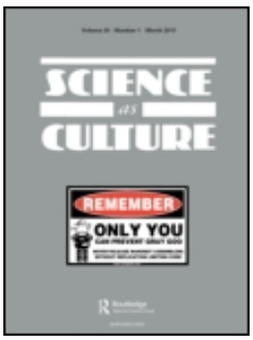

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Challenging the Hegemonic Food Discourse: The British Media Debate on Risk and Salmonella in Eggs

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ABSTRACT *The salmonella in eggs controversy in Britain in the late 1980s contributed to a partial dislocation of the hegemonic food discourse. This discourse had relied on a number of myths that are taken for granted, in particular the* myth of managerial control. *According to this myth, food risks had been successfully managed by a system of food production and a regulatory regime to ensure the safety and quality of the food. In the wake of the salmonella scandal the media debate formed part of a general politicisation of food safety where the managerial myth broke down. This resulted in a dislocation of the food discourse and a new social space opened for the existing myths to be contested and renegotiated. As a result, the media discourse played a role in either encouraging the preservation of the dominant values of the existing power structures or constituting a radical break with previous hegemonic conceptions of food production and consumption. Rethinking the concept of risk in terms of discourse analysis allows for an examination of the political origins of the arguments presented in the British media debate on salmonella. Risk is conceptualised as a signifier in the debate and a struggle takes place in the public domain in order to define and articulate the level of risk from salmonella contamination. On the one hand, the government and the farming industry maintained the manageability of the risk. Meanwhile, a critical discourse emerged questioning the scientific and regulatory hegemony within the area of food safety, the 'naturalness' of modern farming practices and the authorities' ability to manage safe food for the benefit of consumers.*

KEY WORDS: Food safety, salmonella, risk, discourse analysis, media analysis

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Introduction: Salmonella as a Political Problem

In December 1988 the Junior Minister Edwina Currie said on TV that 'most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now affected by salmonella'. This remark from a high profile and out-spoken politician resulted in strong reactions from the egg and chicken industry following a drop in chicken and egg consumption. It, arguably, also became symbolic of a media driven counter-reaction that temporarily dislocated the dominant beliefs and commonly held truths about food production and consumption in Britain. Despite several serious cases of infection in public institutions during the 1980s (*The Guardian*, 6 September 1984 and 27 March 1985), the salmonella issue did not materialise into a fully-fledged political conflict where narratives on food clashed and food poisoning was put into a wider context. In fact, the government had so far successfully maintained that the safety of British food was manageable despite outbreaks of salmonella, BSE, listeria and other incidences that could potentially challenge public trust in British food.

The latent conflicts related to food poisoning became apparent with the dislocating event brought on by Currie's remarks. The salmonella debate is illustrative of how the media coverage of food safety was part of a struggle over what it meant for food to be 'risky'. Risk, in this sense, cannot be perceived to be a strictly scientific and neutral concept describing the likelihood of being affected by danger; instead risk is actively defined and redefined by the interested actors in the British debate on how food relates to safety, health and environment. In fact, risk adopts such wide-ranging meanings in this political crisis, that the existing discourse is challenged and a new space is opened for redefinition and rethinking of the meaning of risk, food and what it means to be a consumer.

This article analyses the debate in British newspapers in the months following Currie's TV performance in order to determine how different positions are played out against each other during a political crisis in food policy. This leads to two guiding questions:

1. If modern food production processes are sustained by a number of hegemonising myths, how did the salmonella in eggs crisis contribute to the dislocation of these myths?
2. How was a definitional struggle over the meaning of risk and food played out in the media?

Question 1 will be answered through an analysis of the dislocating moments in the newspaper media discourse that followed the political scandal. The two issues given particular attention were, firstly, the economic consequences of admitting the high levels of salmonella and, secondly, the damage done to consumer trust in British food as well as trust in the regulating authorities and experts.

In answering question 2, closer attention will be paid to how articulations of risk compete in order to hegemonise the field of food safety. This will be done in an

analysis of how strong and weak risk interpretations draw on various sources, from statistical material to metaphors, in order to legitimise particular political projects.

Analytical Perspectives

The salmonella scandal as a case study allows for a tentative critique of some existing approaches to risk through an analysis of the discursive nature of food risks. Within Beck's widely quoted theory of the 'risk society' and reflexive modernisation, food safety is perceived and articulated in terms of health risks, developed as an unavoidable consequence or side-effect of the processes that constitute modern industrial society; in this case, of the industrialisation and intensification of modern agriculture (Goodman and Redclift, 1991, p. xii). This approach does not sufficiently allow for an understanding of food risks as being contingent on social circumstances and as playing a political role in defining food safety policy. In a discursive and post-structural re-evaluation of risk, drawing on the theory of hegemony as developed by Ernesto Laclau, the article argues that risk is one of the central signifiers in the food safety debate and must be theorised as such.

The written news media is particularly useful for the study of critical articulations of positions in a debate. In the media the food safety topic is framed in political terms and according to how newsworthy it is (Cook, 1998). The media is often believed to dramatise risks due to the claim that risks are 'mediagenic' and can possess a strong symbolic resonance (Anderson, 1997, p. 134; Boyne, 2003). This has led to a strain of study that insists on a social amplification of risk in the case of food scares (Kasperson *et al.*, 2003). However, the article's emphasis will not be on behavioural questions of media effects, and attempts to empirically measure these, but rather on the media message as a structured discourse (Hall, 1982, p. 61). The media discourse is thus based on representations and mediations of events and opinions where the media itself is an important actor in the process of articulating discourses on food safety.

For this reason, three different positions in the news media are chosen for the analysis. First, *The Guardian* represents the most green and critical position in the debate. *The Guardian* has, over time, paid particular attention to issues of food safety, emphasising the need for green alternatives to the industrial food regime. Second, *The Times* is chosen as an exponent for a more economic and mainstream position in the debate. Finally, *The Daily Mail* represents a popular view on risk and food that often diverges significantly from the 'elitist' positions and, interestingly, has had the most direct impact on food policies in the country. This was illustrated by the newspaper's more recent populist campaign against 'Frankenstein food'.[1]

The analysis is based on a process of open qualitative coding applied to the articles from the three newspapers from December 1988 to February 1989. While the analysis is limited to quoting newspaper articles, these do not exist

separately from other textual and non-textual sources and the articles make references to material such as transcripts from select committees, parliamentary debates, official reports and television events. The media interacts with the social world in the process of debating and constituting dominant and contesting articulations of risk by way of influencing how the world is represented, how identities are constructed and by creating particular social relations between actors (van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 1992, 1995, p. 5).

