers are often weak (Hagberg, 2002, p. 227). Increasing food prices hit poor people in rural areas to a similar extent as in the cities, but it is mostly the urban middle class that participates in and benefits from the ‘success’ of the protests against the price increase. In Burkina Faso, more than 70% of the population live in rural areas¹⁰ and seldom have a

salary or own a moped or car, meaning that the TDC and wage tax decreases do not affect them to nearly the same degree (Chouli, 2012, pp. 140–142).

Framing ‘the High Cost of Living’

The discursive frame of ‘the high cost of living’ plays a decisive role in the continuity and the extent of the current mobilisation of protest in Burkina Faso. This framing succeeds in linking more or less all of the relevant issues and actors within Burkina Faso’s social movements. This comes through in the all-embracing name of the CCVC. The CCVC’s July 2008 declaration of demands reflects the broad range of organisations that form the alliance: it contains demands for higher salaries and wages in the public and private sectors, a ‘significant and effective price control’ for staple foods and demands for cost-free basic education, freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly (CCVC, 2008d). Calls for central protest actions are formulated in a similarly broad way: ‘No to the high cost of living, to corruption and impunity! No to the liquidation of weak industries in the state of Faso!’ – this was one of the slogans at the demonstration on 15 March 2008, for instance.

The frame refers not only to staple food prices but also to the cost of living in general. It encompasses three causal analyses that reflect the thematic fields of Burkina Faso’s most influential social movements and the fact that the protest actors refer to one another in their argumentation. First, reflecting the trade unions’ struggles, ‘the high cost of living’ is presented as a problem resulting from the steadily growing wage–price gap. Through a depiction of the problem not as rising prices alone but as the combination of inflating prices and stagnating incomes, the central demand of the protests corresponds to that of the trade unions: a significant increase in salaries and wages, aiming to strengthen purchasing power (CCVC, 2008d).¹¹ Trade unions claim that the wage increase must be larger than usual in order to compensate for the higher prices (CGT-B, 2011, p. 104).¹²

Second, in the protesters’ analysis, a central cause of ‘the high cost of living’ is the rising costs of basic social services, especially education, resulting from privatisation and structural underfunding. This argument serves to integrate high school and university students into the protests against ‘the high cost of living’; students have been a major political force in Burkina Faso since the late 1980s (Hagberg, 2002). They argue that with rising prices and stagnating or only slightly increasing incomes, families can no longer afford the school fees, books and other expenses of their children’s secondary or academic education.¹³ The student movement’s demands fit seamlessly into the frame of the current protests. The students’ struggles in Ouagadougou and the (few) other university locations in Burkina Faso have always primarily addressed the precarious economic conditions in which most Burkinabe students live (Loada, 2010; Mazzocchetti, 2010). As they see it, the recent price increase further perpetuates their difficult situation.¹⁴

Third, ‘the high cost of living’ is framed as a human rights issue. The protesters present the rising prices as an indicator rather than a cause of ‘the high cost of living’. They argue that aside from stagnating incomes and the underfunding of the health and education sectors, corruption and ‘bad governance’ are causally relevant. The governmental elite enriches itself at the expense of the population, and public funds trickle away due to corruption.¹⁵ In one of the CCVC’s founding documents, the member organisations state: ‘The fundamental causes of this situation [the high cost of living] [are] the mismanagement of the human, material and financial resources of the country, characterised by corruption, fraud, impunity for

political and economic crimes' (CCVC, 2008b, p. 1). Through this argument, human rights organisations tie in to the protests, particularly the influential MBDHP.

Contentious Politics of Scale: Locating Causes and Responsibilities

Through their discourses and practice, individual and collective actors locate political, social and economic phenomena on spatial scales. This is closely linked to how they frame social grievances and their causes, responsibilities and possible solutions. By constructing the frame of 'the high cost of living', the protest actors in Burkina Faso ascribe accountability for the high prices and responsibility for solving the problem to the national government. For pragmatic and strategic reasons, this is important for successful mobilisation. In particular, the scalar framing is successful in rallying trade unions, human rights organisations and student and youth movements into the protests, both organisationally and with regard to content.

The protest organisations and the government in Burkina Faso struggle over the prerogative of interpretation with regard to locating the problem of high prices – its causes, responsibilities and possible solutions – on a particular scale (global or national). In their arguments, both attempt to place the problem in the scalar frame that best fits their aims. The Burkinabe government refers primarily to global crises – the financial crisis, high prices on the world market and climate change (AN, 2008, p. 7; Communiqué final, 2011, p. 2; MEF, 2011, p. 3)¹⁶ – thus shifting the causes to a scale on which its own influence is limited. The Burkinabe national assembly's ad hoc commission on the high cost of living stated on 15 May 2008:

The price increase that has caused the current crisis [the food riots and the protests against the high cost of living] is the result of various factors combined: the extraordinary rise in oil prices; the worldwide increase in demand, in particular fuelled by Asia's economic growth; the current expansion of biofuel production that puts further pressure on cereal supplies; the increase in transportation costs; the international financial crisis. (AN, 2008, p. 6, author's translation)

Mamadou Sanou, Minister of Trade at the time, emphasised that the government had 'done its best'; more would have been impossible, he declared on the anniversary of the food riots in 2009 (*Le Pays*, 20 February 2009).