The central argument is that the food regime rested on a number of myths, most notably *the myth of managerial control*. This myth provided a particular principle of reading that the government needed to maintain in order to regain public trust in chicken and eggs. It worked to give food a particular meaning within the existing institutional setting available at the time. During a time of political crisis, where institutions and procedures providing safe food became dislocated, a new social space opened for the existing myths to be contested and renegotiated. The media discourse played a double role in encouraging the preservation of the dominant values and constituting a radical break with previous hegemonic conceptions of food production and consumption. While the media debate raised by the salmonella scandal on one level contributed to a dislocation of previous perceptions and institutionalisations of food, the hegemonic structures and myths which have organised food safety thus far proved to be relatively durable and persistent. As a result, government and industry, in the first instance, successfully displaced the contingencies and uncertainties, which were made visible by the political crisis. However, the salmonella debate contributed to a more fundamental questioning of values, goals and means in food policy, exploring how no simple relationship exists between continuation and discontinuation in the food discourse.

Conceptualising the Risk Debate

A starting point for conceptualising food safety could be the theory of reflexive modernisation. The food crisis can be seen as an example of how a public awareness develops of the unintended consequences of modernisation, understood primarily in terms of modern industrial and capitalist practices such as intensification of farming and food processing procedures. Modern risks therefore are qualitatively different from previous dangers and are imposed by institutional contradictions within the very logic of modern industrial society (Beck, 1995, 1996, p. 28; Strydom, 2002, p. 55; Beck *et al.*, 2003).

This approach has rightly paid particular attention to the breakdown of a scientific hegemony in risk interpretation. It also conceptualises reflexive modernisation as a new stage beyond modernity that changes the way social actors relate to risk. Risk becomes an organising principle in social conflict and institution building; risk awareness is increasingly built into organisational reforms and policies (Mol and Bulkeley, 2002, p. 186). This realist perspective can explain

much about food safety as a policy field. At first glance, the salmonella debate seems to confirm this increased focus on risk as an organising principle for the new social conflict.

However, according to a fair critique by Smith (2004, p. 329), the above account fails to explain how risk perceptions and assessments result from political decisions and processes. As the text data in this paper will show, the risk of salmonella poisoning is up for debate. Competing risk interpretations, and the openness of the risk concept, makes it impossible to elevate risk to an organising principle in society. As a consequence, risk needs theorising from the perspective of power/knowledge complexes. Drawing on Foucault's concept of governmentality (1974), Castel (1991) and Petersen (1997, p. 192) point out that abstract calculations of risk act as a 'political technology' with a regulating potential, for instance, in health promotion strategies. This approach allows us to understand how conceptions of risk play a role in the emergence of discursive responses to food safety.

The political dimension can be re-introduced in both critical (as in risk society) interpretations and scientific interpretations of risk because neither of these are neutral and both rely on the political agendas of the actors in the food debate. This means that neither can be dismissed, as both are active in the political reality and in the struggle over how to define and manage food safety and scientific uncertainty. Neither can any particular risk articulation be *essentially* more true than another. The point is illustrated by the way in which the risk debate is used in relation to policy-making as a way to either reinforce or contest the status of the political, economic and technological decisions (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 90). Moreover, the language of risk that is currently under development in the government and stakeholder organisations exists to govern discourses on health and food and steering these in particular political directions (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 28).

In a re-articulation of the risk concept for the purpose of this article, two points can be made. First, risk is linked to a dislocation of how food is conceived and institutionalised in a particular society (Stavrakakis, 2002). Although the incidents of food poisoning provoke a dislocation, they do so only to the extent that they are articulated as an *unmanageable* risk to public health. The post-structural approach to risk does not deny the reality of the food crises and the events and incidences that caused it—as sometimes suggested by critics of social constructivism (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 108; Torfing, 1998, pp. 84–86; 1999). When it is suggested that social phenomena are discursive, this means that they cannot be separated from the social, historical and cultural processes within which they occur (Lupton, 2006, p. 14). They may be persistent over time and devoid of political contestation. However, it is possible to trace their socio-political formation and thus to show that the phenomena are not as necessary as they may have appeared. The salmonella crisis can be interpreted in this light, where several 'truths' about the safety of food became questionable. The social implication of

making seemingly innocent choices when shopping and producing food were suddenly highlighted in a way that a 'risk society' account of food politics could not explain.

Second, risk functions as a signifier in the debate when the food discourse is filled with meaning and institutionalised accordingly. This happens through processes of political negotiation, debate and the exercise of power. In the case of risk, an openness exists as to how the concept is filled with meaning. Therefore, the risk discourse can play a role in the breakdown of a logically coherent system of signification.[2] Hegemony, on the other hand, is a process of partial fixation of meaning that takes place through: 'instituting nodal points which partially fix meaning of the social in an organized system of differences' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 135; Laclau, 2000, p. 50). The successful articulation and partial fixation of a particular meaning of risk can, therefore, have hegemonic potential if it is convincingly presented as a myth. Myth is here defined as a principle of reading in a given situation that provides new meaning to a dislocated space in which the myths previously held to be meaningful have broken down (Laclau, 1990, p. 61).

In this sense, myth gains a somewhat broader meaning than the more common usage of the word as a false belief or statement. The postmodern notion that myths work to naturalise a particular ideological project runs parallel with Barthe's use of the concept. Myths 'transform history into nature' as they distort the signification of cultural images and text, for Barthe usually in favour of bourgeois culture and ideology (Barthe, 1984). Both Laclau and Barthe see myths as linked to the ideological work of depoliticising events, texts and utterances. The myths attached to the food and risk discourses that are played out against each other in the media are competing hegemonic projects which attempt to rearticulate meaning in order to create a new social horizon of signification.

The theory of reflexive modernisation takes us some way towards a critical approach to the government and industry strategies for risk management. However, seeing risk as a signifier allows for a focus on how the concept is defined and redefined in the debate according to the political struggles that are taking place. A post-structural approach can include a political dimension in the analysis, as well as analyse the social space left open after the occurrence of a dislocating event.

Dislocating Dominant Myths in the Food Discourse

When Edwina Currie made her controversial statement, she did so on the background of a number of news stories on salmonella poisoning in hospitals, prisons, parties etc., several of which led to fatalities (*The Guardian*, 2 December 1988, 27 August 1988 and 30 November 1988). These had been seen as individual tragedies until then, but the new political dimension of the risk of salmonella poisoning was apparent in this leading article from *The Daily Mail*:

> On this evidence it looks as if Mrs Currie has managed to expose a cover-up. Even if she overegged the pudding somewhat, she did make the public aware of a menace which hits many thousands every year and is growing rather fast (*The Daily Mail*, 7 December 1988).

The authorities' failure to protect the public health helped to dislocate the existing regime on food production, management and consumption that had been dominant in post-war Britain. It had successfully hegemonised the food policy by working for consensual goals such as ensuring the supply of cheap and plentiful food through subsidised farming and increased efficiency in food production and distribution (Smith, 1990, 1991). This was possible due to the articulation of *progress* and *efficiency* as nodal points in the food discourse but it ultimately happened at the expense of food quality and environmental concern in food production.

This section analyses how this previously taken-for-granted discourse on food was challenged in the months following Currie's comment. The hegemonic status of this discourse relied on a *managerial myth* and the authorities' ability to ensure public safety was central to maintaining it. In the media, the governmental failings were framed accordingly. The most pressing concern, in the first instance, was for farmers' financial situation and how this would affect the British economy as a whole. However, the environmental and health effects of the scale of salmonella contamination were also considered in the press and in time provided the most groundbreaking critique of the government's handling of food safety in Britain. These two concerns unite in a criticism of the government but from two distinctly different positions. Thus, the salmonella scandal worked to emphasise the political differences in food policy by making the latent conflict between food consumers and producers visible.

Dislocating the Food Discourse: Economic Disaster

Pointing out the level of salmonella infection in British chicken production, expectedly, caused a strong counter-reaction from the farming community, in particular the National Farmers' Union (NFU), the British Egg Producers' Association (UKEPA) and the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC), when consumer confidence in eggs diminished. Also Conservative MPs and the Opposition actively criticised the Junior Minister and eventually the Minister for Agriculture, John MacGregor, directly contradicted her. MacGregor was also the initiator of, firstly, an advertisement campaign to make the public regain trust in eggs and, secondly, a compensation scheme for culling chickens as egg sales dropped. The media reported widely on the direct consequences of a drop in egg consumption following the erosion of trust such as the slaughtering of chickens and the loss of jobs in the farming sector (*The Daily Mail*, 5 December 1988; *The Guardian*, 15 December 1988; *The Times*, 18 December 1988). While the NFU claimed a

drop by 70% in egg sales, some more optimistic suppliers estimated a drop of between 10% and 50% (*The Guardian*, 15 December 1988). Regardless of the initial prediction, the drop seemed to be relatively short-lived, raising the question of how the farming stakeholders and the government's media responses made sense of the salmonella in eggs crisis.

One way to frame the economic crisis in the egg sector was to focus on the devastated farmer himself: 'It took them two days of constant labour to wring the necks of 10,000 hens (…) "You can only do so many for so long before your hands go numb", said 70-year-old Ted Kirkwood' (*The Guardian*, 17 December 1988). The old farmer who has to kill his birds with his own bare hands was portrayed as a victim of the thoughtlessness of a politician. Furthermore: '… they are gassing new-born chicks, so small that you could carry five or six in your hand. "The whole industry is stunned", says Andy Oatley, the egg producers' chairman-elect. "Do you want to see grown men cry? That is what it means"' (*The Times*, 18 December 1988). In order to elevate farmers' complaints about their specific demands for economic stability to a societal level, they needed to be legitimised and moved from the sphere of personal tragedy to a societal level. This was done, firstly, by highlighting the necessity of an industrialised and efficient food regime in a modern reality and, secondly, by pointing out how the crisis had consequences for the British national economy as a whole and thus ultimately for British taxpayers and consumers.

In response to the dislocating event, the processes of industrialisation were articulated as a necessary condition for egg producers. As one farmer commented: 'The fact is that to produce fresh, clean and cheap food, farmers and growers must use modern processes. And these processes, together with all the pesticides, are tightly controlled by stringent government legislation' (*The Daily Mail*, 15 December 1988). The 4p profit margin in egg production made efficiency a necessary condition for survival in a globalised and competitive economy. A reversal to older antiquated farming methods was therefore an unthinkable option that could only be attributed to naïve nostalgic thinking. Any attempt to change the modern techniques and practices can be seen as an anti-modernising reversal to inefficiency that is outside any modern reality.

In an attempt to maintain the nodal point 'progress' as a necessary component in farming, farmers may not be happy about the conditions they work under, but they have no choice in the matter. Such a claim for necessity can work to divorce the discourse from moral considerations (Pepper, 1986, p. 61) and present industrialisation as an objective condition in farming. However, this objectivity can only partially be articulated as a truth in the debate, particularly when it becomes apparent that it rests on a political and moral value judgement in food policy where 'progress' and 'efficiency' in farming are prioritised over, for instance, environmental and health concerns.

In order to challenge the criticism from the critical food discourse, defenders of the farmer and industry perspective drew on a *national economy myth*. A wider

public support for the farmers' plea was sought through the universality that lies in a strong national economy cutting across most conflict lines. A healthy national economy was in the interest of the general public, therefore, a win–win situation arose. Negotiations and partnerships between responsible private, semiprivate and public actors can lead to conflict solutions within a particular institutional and normative framework where the dominating normative aspect relates to the national economy (Bjerrefjord *et al.*, 1989, p. 23). The myth's success in hegemonising the social field can be evaluated in relation to the extent to which organisations and private industry submit to the overall national economic goals (Andersen, 1994, p. 211). In British agriculture the economic goals of increased productivity and low food prices had gained general support, primarily through the system of subsidisation of food production.

In the case of the farming crisis in 1988, the farmers and the authorities appealed to the national economy myth to justify the support scheme for farmers when the government referred to the benefit that a compensation packet would bring, not just to the farmers, but to all members of society who consume eggs. The Minister for Agriculture '... defended his moves to help the egg industry, saying that they had brought stability to the market, and that had been to the advantage of the consumer as well as the industry' (*The Times*, 20 January 1989) and 'he emphasized a number of times that his proposals to help the industry were not compensation. He was dealing with an abnormal market' (*The Times*, 17 December 1988). The Minister did not argue on the level of the troubled farmer, the media strategy primarily employed by the farming organisation, but by referring to the instability of the market. An unstable market could potentially damage the economy and a compensation scheme indicated a benefit to the whole of society rather than just forwarding the interest of a particular group. The importance of the Treasury, a central but often overlooked actor in agricultural politics, in negotiating the compensation scheme further highlights the concern for the national economy as a whole (Smith, 1993, p. 103).