The protesters do not deny the existence of the global crises but emphasise high taxes and weak purchasing power due to low salaries in the public sector and the state-owned enterprises as the main causes of the high cost of living.¹⁷ Little could be done about the high oil price, one activist argued, but the government could reduce taxes in order to influence consumer prices.¹⁸ But instead of lowering the national petrol price, for example, the government actually boosted transportation costs through the communal development tax.¹⁹ As structural causes for the increased prices of staple foods, the CCVC points to the crisis on the international financial markets and the worldwide enforcement of the neoliberal economic doctrine that privileges export orientation over food production for subsistence and local markets. Nevertheless, they argue, protests should not be addressed to international organisations and financial institutions but rather to the national government that, after all, was 'not obliged to make itself the World Bank's darling'.²⁰ Although many of the policies that negatively impact the cost of living were imposed

by international financial institutions, they were, according to the CCVC's founding declaration, ultimately 'political and economic decisions of the authorities of the Fourth Republic' (CCVC, 2008b, p. 2).²¹

Protesters and government basically agree to call for the enhancement of food security through the expansion of national food production in order to reduce import dependence. Here, too, the parliamentary commission points out the country's vulnerability to external global influences (AN, 2008, p. 7) and, as a consequence, recommends the enhancement of agricultural productivity (pp. 15–16). In contrast, the social movements' demands focus controls (CCVC, 2008c).²²

Holding the national government responsible is central to the protest actors' argumentation. Asked who should be held accountable for redressing the high prices, social movement functionaries and 'ordinary' activists alike point to the Burkinabe government. 'If someone decides to govern a country, he is the first to be responsible for food security', one of the CCVC organisations' leaders stated.²³ Directing protest at allegedly natural causes such as poor harvests resulting from drought or flooding is much more difficult than turning it towards specific persons and institutions. Not surprisingly, the social movements in Burkina Faso – in contrast to the government representatives²⁴ – seldom declare 'natural' factors such as climate variability to be decisive for high food prices.

Hence, there are reasonable strategic and pragmatic grounds for the protest actors in Burkina Faso to rhetorically locate the causes of high prices and political responsibility for controlling them on the national scale – that is, the Burkinabe government – and for the latter to cite external causes, particularly the global scale.

Conclusion

How are processes and events on the global scale (such as the food price crisis) related to conflicts and protest on the local scale? Auyero (2001) rightly emphasises:

Reasoning from megatrends (global economy) through spatial patterns (such as overurbanization) to local collective action (riots) should be done with great care since there are intra-national, intra-regional and intra-city political effects of those macro-processes. [...] We see that these riots are glocal political struggles, the (socio)logical result of the vernacular articulations of global pressures and local dynamics. (pp. 49, 50)

This analysis holds true for the current protests related to the food price crisis.

The dramatic effects of the high staple food prices on the impoverished social classes in Burkina Faso and elsewhere in the Global South are beyond doubt. This article, however, did not focus on analysing the political-economic structures and policies that caused the recent food price increase and its impact on developing countries. Instead, it aimed to contribute to research on how global crises are mediated on multiple scales and thus become relevant for local conflict and political protest. Structural conditions, as other studies have shown (Arezki & Brückner, 2011; Berazneva & Lee, 2013; Hendrix et al., 2009), have substantial facilitating or hindering effects for protest. This article moved beyond previous studies by analysing empirically how social movement organisations refer to the impact of global crises (in the present case, the food price crisis of 2007–2008) when mobilising for related protest. In doing so, I have emphasised that mobilisation needs

to frame a problem (such as the high cost of living) in specific ways, building on causal analysis, assignment of accountability and proposals for problem solving. The structural preconditions of mobilisations, both internal (social movements' resources) and external (political structures), have remained largely unaddressed. This should not imply that structural conditions are irrelevant, but rather that they are simply beyond the scope of this article.

Conceptually, the article aimed to intervene into the debate on scale and framing in contentious politics, emphasising that scalar ascriptions are of central relevance for framing in political conflicts. I have argued that food riots and subsequent protest by social movement organisations can be understood as part of the social production of nested scales, rather than as a local effect of a global cause. Scales are neither produced by external forces nor fixed into static roles. Instead, they are produced, stabilised, destabilised and reconstructed by social actors through processes of conflict and negotiation. Framing in social movement protests, as this article has demonstrated, is part of this negotiation process.