In the very first instance, the dislocation of the hegemonic food discourse caused by Currie's comment took the form of an economic crisis with farmers as the primary victims of the thoughtless comment on salmonella. This particular discursive interpretation of the event represented an attempt to maintain the status quo in food policy and defend the hegemonic food discourse with reference to both the national economy and to the necessity of an industrialised approach to food production. The limits to objectivity within this myth were made visible with the dislocation of the hegemonic industrial food discourse. It relied on the authorities' ability to maintain public trust in food by ensuring its safety. Currie's statement made it difficult for the government and the farming community to convincingly argue that food safety could be managed. This created a new space for critical voices and contestations of the hegemonic food discourse, particularly in relation to the scientific basis for the level of salmonella poisoning and its consequences.

Breakdown of the Managerial Myth

According to Maguire, fear seems to be an overlooked aspect of our lives although it is a deep characteristic of society. *The managerial myth of predictive control* provides sets of rules and behaviour that make us accept our situation. This helps to avoid a never-ending existential questioning of the security in our lives that would derive from this basic condition of uncertainty and ambiguity (Maguire, 1996, p. 177). Likewise, Jasanoff points out the importance of governmental expert institutions in maintaining trust in the many complex and uncertain activities of modern life. She describes the 1996 BSE crisis as a 'civic dislocation', denoting 'a mismatch between what governmental institutions were supposed to do for the public and what they did in reality', thus causing citizens to 'disengage from the state'. This breakdown of trust had dislocating effects on the food system itself as well as on the government system (Jasanoff, 1997, p. 223).

In this light, the success of a risk management strategy would rely on a hegemonic articulation of food poisoning risk that could be contained, limited and dealt with within the trusted system of the food regime. Fear and media panic, on the contrary, resulted in a breakdown of signification to the extent that risk was incompatible with the myth of managerial control. The role of the government during the salmonella scandal was, mostly, to defend the myth of control while coming under attack for failing to deal with safety.[3]

The managerial myth relied in particular on the government institutions' ability to produce authoritative expert knowledge on how to deal with risk. The breakdown of the scientific consensus on safe food is exemplified by the microbiologist Professor Richard Lacey who was a very active partaker in the critical debate on the quality and safety of food. He claimed that: 'At least one person a week is dying from eating eggs infected with salmonella'. His academic credentials are thoroughly spelled out in the article to ensure his legitimacy as a spokesperson for a critical discourse within the scientific community (*The Guardian*, 19 December 1988). His claim was a direct contradiction of the government's newspaper advertising campaign for the safety of British eggs. In this campaign the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Sir Donald Acheson, assured the public that the risk of salmonella infection could easily be eliminated by simple cooking practices and kitchen hygiene (*The Daily Mail*, 16 December 1988). This disagreement over the risk constituted by salmonella worked to emphasise the gulf between government advisers and more independent scientists who were seen to have no vested interests.

While Beck writes extensively on the breakdown of science as a uniform horizon of understanding of risk, he does not provide an elaboration of the ideological dimension inherent in this disagreement within the epistemic community. Instead, science can be conceptualised as a hegemonic discourse that is drawn upon in order to legitimise political decisions made in order to reassure public trust in food. If hegemony is understood as a social horizon of meaning

that is partially fixed, the scientific disagreement indicates how coherent meaning breaks down and causes a dislocation. The safety of eggs went from being largely unquestioned to causing a partial breakdown of public trust in food.

This ideological and political dimension to the salmonella scandal can be explored through the use of the signifier 'epidemic' in the debate. The label of epidemic was, from the outset, of primary concern for the representation of the scope and seriousness of the risk. An epidemic immediately becomes an issue of public rather than individual health and, thus, demands collective action on a different scale. This resulted in a conflict over risk interpretations as reported from the Commons Agricultural Select Committee investigation in January 1989:

> Mr Wiggin, a former junior agriculture minister, accused Professor Lacey of scaremongering. 'You, almost uniquely in your profession, have gone out of your way to make this story as big as possible.' Prof Lacey replied: 'We are facing the worst food poisoning epidemic in our history. How can that be a story?' Government health experts including Sir Donald Acheson, the chief medical officer, and Mr Keith Meldrum, the chief veterinary officer, were ordered by Mr Wiggin to attend in case they were wanted to challenge Professor Lacey's evidence. Sir Donald had already told the committee that the outbreak in eggs is a serious health problem, but Mr Meldrum said that salmonella had only been found so far in 33 of the 25,000 flocks in the country (*The Guardian*, 26 January 1989).

The clashes in interpretation of the risk of salmonella poisoning from eggs indicate that risk is indeed a *floating signifier*,[4] where meaning has not yet been fixed, so that different actors enter into a struggle over whether to define risk according to a probabilistic logic, a scaremongering force or something to be seen as a valid public concern. Professor Lacey becomes part of a conflict with government representatives and members of the Agricultural Select Committee. He does so as part of a political contestation of the government driven discourse on risk and food that has failed to provide a credible discursive response to salmonella poisoning as an event. It is, thus, not the reality of the event that is questioned but how this event is given meaning, how risky it is, and how the government, farmers and the individual consumer should respond to it. All these questions become political in the salmonella crisis.

Likewise, the scope of the risk used to support the different positions within the debate, while always presented as objective 'facts', were confusing, ambiguous and highly debatable. The government's official statement, quoting Sir Donald Acheson, claimed there was a limited risk (*The Daily Mail*, 16 December 1988). Later he used the word 'epidemic' about the 'serious health problem' that salmonella poses, stressing the under-reporting of cases and concluding that there were probably 'several thousands cases of illness last year' (*The Daily Mail*, 12 December 1988). Two months later the picture was yet more confusing with less specific sources (officials) but a significantly higher number:

> Four weeks ago, the Government took full-page ads in the national press pointing out there had been only 49 reported outbreaks of salmonella poisoning last year which could be traced back to eggs. A mere 1,000 people were affected, when some 200 million eggs were being consumed every week. Yesterday, however, officials conceded that the number of salmonella victims could be as high as two million, of whom 700,000 or more could have been affected by eggs. There were no ads for this estimate. No press releases. No official announcements. Instead, the scientific report in which the new estimate appears was slipped quietly into the House of Commons library; a terrain where reporters cannot tread (*The Guardian*, 10 February 1989).

The scientific uncertainty in the expert statements relating to risk was, clearly, an important element in how the media challenged the managerial myth. Newspaper comments revealed ambiguities and questioned the vested interests that may provide the reasons for the discrepancies in the presentation of the seriousness of the salmonella risk. If the managerial myth was the governmental attempt to articulate the food discourse as a complete system of signification, the critical food debate tried to break down this meaning by questioning its logic and coherence. The food safety debate showed that risk was both difficult to manage and to grasp because of the way that it was represented as contested, uncertain and ambiguous rather than resting on a solid foundation of knowledge on which a political or individual decision can be based. This gap between knowledge and decision indicates a fundamental problem when it comes to making decisions in a contested terrain that cannot be conceptualised as a system of meaning, which makes sense within a discourse on food (Žižek, 1999, p. 337).

Defining Risk in the Salmonella Debate

When a dislocating event interrupts existing discursive structures of meaning, a new space is opened for redefinition of concepts and political terrains (Laclau, 1990). This was the case with the claim of widespread salmonella infection of eggs. It became important for political actors to actively contribute to the debate on how to make the contested concepts meaningful again. As risk was central to the debate and had been stripped of any consensual meaning, it became the concept that had to be redefined in order to give meaning to Currie's statement. How widespread was the risk of salmonella poisoning for consumers and what was its cause?

The answers given in the media debate were in no way consistent. Rather, they seemed dependent on political positions where conservative risk estimates potentially minimised the disruptive and dislocating effect of salmonella poisoning in the interest of both food producers and the existing regulatory structures. More pessimistic risk forecasts would lead to a fundamental questioning of the

hegemonic food discourse and its ethical and political justification. These definitions relied on particular discursive articulations of how food relates to nature, the economy and farming and are neither politically nor ethically neutral despite, in some cases, being presented as such (Eder, 1996; Jasanoff, 2005).

Safe Eggs: A Struggle Over the Meaning of Risk

The farming organisations were, from the beginning of the salmonella scandal, very active in the media debate. The aim was explicitly to reassure the public after Currie's remark (*The Times*, 12 January 1989), as it was vital for egg producers to enter the political struggle on how to define risk so that its dislocating effects could be eliminated or, at the very least, limited. The debate focused specifically on Currie's exaggerated articulation of risk and assigned it malicious intentions of damaging the egg industry (*The Guardian*, 16 December 1988). The 'slander of goods', 'malicious falsehood' and 'negligent misstatement' that Currie's statement constituted was also contradicted, for instance, in a report from the UK Egg Producers' Association concluding that: '. . . many investigations into the causes of salmonella outbreaks have been shoddy. They reached false, inaccurate and distorted conclusions, and misled scientists, ministers and the public' (*The Times*, 27 January 1989). The argument that she was responsible for 'scaremongering' became easier to carry forward, firstly, by the media's readiness to pick up on scandals, secondly, by Currie's personality as a particularly out-spoken and sometimes not so considerate politician.[5] In this way, the farming organisations managed to divert attention away from the issue of risk and towards the political scandal and the fact that Currie did not provide any clear evidence for her statement.

In the attempt to articulate the salmonella risk as exaggerated, the farming organisations consistently defined risk in a way that did not challenge egg sales so that risk would not be an interruptive element that threatened the nodal point of 'progress' in farming. In this task, the farmers received a high degree of support from actors within the decision-making arena. Immediately after Currie's comment: 'Ministry of Agriculture officials were reported to be "extremely" angry. A spokesman said the number of infected eggs, which have been linked to 26 outbreaks of salmonella, was very small in relation to the consumption of 30 million eggs a day' (*The Guardian*, 5 December 1988). The internal division within the government became visible when the Minister for Agriculture MacGregor publicly contradicted the Junior Minister for Health and called for proportion in response to the risk (*The Guardian*, 17 December 1988; *The Times*, 18 December 1988). The reports from parliamentary debates show how, primarily, conservative MPs elected in rural areas supported the farming perspective.

> Mr David Steel (LD): 'Some of us will never understand why an instant apology was not made. There had been about one outbreak a week, while 200 million eggs a week were consumed. The restoration of a sense of

> proportion is more important than shovelling taxpayers' money at it.' Mr MacGregor agreed that it was important to keep a sense of perspective, or to restore it. (. . .) Sir Peter Emery (C) asked for a direct contradiction of what Mrs Currie had said, that most egg production was affected by salmonella. Mr MacGregor: It is not the case that most eggs are affected. Mr Patrick Cormack (C) said that this had been an outbreak of hysteria. There was no need for people to worry about ordinary diets. Mr MacGregor: He is right in saying that people should return to their normal practices, taking full notice of the advertisements we have put in the newspapers this morning (*The Times*, 17 December 1988).

The articulation of risk as 'clearly exaggerated' and 'hysterical' (*The Times*, 20 December 1988; *The Guardian*, 20 December 1988) was developed with the government's advertisement campaign with the purpose of influencing the public to regain trust in eggs. It emphasised that the risk for 'normal' adults can be practically eliminated by avoiding raw or lightly-cooked eggs while weaker members of the public, e.g. elderly, infants and sick, should show more precaution in egg consumption (*The Daily Mail*, 16 December 1988). Risk could, therefore, be managed with simple kitchen hygiene and minimal precaution.

The high degree of support that the farmers received from actors within the parliamentary and governmental systems should be viewed against a background of a high level of institutionalisation of the relations between the farming organisations and the political system. This partnership can be seen as the sedimentation of particular social relations that became naturalised. The process of sedimentation is described by Laclau as a process whereby the original political dimension is forgotten (Laclau, 1990, p. 223). Any institutionalisation of social relations is a result of political and discursive struggles and these struggles are simultaneously constrained and formed by institutional conditions (Dyrberg and Torfing, 1992, p. 146; Andersen, 1994, p. 19). A number of studies conclude that NFU historically had privileged access to the regulating governmental bodies (Self and Storing, 1962, p. 139; Grant, 1990; Smith, 1990).

The media debate seemed to support the resonance for farming issues particularly within the Ministry for Agriculture, Fishery and Food (MAFF) and the Conservative party. Several measures, e.g. the advertisement campaign and a compensation scheme for culling chickens, supported the corporatist thesis of a close and formalised relationship between MAFF and NFU. This connection, and in particular MAFF's failure to balance different interests, was criticised in the public debate.