For the protest organisations in Burkina Faso, the food price crisis presented an opportunity for mobilisation. Thereby, the scalar dimension – that the occasion was a global crisis – influenced the ways in which the actors framed the issue to suit their own agendas, demonstrating the centrality of scalar framing for protest mobilisation in general. This can be concluded beyond case-specific historical conditions, actor figurations and discourses. 'Global' and 'local' refer to spatial and institutional ascriptions and meanings that are negotiated in political conflicts. Referring to the conceptual differentiation between scales of regulations and scales of meaning, and combining the analytical concepts of scale and framing, this article has demonstrated that scalar discourses *as such* are integral parts of political conflicts and mobilisation to protest.

Notes

1. FAO food price index, FAO website (accessed: 24 January 2014).
2. FAO food price index, FAO website (accessed: 24 January 2014).
3. *Africa News*, 12 August 2008, 18 July 2008, 16 December 2008, 12 February 2009, 28 May 2009, 12 June 2009 and 8 August 2009; *The Guardian*, 9 April 2008; *IRIN*, 31 March 2008; Amin, 2012; Berazneva & Lee, 2013; Harsch, 2008, p.15; Janin, 2009; Maccatory, Oumarou, & Poncelet, 2010; Schneider, 2008; Sneyd et al, 2013.
4. Amnesty International, 2009; *Ouestaf News*, 28 February 2008, http://www.ouestaf.com/Burkina-des-violences-contre-la-vie-chere-gagnent-la-capitale-Ouagadougou_a1597.html (accessed: 30 January 2014).
5. Interviews, CCVC and member organisations, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011; Ouagadougou, 2 September 2012.
6. *Fasozine*, 19 March 2011; 'La CCVC demande au gouvernement de LAT de réduire significativement le coût de la vie!', press conference/press release, 7 May 2012, CCVC/le comité d'organisation, 'Toutes et tous ensemble à la marche meeting du 26 Mai 2012 contre la vie chère' (leaflet, May 2012).
7. Furthermore, political parties are excluded from the CCVC. Representatives of the coalition justify this by stating that one lesson learnt from the 'Collectif' was that party representatives may use civil society action for individual power purposes (interviews, Ouagadougou, 16 November 2011; Koudougou, 8 December 2011).
8. Interview, Ouagadougou, 5 September 2012.
9. Interviews, CCVC member organisations, Banfora, 24 November 2011; Ouagadougou, 3 December 2011, 2 September 2012.
10. World Development Indicators, World Bank website (accessed: 28 May 2013).
11. Interviews, student movement, Ouagadougou, 16 November 2011; professional association, Ouagadougou, 19 November 2011; trade unions, Ouagadougou, 19 November 2011; and Banfora, 22 November 2011; human rights organisation, Banfora, 24 November 2011; youth organisation, Ouagadougou, 3 December 2011.

12. Interview, trade unions, Ouagadougou, 2 September 2012.
13. Interviews, trade unions, Ouagadougou, 10 November 2011; trade unions, human rights organisation and student movement, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011.
14. Interviews, student movement, Ouagadougou, 16 November 2011, and Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011.
15. Interviews, human rights organisation, Ouagadougou, 16 November 2011; shopkeepers, Banfora, 24 November 2011 and Ouagadougou, 2 December 2011; trade unions, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011.
16. Interview local government, Ouagadougou, 5 September 2012; interview trade unions, Banfora, 22 November 2011.
17. Interviews, trade unions, Ouagadougou, 11 and 19 November 2011, 2 September 2012; human rights organisations, Ouagadougou, 14 November 2011 and Banfora, 24 November 2011; women's association, Ouagadougou, 18 November 2011; professional association, Ouagadougou, 19 November 2011; shopkeeper association, Banfora, 23 November 2011; trade unions, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011; youth association, Banfora, 22 November 2012 and Ouagadougou, 3 December 2011, 31 August 2012.
18. Interview, human rights organisation, Ouagadougou, 14 November 2011.
19. Interview, trade unions, Ouagadougou, 19 November 2011.
20. Interview, student movement, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011 (author's translation); human rights organisations, Ouagadougou, 14 November 2011; trade unions, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011; high school student movement, Bobo-Dioulasso, 25 November 2011, and Koudougou, 8 December 2011.
21. The Fourth Republic refers to Burkina Faso's political system since the adoption of the constitution in 1991.
22. Interviews, trade unions, Ouagadougou, 10 and 11 November 2011, 2 September 2012; professional association, Banfora, 23 November 2011.
23. Interview, Ouagadougou, 2 September 2012 (author's translation).
24. Interview, local government, Ouagadougou, 5 September 2012; AN, 2008, p. 1; Zahonogo et al., 2011, p. 6.

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