A temporary institutional setting with direct importance for the interpretation of risk from salmonella was the Commons Agricultural Select Committee set up to clarify the facts relating to the risk for salmonella. The committee became another locus for the political struggle over risk and the structures were, according to media reports, privileging the governmental position:

> JERRY WIGGIN [C] peered over the top of his wire framed spectacles. 'Would you say', he inquired of the men sitting in front of him, in committee room 10 of the Commons, 'that more alarm and despondency is being spread than is justified by the veterinary evidence?' The veterinary advisers were in little doubt: they agreed with Wiggin that the controversy had indeed been blown out of all proportion. Others called to give evidence, however, were far from happy with the way the proceedings were conducted. Health officials and doctors, for instance, barely had to mention a chicken to be ruled out of order. Much of what they wanted to say was judged as 'hearsay'; and Tim Boswell, the committee vice-chairman …, questioned whether during an investigation they had ever actually 'seen' a contaminated egg (*The Times*, 22 January 1989).

Of particular interest is the use of statistical evidence to support competing interpretations of risk. The official figures appeared prominently in the government campaign for the public to regain trust in eggs. In a full page advertisement, quoting the Chief Medical Officer's advice, the facts were outlined as follows:

> Eggs are a valuable and nutritious part of a balanced diet. We in Britain eat, on average, 30 million eggs a day—200 million a week. The number of reported cases [49 affecting 1,000 people] of food poisoning from salmonella linked to eggs is very small by comparison with the huge number of eggs that are consumed (*The Daily Mail*, 16 December 1988).

This articulation of risk as being avoidable and manageable was only one amongst a number of divergent numerical representations of risk quoted in the media debate (see Table 1).

As Table 1 indicates, the official figures for salmonella should be seen in conjunction with an array of, somewhat, confusing figures being used in the media debate. At a first glance several of them seemed to be conflicting and the figure of how many people had been poisoned in one year varied from 1,000 to 2 million. Several factors explain the discrepancies of the numbers. First, the figures referred either to salmonella caused by egg consumption or to all cases of salmonella. Second, the sources agreed that salmonella poisoning was underreported, but the multiplication factor used to compensate varies between 1, 10 and 100. Third, there was a large discrepancy between salmonella incidences in humans and infection levels in chickens. The figures were not untrue, but the apparent confusion and fragmentation emphasised how contesting figures made claims to truth without the connection between these being properly explained.

When the government figures indicated a narrow conception of risk rather than a broader one, the figures used can appear to be politically motivated. Governmental information generally has an inert authority. The government as an institution produces and owns much of the expert knowledge in the field as well as an

Table 1. Salmonella numbers in the public debate, December 1988–February 1989

Figure	Time period	Source of the poisoning	Source	Newspaper[a]
49 outbreaks affecting 1,030 people	1988 until 25 Nov.	Salmonella from eggs	Department for Health, Public Health Laboratory Service, Chief Medical Officer	*DM*, 16 Dec. 1988 *G*, 6 Dec. 1988 *T*, 20 Dec. 1988
46 outbreaks affecting 1,141 people	1988 to 7 Dec.	Salmonella from eggs	Health Secretary K. Clarke	*DM*, 8 Dec. 1988
354 reports	1 week (of 2 Dec. 1988)	Salmonella enteriditis	Report from Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, London (CDSC, London)	*T*, 20 Dec. 1988
11,000 reports	1988 to Sept.	Salmonella enteriditis	Report from CDSC, London	*T*, 20 Dec. 1988
Cases doubled	1981–1987	General strain of salmonella	*The Times*	*T*, 13 Jan. 1989
Cases increased 13 times	1981–1987	Salmonella enteriditis	*The Times*	*T*, 13 Jan. 1989
2/3 of frozen chicken infected (65 out of 101)	1987 study	Salmonella	Public Health Laboratory Service	*T*, 19 Jan. 1989
12,000 cases	1988	Salmonella enteriditis	Secretary of State for Health, K. Clarke	*T*, 24 Jan. 1989
60 outbreaks involving 1,600 people	1988	Salmonella related to eggs	Secretary of State for Health, K. Clarke	*T*, 24 Jan. 1989
14,000 cases in 1982; 40,000 cases in 1988	1982 and 1988	Food poisoning	D. Clark (Labour)	*T*, 25 Jan. 1989
Approx. 250.000; 1 egg in 7,000 contaminated		Salmonella related food poisoning	Prof. Lacey	*T*, 26 Jan. 1989
Reported: 20,532 true level: up to 2 million infections in Eng/Wales	1987	All strains of salmonella	Secret report to Ministers	*T*. 9 Feb. 1989 *T*, 22 Jan. 1989
1,101 cases in 1982; 6,858 cases in 1987	1982 and 1987	Salmonella enteriditis	Report from CDSC, London	*G*, 6 Dec. 1988

1 in 1,000 slaughtered chickens infected		Salmonella enteriditis	Unnamed microbiologist	*G*, 6 Dec. 1988
21 in 83 chicken protein feed factories infected	1987	Salmonella	Ministry for Health	*G*, 17 Dec. 1988
3,000 people infected and 1 dead per week	Per week in 1988	Salmonella enteriditis from eggs	Prof. Lacey	*G*, 19 Dec. 1988 *T*, 20 Dec. 1988
33% fall in no. of infections/week: 255–170	Dec. 1988	Salmonella enteriditis	Department for Health	*G*, 20 Dec. 1988
141 cases and 26 deaths	1988 until mid Nov.	Blood poisoning from salmonella	Department for Health	*G*, 20 Dec. 1988

[a] *The Daily Mail* (*DM*), *The Times* (*T*) and *The Guardian* (*G*).

Figure 1. 'Most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now affected by salmonella.' This comment, made by Edwina Currie, caused a political uproar over eggs, risk, agriculture and food safety. *Credit*: riganmc / FreeDigitalPhotos.net.

expectation of responsibility and truthfulness. However, the discrepancy in the use of statistics made the political dimension in risk visible in the way that scientifically based information was used politically to present a certain world-view to the public. The apparent confusion and divergence could easily undermine the epistemic authority of scientists, politicians and the food producing system (Szerszynski *et al.*, 1996, p. 6).

The response to the critical food discourse and the public loss of confidence in the food regime was, most importantly, to emphasise the manageability of risk. This was done by contesting the 'scaremongering' and media hysteria and producing statistical evidence on the limited impact and risk of salmonella poisoning for normal healthy people. The use of statistics in the debate shows, however, that ambiguity and confusion was part of the media debate and that the presentation of the justification of a narrow articulation of risk did not go unchallenged. This put the credibility of MAFF under threat and it became of vital importance to regain the trust of the consumers.

Risk and Unnatural Food Practices

The food crises and the salmonella debate gave rise to a more critical strand of journalism that fundamentally challenged the hegemonic food discourse's articulation of the manageability of the salmonella risk. It resonated with a wider environmental discourse questioning present day farming practices and emphasising the contrast between 'unnatural farming' and a more 'natural' approach, by

paying attention to ethical and political issues of animal welfare, food safety and the environment.

The articulation of risk from salmonella poisoned eggs was central to this critical argument. Modern farming practices are an integrated part of the practices within food consumption, production and agricultural policy that are, generally, taken for granted and naturalised. The political and contingent basis of these practices was challenged in the public debate by highlighting their unnatural and repulsive dimensions such as battery chickens and factory farming. This resulted in a re-articulation of nature and the environment, which had previously been institutionalised mainly in utilitarian terms (Eder, 1996). Creating a contradiction between environment and progress, the critical discourse in the public debate proved to formulate an important counter-position to the present hegemony on food.

The repulsiveness of factory farming and feeding practices was, in particular, highlighted with suggestions that the industrialisation of farming ultimately had consequences for the levels of salmonella contamination in meat and eggs, as indicated in this *Guardian* headline: 'Cannibal chickens keep salmonella in the family' (*The Guardian*, 17 December 1988). It is pointed out that there is a price to pay for development, progress and cheap agricultural products for consumers:

> Betty MacDonald (...) called the chicken production line 'the common man's Holy Grail'. Like the Grail, it proved elusive: galloping capitalisation, technical progress and falling margins sent the common man to the wall. The industrialised egg was hatched: the product of vast flocks of birds, genetically homogeneous (therefore the more vulnerable to disease), and strictly cannibalistic (healthy hens have been contaminated with protein feed derived from 'recovered' poultry offal: only now are the British Egg Industry Council and its ministerial supervisors soundings suddenly squeamish) (*The Guardian*, 7 December 1988).

Combined with the economic structures of production, such as intensification and processing, the natural aspect in chicken rearing was challenged: 'In this age of fast-changing food technology and increasing use of convenience food the threat of food contamination is increasing' (*The Guardian*, 25 January 1989). Within this critical food discourse there was a push towards retaining at least some aspects of 'the natural' in order to avoid the complete evasion of nature from the food production and consumption process.

There was criticism of human arrogance: '... the ministry has egg on its face for allowing agri-industry to flout nature's own microbial control to everybody's eventual loss ...' (*The Guardian*, 7 December 1988). The debate contained references to an eco-centric discourse emphasising the intrinsic value of nature, animal rights and even the right of nature itself (Pepper, 1986, p. 106). Nature gains an almost agential power and gets the ability to 'strike back' (Bennett, 2004).

> For years, we have mass-produced chickens as if they were milk bottle tops to be stamped out by the million on a never ending production line. We have kept them confined, in batteries, barely able to move and permanently denied the sight of sky and sun. We have carted them around the country in cages with their wings sticking through the wire and their feathers tossed about in the wind that blows off the back of lorries. We first fed them on something called pellets and then, just to provide a little variety in their diet, added dead chicken to their menu. Now they have struck back. It would be wrong to rejoice. But it would be ridiculous to be surprised (*The Guardian*, 24 December 1988).

A critical food discourse was given meaning through the denied identity of both consumer and nature itself by the threat of elements such as progress, factory farming, cannibalistic battery hens and cheap food of poor quality. The development of modern food production had happened with a naturalness that had been largely unchallenged except from an environmental point of view. However, the risk that salmonella poisoning poses to humans seemed to make the critical position more urgent and visible, resulting in a further dislocation of the manageability of the food risks. The ideological basis for the industrial food discourse (utilitarianism, capitalism etc.) was, with this move, made visible and contrasted with a more environmental and humane position. 'Unnatural' practices in food production were linked to how nature was constructed as a concept in the food debate.

The equivalence created between Western, human and industrialised arrogance indicates that a binary opposition between nature and culture has been articulated as one where the latter dominates the former. It thus contributes to a critique of a utilitarian discourse where humans cultivate nature for exploitative gain. Farming activities are, of course, always cultivations of nature, be it organic or factory farming. However, the emphasis of the distinction between a utilitarian/progress oriented and an environmental articulation of nature played a role in constituting the identity of a 'critical consumer' in opposition to the potentially catastrophic development of Western modernisation. With Szerszynski's words: 'A growing technical and political awareness of the environmental costs of modern life undermined our Promethean confidence in progress and science' (Szerszynski, 1996, p. 104). When, moreover, consumption of factory farmed food became hazardous, risk of food poisoning became one of the factors that dislocated the existing logic within the food regime based on progress in farming.

The critical newspaper debate, particularly in *The Guardian*, was instrumental in constructing and challenging political identities and worldviews and in calling naturalised perceptions of food and farming into question and, thereby, indicating the political and contingent origin of the existing hegemonic food regime that rested on a construction of nature in utilitarian terms. In this way the very nodal point of 'progress' in the hegemonic industrial food discourse was challenged.

Conclusion

We can now return to the questions asked in the introduction. Firstly, if modern food production processes are sustained by a number of hegemonising myths, how did the salmonella in eggs crisis contribute to the dislocation of these myths?

The material analysed in this article shows that there is some evidence that the media debate in the wake of the salmonella in eggs scandal played a dislocating role for the hegemonic industrial food discourse. It did so by introducing the element of risk into the way food is perceived by the public and by challenging the central myths that had hegemonised British food policy. With Edwina Currie's comment, a much broader debate on the values and goals in food policy and previously accepted intensive farming practices arose. This led to a new awareness of the political and ideological foundation of the myths. Fatal incidences of salmonella poisoning were reported prior to December 1988, but it was with Currie's statement that the risk gained meaning as a threat to the consumer and politicised the field of food safety. It was the discursive articulation of the event as a risk rather than the risk itself that caused a dislocation and led to contestation of the established food policies and practices.

The analysis focuses on the dislocation of two myths that were central to maintaining the hegemonic food discourse. *The national economy myth* placed 'progress' as a nodal point in the food discourse and was challenged through the way in which farming practices were now reported as being 'unnatural' and too industrialised. Another dislocating moment was linked to risk articulations that made the authorities' loss of control visible both on a financial level and in terms of food safety. In unison with other food crises, the salmonella scandal thus contributed to a serious public scrutiny of *the managerial myth of predictive control* and a partial loss of consumer confidence in British food. With new articulations of risk threatening to break down this myth, the struggle over risk definitions became central to challenging or defending the status quo in food policy. The dislocation thus worked to emphasise the political and ideological dimensions in the myths which had previously been presented as necessary or objective. In Laclau's use of the concept, the myths had done hegemonic work by partially fixing the meaning of the social in an organised system of differences within a discourse.

The newspapers included in this analysis were actively engaged in the process of challenging and instituting the myths. They emphasised the disagreement that was present in the food debate and provided space for arguments both for and against the industrial food discourse. As can be expected they tended to be critical towards the relevant authorities, seeing their role as the independent but critical 'watch dogs' in British politics. This is evident in the way that they all frame the salmonella issue as one that shows the loss of consumer confidence in farming products as well as a loss in confidence in the political system that was suppose to ensure and provide a system of safe food.

There were, however, also differences between the newspapers, both in political commitment and in the emphasis put on critique. *The Guardian* tended to give most space to the critical food discourse and *Guardian* journalists played an active political role in articulating a position against factory farming. *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* focused more on the political scandal and Edwina Currie, an editorial strategy that seemed to be more in line with the advocates of an industrial food discourse as it helped to divert attention away from the dislocation. *The Times* also gave most space to defenders of the farming position, although the newspaper still remained mostly critical of the farming organisations and the government. The newspapers thus played a double role in the salmonella debate. On the one hand, they contributed to the debate that resulted in a dislocation of the myths that sustained the status quo in food policy. On the other hand, they also provided a forum for defending the prevalent risk-management discourse.

Secondly, how was a definitional struggle over the meaning of risk and food played out in the media?

The media texts analysed show how the different risk definitions were part of a political struggle to dominate the food discourse. The strong definition, in the form of 'a food poisoning epidemic', framed food risk as unmanageable by critically assessing how food was consumed and produced. By contrast, a weak definition of risk as 'extremely low' provided support for the prevalent risk-management discourse. The political conflict was thus one over whether or not risk was manageable.

The theory of reflexive modernisation conceptualises the shift towards a new modernity as one where the public gains awareness of new global and invisible risks and as a result comes to question the foundations of modern industrial society itself (Beck, 1992). The challenge to governmental institutions and policies caused by the breakdown of the managerial myth could be interpreted in this light. However, this approach does not acknowledge the political, contingent nature of competing risk interpretations. It fails to explain how the prevalent structures persist, despite the critical debate, so that the status quo is both challenged and maintained at the same time.

Drawing on a post-structuralist reading of risk using Laclau's concepts of hegemony and myth (Laclau, 1990), the analysis shows how the level and scope of the risk was highly contested, as well as how the different risk interpretations relied on inherently political articulations of food. This is exemplified by how the manageability of risk was severely challenged by the selective way that statistical and numerical evidence were used in the media. The political authorities, through MAFF and the Agricultural Select Committee, were engaged in limiting the damage done by Currie's remark in order to regain public confidence in British food. While the MAFF-driven advertisement campaign attempted to portray the risk level as extremely low, this was continuously challenged in the media reports, leading to great public confusion as to whether or not the risk was manageable.

Moreover, the critical contestation of farming practices made visible how the hegemonic food discourse, rather than being necessary and politically neutral, relied on a utilitarian approach to nature. The moral justification for utilitarianism was built on the fact that technological progress and economic prosperity provide a benefit for humanity. However, when progress became risky, the logic of the food discourse broke down and an open space was left for new articulations of how farming relates to nature, the environment and development. The nodal point 'progress', via the new focus on risk, gained a new meaning through concepts such as factory farming, bacteria, profit, cannibalism and dirtiness. Technological progress itself became the very thing that threatened the safety of consumers.

It is, however, easy to overstate the importance of the critical media contestations as the governmental discourse had an inherent authority, with the support of MPs, government scientists and other opinion-leaders in British society. While the critical media discourse made the political foundation of the food regime visible, this only resulted in a partial dislocation of the hegemonic food discourse. Risk could still be articulated as manageable but it had nonetheless entered the food discourse and had altered the meaning of the relationship between food, health, environment and society.

Drawing on Derrida (1982), we can understand this as a process of iterability where both the repeatability and alterability of a discursive articulation are considered: the same term is repeated but changes meaning according to its new context. This means that neither continuity nor discontinuity can be understood as completely separate entities (Howarth, 2000, pp. 41–42). The hegemonic food discourse, with its emphasis on progress in farming, had to be rearticulated in more environmental terms in order to gain legitimacy. This could change the relationship between food, health and the environment. The industrialised food discourse may not break down but it will have to alter the meaning of some of its key terms and include new ones. On the one hand, this could lead to an increased focus on health and environment in food policy. On the other hand, environmentalism could be cast in terms that would make it less threatening to the overall goal of agro-food industrialisation as societal progress.

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Notes

[1]As illustrated by: 'Frankenstein food fiasco' (*The Daily Mail*, 13 February 1999).

[2]See Laclau's definition of discourse as a logically coherent system of differential relations between elements of signification (Laclau, 1996, p. 37).

[3]See for instance: 'The Agriculture Ministry was accused last night of allowing people to die from food poisoning through its "failure properly to protect consumers". The attack by Labour's shadow Agriculture Minister, Dr David Clark, in a Commons debate initiated by Labour to highlight salmonella poisoning and other food dangers, was strongly rejected by the junior Agriculture Minister, Mr Richard Ryder' (*The Guardian*, 25 January 1989).

[4]In a dislocated social field there may be competing attempts to articulate a hegemonic project and given the openness of meaning in a politicised and antagonistic area, a signifier may be *floating* (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). Its meaning has not yet been fixed and we can talk of the sliding of the signifieds under the signifier (Torfing, 1999, p. 301).

[5]The newspapers are quick to remind the reader of former comments by Currie, for instance, that people in the North were in the habit of eating chips and swilling beer (*The Guardian*, 6 December 1988), that the elderly should knit woollen hats and buy silk long-johns to keep warm (*The Guardian*, 6 December 1988) and that women worried about cervical cancer should 'not screw around and not smoke' (*The Guardian*, 6 December 1988).

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